

MARY MOTHER OF GOD JANUARY 1 2010 ABC

(Numbers 6: 22-27; Galatians 4: 4-7; Luke 2: 16-21)

PONDERING IN OUR HEARTS IN 2010

I recently asked a friend of mine how his grandchildren were doing. He quickly whipped out his wallet to show me pictures of all ten of them! How often does something like this happen? People are rightly proud of their kids and grandkids.

Something like this is going on in the Gospel of this Mass. Mary and Joseph were happy to show off their newborn to the Shepherds, as recorded by St. Luke in today's Gospel, and they were also pleased when the strange visitors came from the East – the Magi in St. Matthew's Gospel which will be proclaimed on Epiphany this weekend. The shepherds came to see for themselves what the angel had announced to them. Mary and Joseph were delighted to have them visit and to hear them "glorifying and praising God" (as Luke says). Later on in this passage, we hear of the circumcision of Jesus that Jews celebrate on the Eighth Day (or we would say a week) after birth. In all these occasions, Jesus is being introduced to the world gradually and naturally as part of a family.

We might have a tendency to think that somehow Mary completely understood what was happening to her and that it was easy for her to embrace her vocation as the Mother of God. We know that she was full of grace and full of faith and that she never doubted God's word. She trusted God and that is why she is blessed among women (as St. Elizabeth said to her at the Visitation). But that does not mean that all the unusual things that happened to Mary, from the Angel Gabriel's announcement to the birth in a stable to all the unexpected and even exotic visitors, were easy for her and Joseph to comprehend and embrace. What Mary did do was to reflect on all these things in her heart (as Luke says). The shepherds began to make the birth of Jesus known by proclaiming that he was the Messiah, as the angel had told them. Mary took the shepherds and the Magi and the whole experience she was having to heart and she pondered on their meaning – that is, she reflected what all this meant in God's plan for her and for her people (the Jews) and maybe for the Gentiles too, which means the whole world.

Mary shows us the way here. We too are called to adopt a contemplative stance before the mystery of God and our life and our salvation that came in Jesus Christ. This is not easy, as Mary knew. Her ongoing "yes" to God entailed sacrifice and our ongoing "yes" will also entail generosity of heart. Like Mary, we can continue to be faithful only through prayer and reflection. Mary was the Mother of God (as today's Solemnity proclaims), but she was also human. It took openness to God's grace for her to accept his plan for her and it will take openness for us to accept his plan in our lives. What happened to her was something really big because it was no less than the mystery of the Incarnation (God made human flesh!). But Mary lived out this mystery in the little daily routine of family life and of religious observance. So it is with us – God is present in our humble lives with his grace and peace to enable us to become every day more like the divine Christ who became human like us to show us the way to eternal life.

The Church prolongs the celebration of Christmas for eight days – for an Octave, as we say – from Christmas Day until today when we honor Mary the Mother of God. This is because of the importance of the Nativity. But even a week is not in any way near long enough to comprehend the beauty of the mystery of Emmanuel (which means God-is-with-us). That is why it is important to take our cue from Mary and pray and contemplate what God has done for us all year round. This is traditionally a time for New Year's resolutions, which we all know are more often broken than not. But maybe here is one we can keep by God's grace: resolve to deepen our prayer so that we can truly reflect on all God's ways in our hearts.

We live in a culture that is becoming more and more fast paced. Action is prized above all. Get that work done, drive like crazy to arrive on time, shuttle the kids to practice or whatever, hurry up and respond to the latest text or twitter we received. But what the world needs now is to ponder the effects of our actions and, indeed, to think about what we are going to do before we do it. Like Mary, we are asked to "give flesh" to the Savior. We are asked to be the Mother of God (even guys) because Jesus says in the Gospels that his followers are not only his sisters and brothers but also his mothers! We give flesh to Christ by living Gospel values in our ordinary lives – and our lives are raised above the ordinary by God's grace breaking in on us (as it did on Mary). If we adopt a contemplative stance, one of taking some space and quiet every day to be with God, we will prolong the joy of Christmas indefinitely and our actions will show forth Christian values to our community and the world. Thus will the Word become flesh in our lives and we will be securing a meaningful future for our children and grandchildren whose pictures we are so eager to share.

Mary found herself in the midst of something that went well beyond human experience because it was graced. If we think about it, this happens to us all the time. The key is indeed to think about it! Here then is our New Year's resolution; make time and room every day to ponder the Mystery of God's love at work in and through us!