

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD, JANUARY 01, 2021

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THE MOTHER OF GOD AND GOD'S NEW YEAR BLESSING

Today the first day of the new year 2021, is also the octave (eight-day) of Christmas, on which we celebrate the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

The early Christians observed the celebration of Mary as the Mother of God. It was at the First Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431, that the title "*Mother of God*" from the Latin "*Mater Dei*" a translation of the Greek "*Theotokos*" which means "the Bearer of God", was adopted. The Council addressed the Issues of the "two natures" and "person" of Christ. Against the Heresy of Nestorius, the Church declared that Jesus is one divine person, with two natures – divine (from God) and human (from Mary), and that Mary gave birth to the whole person of Jesus who is both God and man. She did not originate or generate God, but she bore Him in her womb and gave birth to Him. So, she became the Mother of God. The Apostle's creed asserts that Christ "was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary" a message we see elaborated in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

In the second reading (Galatians 4:4-7), Paul states that "*God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*" The incarnation explained here, brings together the description of the divinity of Christ "God sent his Son" and the humanity of Christ "born of a woman." Mary becomes the center point of the beginning of salvation as she gives birth to the Son of God, who is God himself. This son is the one through whom God has chosen to speak to us in these last days as the Gospel acclamation affirms (Hebrews 1:1-2).

In the Gospel of today (Luke 2:16-21), the Shepherds visited Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus in the manger, and there they recounted joyfully all that they had been told by the Angels earlier in verses 8-15. In verse 11, the Angel said, "*for today in the city of David, a Savior has been born for you, who is Christ the Lord,*" and in verse 14, the host of the armies of heaven joined in praising God, saying "*Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.*" Mary, at the center of the Joy and peace between heaven and earth, "kept all these things she heard, reflecting on them in her heart." She has agreed to the daunting task; however, she can only succeed through humility and prayerfulness.

With the birth of her son Jesus, the Son of God who is also God (John 1:1), Mary becomes the mother of God, and thus ushers in the new era and beginning of salvation. Therefore, this celebration of the *Theotokos* is so fitting at the beginning of the new year, where we receive God's blessings as prescribed to Aaron in Numbers 6:22-27.

The first reading today concludes the legal section from **Leviticus 1 - Numbers 6**. God directed Moses to tell Aaron and his sons the priests how to bless the children of Israel and in v.27, he says, "so shall they invoke my name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them."

In Leviticus 9:22-24, After Aaron and his sons were consecrated priests and carried out their first duties, Aaron "*lifted his arms toward the people and blessed them,*" and "*the glory of the Lord*

appeared to the whole community,” such that the people “*shouted with joy and fell face down on the ground.*” For the Israelites and Christians today, this blessing concludes their worship and serves as a promise of God’s blessings upon them if they keep the laws.

The nature of the blessing itself is threefold. The first part of the blessing “*yebarekeka Adonai, Weyishmereka,*” i.e., *May the Lord bless you and keep you,* is an invocation of God’s divine intervention on his people. God will bless them (*barak*) with prosperity and well-being, and He will keep them (*shamar*, i.e., to guard or protect), protect them from the hazards and evils they face in the wilderness.

The second and third parts ask that Yahweh may show his benevolent presence to his faithful people, by shining and raising his face upon them “*Adonai Pana ’w’ eleka*”. When God “hides his face” he is angry (see Deut 31:17-18; Ps 30:8; 104:29), but when God raises his face, he looks on his people for good. So, the Shining forth and lifting of Yahweh’s face is God’s way of blessing his people with favor/*graciousness* “*wihuneka*” and with *Shalom* – peace, well-being and wholeness in all areas of life.

Therefore, the blessing reveals that we owe everything to God who blesses us with peace and all our needs and protects us from all harm. As we begin the new year today, may we receive God’s divine blessings for our well-being and protection and may we draw inspiration from the selfless love of Mary the Mother of God, who never hesitated to do the will of God in her life.

May God bless and protect us in this new year. I wish you all a happy and prosperous new year.