

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God – January 1, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: 1 Numbers 6:22-27

The LORD said to Moses: "Speak to Aaron and his sons and tell them: This is how you shall bless the Israelites. Say to them:

The LORD bless you and keep you!

The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!

The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace!

So shall they invoke my name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them."

Psalm: Ps 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

R. (2a) **May God bless us in his mercy.**

May God have pity on us and bless us;
may he let his face shine upon us.
So may your way be known upon earth;
among all nations, your salvation.

R. **May God bless us in his mercy.**

May the nations be glad and exult
because you rule the peoples in equity;
the nations on the earth you guide.

R. **May God bless us in his mercy.**

May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you!
May God bless us,
and may all the ends of the earth fear him!

R. **May God bless us in his mercy.**

Scripture Reading: Galatians 4:4-7

Brothers and sisters: When the fullness of time had come, 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. As proof that you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir, through God.

Gospel: Luke 2:16-21

The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them. When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

“Let it be done unto me according to your will,” Mary said. A real Archangel appeared, handing out shocking news of the Annunciation. What a jolt this must have been for someone so unassuming, so self-effacing as Mary. Did she flinch? No, she reacted with calm. Simply put, “I accept. Tell me how this wonderful birth will happen.” (Lk 1:38) But the series of events that followed do not at all seem worthy of her calm. Mary was a betrothed woman who had been found pregnant! Her husband-to-be had been about to divorce her! Until an angel explained things in a dream. And walking was the mode of transportation in those days, sometimes for astonishing distances, so the census call did not make her promise easy. She was in the last part of her pregnancy—the most difficult time of all to travel from Nazareth in the far north of Israel down to Bethlehem, which is south of Jerusalem. Not an impossible distance, but in the last month of pregnancy, a tremendous challenge. Joseph in his kindness got a donkey for Mary to ride.

It was the presence of God deep within her, so deep that she let her life unite with his.

When they finally got to Bethlehem, a very small village, there was no room for them in the inn. And since the infant was “lying in a manger,” and there is not a word in scripture about a cave, the most likely birth place would have been in some kind of barn or stable for domestic animals. This birth was not bathed in satin finery; not luxurious. Jesus was born into poverty and discomfort. This Sunday we see Mary just days after the grueling journey and the amazing birth (Gospel). She is carrying out the promise she had made to Gabriel. All is well. The child is healthy and cuddly, and the angels, unable to contain their joy, have once more danced hugely into Mary’s life. Even the animals understand. Breathtaking.

It would seem that Mary’s calm could now seek some quiet and rest after all that had happened. But no, unkempt shepherds, straight from the fields, “went in haste” to the shelter, announcing in their craggy voices that they had been told who this baby was. The angels had trumpeted it to them! Wise men, or as we say now, kings, found the holy shelter and barged right in, bearing royal gifts. Does this all impinge on Mary’s peace? It seems not. She is good to her word. The Gospel says that she quietly “kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.”

Part of it was her personality, of course, but even more, it was the presence of God deep within her, so deep that she let her life unite with his. This produced a son. Existence on this earth is never free from hazards and setbacks and stunning difficulties, but as Mary watched each movement of the newborn baby, she breathed in a holiness, a pitch of holiness that even she had not known before. Her calm took place within a crowded, difficult, cramped stable, one we can only imagine within our own hearts. “Let it be done unto me according to your will.” Let each of us try to be able to echo her words, at least for a few moments. Try it now.....“Let it be done unto me according to your will.”

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Even though sometimes God’s face is hidden from you, do you think “the Lord is looking upon you kindly”? Why is God’s face hidden at times?
2. What did God do for us that moved us from the status of slaves to that of children of God?
3. What kind of sense would you make of shepherds and messages from angels and mangers? Did Mary get any final answers from Gabriel or the shepherds? Can you make sense of everything in your life? What do you mull over in your heart? What do you treasure and remember and preserve?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, who through the fruitful virginity of Blessed Mary bestowed on the human race the grace of eternal salvation, grant, we pray, that we may experience the intercession of her, through whom we were found worthy to receive the author of life, our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen