

Readings for the feast of Mary the Mother of God

FIRST READING: Numbers 6:22-27

A reading from the Book of Numbers:

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."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8.

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.

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.

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!

May God bless us in his mercy.

SECOND READING: Galatians 4:4-7

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians:

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.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 2:16-21

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

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.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the feast of Mary the Mother of God

January 1st is the eighth and final day of Christmas. In keeping with ancient, Jewish custom, our major feast days last an octave. Since I was a kid it has had other names too. It was the Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus. Then it was The World Day of Peace. Now it is the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God. It still remains the Octave of Christmas regardless of what else we may call it. It is also a holy day of obligation. To have an actual feast on the day helps the Catholic Church justify making people attend mass on the morning after New Year's Eve. I used to joke about giving a temperance talk in place of a homily. I never have.

Of the four Marian doctrines of the Catholic Church, Mary, the Mother of God, is the only one with clear biblical origins. The perpetual virginity of Mary has a few prophetic references. The other two, being born without sin, the Immaculate Conception and Mary being taken to eternal life body and soul, the Assumption of Mary, have theological references. All the feasts of Mary and her significance in history are linked to her relationship to Jesus as his mother. Without being Jesus mother, she would not have entered history.

The first reading from Numbers had Moses teaching Aaron how to bless in the name of God. For the ancient Jews, ritual was important. What is a blessing? It is being aware of the presence and closeness of God. Receiving a blessing reminds us that God is just a thought away. People often approach me to bless their car. For the car's drivers to drive, being respectful of law, pedestrians, passengers and other drivers, is the blessing's true purpose. It does not work as a car-shield or insurance policy. The blessing is always for people to remember that God is always with us. For someone to pray the rosary is a far better blessing than I can bestow. The blessing is essentially a prayer that I pray. Praying is the true blessing; for in prayer, our thoughts become focused on God. God is close, indeed.

Paul lived, ministered and preached in a post Easter and post Pentecost world. He could interpret scripture in light of the dying, rising and return to the Father by Jesus. The Spirit had come with gifts, grace and promise of God's Kingdom. His faith in Jesus was the lens that focused his life and understanding of the world. Here he defined what salvation in Jesus had brought; new relationships. Members of the Church of Galatia were his brothers and sisters. Their faith had transformed them in Christ as God's sons and daughters; God's beloved children with Jesus as their brother. The word that Paul used for God is significant; Abba. It wasn't the Swedish pop group but a Hebrew word that means daddy or papa.

Emmanuel, God is with us is what happened when God's word became flesh. Jesus has promised to remain with us until the end of the age when he will return to finalize our transformation and the world into God's Kingdom. Jesus, we believe had two natures. He was fully human and fully God. He was like us in all but sin. From Paul's perspective, he believed this

as do we. Mary, Joseph and the shepherds may have faith but they lacked the experiences of Easter and Pentecost. Jesus had not yet begun his mission and ministry, he was still a baby. Mary pondered these things. Was it in puzzlement, wonderment or awe? Luke doesn't tell us but he wrote this from his perspective, the same as Paul's and ours. A lot had happened to Mary and more would continue to happen. Did she merely remember God and know God's blessing?

A little aside of grammar and word meaning. What's a manger? It has the same Latin root as the Italian word mangia. "Mangia; mangia!" your Italian nonna would exhort; especially on New Year's Day, "Eat; eat!" A manger is an animal food trough. I hope it was big enough to fit Mary and Joseph and the infant in the manger for, as Luke wrote was the location where the shepherds found them. I care less for keeping the translation of scriptures being exact and more for it making sense. I would have written, where they found Mary and Joseph. The baby lay in the manger.

Much has happened to us. Do we ponder in God's presence? We are just as blessed as the ancient Hebrew people, Moses, Aaron, Paul, the Galatians, shepherds, Mary and Joseph. For we know that God is present to us; nearer than our beating hearts and breath. Much more, hopefully, will continue to happen as we live. Our lives deserve as much reflection and pondering as did Mary's. It continues our blessing.

May the New Year find us seeking to bring Christ to a waiting world.

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PS: Just remember it's 2022 (What we say is 2020 too, a thought;)