

MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

Gospel: Luke 2:16-21

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

REFLECTION 1: TOSSING THINGS TOGETHER IN OUR HEARTS

Birth is a miracle from God. Every mother of a newborn can look down with awe at the new life she cradles in her arms. She might ask her child 'Where did you come from, little one?' She might utter the words of the poet: 'Before you were conceived, I wanted you. Before you were born, I loved you. Before you were here an hour, I would give my life for you'. Today's Gospel of Luke describes this in one sentence; 'Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart'. We marvel at Mary, the Mother of God, a young girl from Nazareth. She gave birth to a tiny baby who was also God. It is a miracle within a miracle.

The Church begins this new year with a celebration of Mary, Mother of Jesus, a model of strength, grace, and courage for all believers. In his Christmas Eve homily in 1978, Oscar Romero, Archbishop of El Salvador, affirmed the important role of Mary in God's plan of salvation. She is 'the human instrument, the daughter of Adam, the daughter of Israel, sister of our race the truest homage that a Christian can make to Mary is, like her, to make the effort to incarnate God's life in the fluctuations of our fleeting history'.

Mary's own history was bound to that of Jesus and she is portrayed as such in scripture. Mary's name is first mentioned in reference to Jesus' conception. She is featured by Luke and John at each significant moment of Jesus' life, from his birth to his ministry, to his passion, death and burial. Mary is also present with the post-Easter Church as noted in Acts. Moreover, when Mary is mentioned in scripture, she is represented as a disciple, that is, one who hears the word of God and keeps it (Luke 11:21). The process of hearing God's word and translating it into words and actions requires lifelong effort and Luke gives us a clue as to how that effort began for Mary. In today's Gospel, the Evangelist tells his readers that 'Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Literally translated from the Greek it means, 'to toss things together in one's heart'.

For Mary, an angel messenger has proclaimed the day of salvation, a sign had been given, heavenly hosts have appeared and Mary for whom these events have been puzzling, kept everything in her heart. Mary's greatness lies in her willingness to go forward with a plan she did not understand, to a place she had not chosen, for the sake of a people who would reject and torture and kill her son. Mary would remain 'pregnant' with words and signs that would only later come to light.

Mary is a guide for all who venture into this new year. We can rejoice with Paul (Gal. 4:4-7) in the fact that we too are God's children near enough to call God 'Abba', 'Papa', 'Daddy'. With Mary and all who believe, we enter into 2023 with the blessing from Numbers (first reading) to encourage and strengthen us. 'May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace.' Like Mary, we hold this blessing in our hearts, allowing it to grow there along with echoes of the sacred texts that will inspire and guide us through the year.