

Mary, Mother of God

Reading I: Numbers 6:22-27

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

Reading II: Galatians 4:4-7

Gospel: Luke 2:16-21

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/010123.cfm>



The Feast of Mary, Mother of God, corresponds to the eighth day after Christmas. In the old calendar, it was titled the circumcision of Jesus. While the readings do not focus on Mary, the feast highlights Mary's role in bringing Jesus into the human family. The readings highlight the important response every disciple should have to God's presence with us, and Mary is the model for all disciples.

The Gospel raises three central themes. The Shepherds listened and took to heart the message of the angel. Listening is an essential skill for all disciples. Listening is not just hearing but taking to heart the message that comes to us, deciding how to respond, and implementing the message. Their response was to share the good news with others, for "they made known the message that has been told them." The call of a disciple is never to hoard or hide what God has done but to make it known and share it with others.

The second theme comes from the example of Mary. "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." The message and actions of God always hold more meaning. Disciples need to ponder, reflect on, and consider the Word of God from different vantage points. The Sunday scriptures are on a three-year cycle. The Church returns to the scriptures again and again as people experience various events, learn new things, and grow in their relationship with God. The scriptures offer new insights as one lives life. After making a new commitment, becoming a parent, being given new responsibilities, or journeying through grief, the Word of God opens new avenues to experiencing God's love and mercy. These come through pondering God's Word again and again.

The third theme is the naming of Jesus. In the Hebrew tradition, a name expresses a person's whole identity. Knowing God's name enables one to call upon God and be heard. In naming the child Jesus, he is declared the savior, not only of the Jews but of all humanity. He is the one who inaugurates the reign of God and defeats the powers that have imprisoned the human family in selfishness and empty directions. The second aspect of naming is that the one who names a child declares that the child is a true descendant. In naming Jesus, Joseph declares him to be of the life of David. He is the true fulfillment of God's promises.

The first reading from the book of Numbers has more connection with the beginning of the new year than with the feast of Mary. The priests of Israel called upon God to bless, protect, and sustain the people of Israel. God instructed them to invoke God's name upon Israel. In this invocation, God was called upon to provide for them. As the new Israel, Christians call upon God and are sustained daily by God's grace and love.

The reading from the Letter to the Galatians directly connects to the feast. Paul declares, "God sent his son, born of a woman...so that we might receive adoption as sons." There have been many debates through the centuries about the relationship of the divinity of Christ with his humanity. Drawing from this and other scriptures, the Church declared, and we profess in the creed each week, that Jesus is consubstantial with the Father (one in being with the Father) and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary. Jesus is both God

and human in his one person. He is one with God in his resurrection and still retains his humanity.

Because Jesus united humanity with God, each disciple receives the same Spirit that Jesus had. This Holy Spirit enables us to address God as "Abba." Abba was the familial expression for one's father. In contemporary language, we might say Daddy or Papa. Having been brought into the family of God, disciples are no longer slaves but children of God. As such, each disciple belongs and has a place in God's household. It is not the external law that connects us but God's own Spirit who brings us into an ever-closer relationship with God. Our response to being accepted and welcomed by God is to walk in God's ways. Disciples belong and celebrate God's gift of new life in our daily living and loving.

Key themes:

Jesus, One person with two natures

Mary, Mother of God

Mary, Model disciple

Listening in Prayer

Reflection Questions

How do you reflect over and ponder events and experiences in your life? How might you allow the scriptures to bring insight to them?

In what ways have you been motivated to take action after the Gospel has moved you?

What does your name express about you?

How do you live as a member of God's family?

Prayer ideas

For the Church: that we may be like Mary, treasuring God's words and deeds in our hearts and drawing wisdom from them for our daily lives

For a deeper awareness of the Spirit in our lives: that we may know our adoption as children of God and live in freedom and friendship with God

For a deepening of our relationships: that God will help us to grow in love and understanding with all with whom we share life

For the ability to listen better: that we, like the shepherds, may genuinely listen to the words spoken to us, find meaning in them, and act wisely upon them

For God's blessing on the New Year: that God will fill the coming days with health of body, mind, and spirit; renew the gifts of the Spirit within us, and inspire us with new ways to show God's mercy to others