

Solemnity Mary, the Holy Mother of God

1.1.26

No doubt you've heard the saying, "a camel is a horse designed by a committee." Today's Solemnity might be thought of in a similar way. There are several different themes that are commemorated today, but those themes don't necessarily seem to connect.

This Solemnity has the title *Mary, the Holy Mother of God*. That reference seems to be age-old. From the earliest centuries in the Church, this day focused on the notion of Mary as "God bearer". That is the first and main theme of this day. Mary is often referred to as the "Mother of God." As such, she didn't create God. That is not possible since God has existed from all time. Rather, Mary's "yes" to the Father's request enabled her to be the vessel in which the child Jesus grew. Mary became the "God bearer" which is one of the most ancient titles given to her. That title dates back to at least the 4th century or before. And this theme is what is described in the middle of our second reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians – "When in the fulness of time, (the Father) sent his Son, born of a woman...so that we might receive adoption as sons (and daughters)."

As we begin a new year, Mary's "yes" to God the Father's request to be the mother of the Savior is something we should meditate on – today and throughout this new year. Mary's "yes" had a pivotal role in making Christ visible to the world. Our "yes" to God, our cooperation with his will, makes Christ visible to the world as well. Often we ask Christ to manifest himself to us. He does so in his Church; through the sacraments; and in the miracles we witness every day which reveal his power and

might – like the gift of a new day, the birth of a child, the healing we receive, and the divine strength that we are given in order to endure various trials.

Throughout this New Year, may everything we do begin and end with Christ. May all that we do, with and through the grace of Christ, be a visible sign to others of Christ’s presence in our life and in the world.

The second theme this day is a bit more modern, relatively speaking, and has been commemorated from the 1500’s until around the 1960’s. On this, the eighth day since we celebrated Christ’s birth, the scriptural passage which refers to the naming of Jesus and his circumcision has been proclaimed. The Catholic Church is big on celebrating octaves. An octave in the Church calendar is the commemoration for eight days of an incredibly significant event in our salvation. Christmas is one event which is so big that it is celebrated for eight days. Easter enjoys a similar significance. For that reason Easter is also celebrated for a full eight days.

Most of us can recall exclaiming something like this at Christmastime, “Christmas is so awesome, I wish it would last the whole year long!” That sentiment is what lies behind celebrating an octave like Christmas or Easter. We are so elated by this incredible event that we cannot possibly celebrate it within a single day.

Eight days after Jesus was born, he was officially given his name. That name was told to Mary at the Annunciation. The angel declared that the child’s name would be Jesus. Mary and

Joseph fulfilled the promise made by the angel and gave their son the name Jesus (Yeshua or Joshua), which means “God saves us (from our sins).” The name indicates who Christ is and what he would do for us. Truly, Christ came to us to free us from our sins, to restore us to the dignity that the Father originally intended us to have, and to have us share life with the Trinity, the angels, and saints for all eternity.

The circumcision of Jesus is something Mary and Joseph did for their newborn son as faithful Jews. That act shows us that Jesus is faithful to the covenant of Moses. Later, Jesus would reveal that he not only participates in that covenant, but he is the fulfillment of the covenant. We say as much at every Mass when we recall the words Jesus uttered at the Last Supper over the cup of wine, “This is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

This theme reminds us of why the Word was made flesh – that is, why Christ was born among us. He came to us to save us from our sins as well as to join us with him, the Father, and the Spirit for all time. Often times we engage in faith-filled practices in order to grow closer to Christ. Praying daily, going to Mass every Sunday, and seeking ways to serve the Body of Christ by ministering to our sisters and brothers is a way we live that out. But this theme reminds us that more than what *we* do, is what ***Christ is constantly doing for us.*** Each minute of every day, Jesus constantly seeks us out, graces us, forgives us, sustains us, and enriches us. That is his nature. And that is what he naturally does for each of us.

His circumcision reminds us of Mary and Joseph's fidelity to the faith and how our faithful observances unite us to God's life and purposes. Today is a good opportunity to re-commit ourselves to a consistent practice of the faith. It is that persistent practice of the faith which draws us even closer into the covenant of Christ. That covenant reminds us that Christ never gives up on us. He is always seeking what is best for us.

In the late 1960's with the change in the liturgical calendar and the liturgical prayers, the Church focused less on the naming of Jesus and his circumcision and returned to the earlier focus of this Solemnity – Mary, the Mother of God or Mary as “God bearer.”

The third and final theme of this Solemnity is the most modern. In 1967, Pope Paul VI declared that January 1st should be known as a “world day of peace”. This theme was incredibly timely. Those of us who lived through those days remember the Cold War, the potential for and regular threats of obliteration from nuclear war, and the horrors of the Viet Nam War. These things were constantly on our minds and were matters of grave concern. The first reading from the Book of Numbers reflects the newly established theme for this day with the blessing of Aaron, the brother of Moses. While the Book of Numbers was written about 3500 years ago, that blessing remains timeless. We would do well, to put a bookmark in this 6th chapter of the Book of Numbers and pray this prayer every day – for ourselves, the members of our family, for our world, and for world leaders. We need God's peace more than ever – in our country and in every country throughout the world.

While today may be more “camel” in nature than anything else, it contains several themes which are worthy of our reflection. We would be wise to integrate these themes into how we live our lives – on this first day of the New Year and always.

May God give you and those you love every needed grace and blessing on this holy day and always. May Christ who saves us from our sins, may Christ who is the Prince of Peace, and may Christ who became flesh and was born of Mary, be with us, sustain us, and empower us every day this year.

Amen? Amen!