

Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God & New Year's Message

Introduction: Since we celebrate the *Feast of Mary, the Mother of God* on New Year's Day, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy and Peaceful New Year? I pray that the Lord Jesus and His Mother Mary may enrich your lives during the New Year with an abundance of Divine blessings. Today's *Feast of Mary, the Mother of God* is a very appropriate way to begin a new year, reminding us to rely on the powerful intercession of our Heavenly Mother. The Church also observes the 53rd World Day of Peace on this day and invites us to pray specially for lasting peace in the world throughout the New Year.

Scripture lessons summarized: Today's first reading gives us the beautiful Divine blessing from the book of Numbers for the New Year. In the second reading, Paul reminds the Galatians and us that God's Son has become one of us through Mary, and that it is through Jesus that we have become the children of God. Today's Gospel describes how the shepherds spread to all their neighbors the Good News surrounding the birth of Jesus which the angel had revealed to them, and how Mary treasured "all these things" in her heart. The Gospel also tells us that on the day of his circumcision, the Child was given the name Jesus that had been chosen by God Himself.

Traditional belief and Church doctrine: We honor Mary primarily because God honored her by choosing her to become the mother of Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, when He took on human flesh and became man, as stated in the Bible. The angel said to Mary: "*And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His Name Jesus; He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High...*" [Lk 1:32-32a; RSV 2 Catholic]. After the angel had appeared to her and told her that she was to be the mother of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary visited Elizabeth. At Mary's greeting, Elizabeth said, "*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the*

Mother of my Lord should come to me?" [Lk 1:42-43; RSV 2 Catholic]. Hence, the Council of Ephesus affirmed in AD 431 that Mary was truly the Mother of God (*Theotokos*), and in AD 451, the Council of Chalcedon affirmed the Divine Motherhood of Mary as a dogma, an official doctrine of the Holy Catholic Church.

Life messages: 1) Let us strive to be pure and holy like our Heavenly Mother. All mothers want their children to inherit or acquire their good qualities. Hence, let us honor Mary, our Heavenly Mother, by practicing her virtues of trusting Faith, obedience to the word of God, purity, and humble, committed service.

2) Let us make the New Year meaningful by having every day a) some noble thing to dream, b) something good to do, and c) Someone to love, the first-person being Jesus. 3) Let us sanctify every day of the New Year: a) by offering every morning, all the activities of the day for God's glory, thus transforming them into prayers, b) by asking for the anointing and strengthening of the Holy Spirit to do good for others and to avoid evil, c) by remaining faithful to our family prayers and Bible reading at night, d) by asking God's pardon and forgiveness for our sins committed during the day and e) by seeking God's special protection during sleep. Before we sleep, let us say, "Good night, Lord," repeating Jesus' last words from the cross, "*Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit.*"