

Mary, Mother of God 2008

Luke 2:16-21

The first day of the new calendar year:

- day of Cosmic and symbolic transition
- day that always brings with it daunting hope

And for this day we are given to celebrate Mary as the Mother of God.

You would think that the Church would choose something less controversial to launch the year.

Why not begin with all of our Christian brethren on an easier page, the *same* page?

Well,

- *firstly*, this Gospel passage, the visit of the shepherds, does show a certain self-effaced prominence of Mary. She is mentioned as the first one the shepherds notice. She is mentioned as
 - not only sharing in the amazement of everyone as they hear the shepherds *but*
 - as keeping everything in her heart in a special way. Indeed, in Mary begins “Tradition”, the keeping of revelation in the heart so that it bear luminous fruits of deepening insight and works of love.
- *secondly*, if Jesus gives Mary to us, then the celebration of his birth includes the mother.

Mary was officially declared “Mother of God” in 431 at the council of Ephesus.

The Council of Ephesus declared the unity of the person of Jesus.

This may sound abstract or irrelevant, but, trust me, it is not.

Just fasten your brain belts for a moment.

The *person* of Jesus is the Word, the divine second Person of the Trinity.

And, by virtue of the unity of person of

- the Word *made flesh*
- the Word *assuming humanity*

she from whom his flesh came is mother of his *person*.

This does not mean that the Word, that is to say, his divinity originates in her.

It is the simple acknowledgment of the unity of his Person, and herein lies the mystery.

Somehow, Mary is mother of God, because she is the mother of the God-man.

Our role is to *approach* the mystery:

- of the Word made flesh
- of this transfigured woman who is, by virtue of her transfiguration, *our* mother

Our role is to *cooperate* with the mystery of God.

In Mary, we discover what it means to cooperate with God.

Our life is about cooperation with God.

Our most important active effort after welcoming God: *cooperation* with God

God invites us to cooperate with/to participate in his labor of love

- in us
- in others
- in the world

What a privilege it is to cooperate, to participate

- in the divine project.
- in God's sharing of himself.

Omnipotent, omniscient God deigns to include limited creatures in what he does.

Why would God do this, knowing that these creatures

- will certainly slow things?
- often damage things?

We can have a similar experience, for example, in the raising of children.

We can *do for* the children, who are then recipients of our so-called goodness. **Or**

We can invite the children to labor with us (risking a less perfect finished product), and have them learn in the process.

Such participation fosters

- growth
- deeper bonding

God invites Mary to a unique and amazing cooperation:

to lend her body to the miraculous conception and birth of God in the flesh.

Mary is the vehicle for the most perfect creation the cosmos have ever seen/will ever see:
a body for God.

It is thus, in a sense, the most incredible cooperation with God, by a mere creature,
our world has ever known.

How interesting as we begin a new year,

When our most important resolution ought to be

to cooperate more deeply and more lovingly with our God of love.

We are given a model of perfect cooperation from whom we directly benefit:

- in that her cooperation was "necessary" for the Incarnation
- she works in us to foster cooperation

But Mary is more than vehicle.

She is an *active participant*.

This is important to discover,

for she teaches us true cooperation with the divine (and thus joy...)

Before Mary conceived in her flesh, she conceived in her heart.

Although preceded and enveloped by grace, it all begins, on Mary's side, with a choice:
her "fiat", her "yes".

Grace does not diminish freedom; *au contraire*.

The bond Mary has with Jesus is first one of faith, hope, and love,
before being one of flesh and/or human affection.

She is first bound to him as her God, and in that bond, welcomes him into her flesh,

This inner bond in divine love is expressed in today's gospel.

We discern Mary moved by divine love.

We observe her healthy and profound reaction

to the various incidents occurring in relation to her son – both good and bad

She carried in the depths of her heart, in faith.

“Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.”

- more than simple reflection, that is to say, “thinking about”
- allowing to inhabit the heart *beyond understanding*.

If Mary had proceeded in proportion to her understanding,

she would not have become mother of God, or our mother.

At the Annunciation, *Mary did not understand*.

At the Cross, when Jesus asks her to welcome John (and through John, each one of us)

as her child, *Mary did not understand*.

She trusted and she welcomed, and in that welcome,

sought to cooperate with her mind and heart.

Let us trust and welcome and cooperate.

The Holy Spirit enables us to do so.

We are carried by the Holy Spirit,

who “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16).

If we lovingly acquiesce to this holy presence within, the Word becomes flesh in us....