

January 1, 2023

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

Luke 2:16-21

The shepherds went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them. When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

### **Background:**

This gospel text is almost identical to the text for Christmas Mass at Dawn (Luke 2:15-20). Here the appearance of angels is presumed but not stated. Today's gospel includes the last verse that was not part of the Gospel text for Christmas. The addition of that verse refers to the fact that Joseph and Mary took Jesus to be circumcised on the eighth day. This addition would draw attention to Joseph and Mary's faithfulness to Jewish traditions, and at the same time, the humanness of Jesus.

Shepherds were regarded as one of the lowest levels of society in Jesus' time. Because care of their flocks would have included responsibilities that put them in contact with blood, they were ritually unclean and not able to participate in community rituals and observances. They were considered irreligious, and looked down upon. They lived in poverty and were considered to be people who would resort to any means to obtain what they needed or wanted. By leaving their sheep to go to Bethlehem, they were putting their flocks in danger and, therefore, threatening their own future as shepherds. Their behavior, abandoning the sheep to go see a newborn and telling others of their experiences, would be very unusual for people who lived most of their lives isolated from others and looked down upon by society.

When Mary and Joseph present Jesus to be circumcised and give him the name Jesus, some of what the angel had spoken about him has already come to be. "Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'" (Luke 1:30-33) Mary and Joseph will have to wait to see how the rest of God's promises unfold in the person of Jesus. The shepherds are described as returning to their flocks giving praise to God for what has taken place. But Mary's response is much less dramatic and moves her inward. She holds these events in her heart, where she can reflect on and ponder them over and over again, as her Son grows from the child of her womb to the Christ on the cross.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. How important a person is Mary in your own prayer and spiritual life? How do you respond to the importance that Church places on her on this feast and other celebrations dedicated to Mary?
2. The gospels suggest that Mary and Joseph were faithful, observant Jews, yet they seem to welcome the shepherds. What does that say to you about them?
3. The text tells us that the shepherds told Mary, Joseph, and others about the message they had received from the angels. How do you think most people responded to the message of the shepherds?
4. Most of our crib scenes do not include the real human and earthy messiness of the reality that Luke has described. What do we miss by not including this aspect of the reality of Jesus' birth?
5. The text states that Mary pondered these events in her heart. What does the choice of the word pondered suggest to you? How is it different than other words that might have been used?
6. How is this celebration, or the text, inviting you into a deeper relationship with God or Mary? Can you take some time to talk to God about your relationship to Mary, or what this gospel seems to be inviting you to reflect upon?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [annemarie.lom@gmail.com](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscclalledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

*Please include this information when printing or forwarding.*

### **Excerpts from the readings for January 1, 2023, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**

The Lord said to Moses: “Speak to Aaron and his sons and tell them:  
This is how you shall bless the Israelites. Say to them: The Lord bless you and keep you!  
The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!  
The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!  
So shall they invoke my name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

May God have pity on us and bless us in his mercy; may he let his face shine upon us.  
So may your way be known upon earth; among all nations, your salvation.  
May the nations be glad and exult because you rule the peoples in equity;  
the nations on the earth you guide. May the peoples praise you, O God!  
May God bless us, and may all the ends of the earth fear him!

Brothers and sisters: When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son,  
born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law,  
so that we might receive adoption as sons. As proof that you are sons,  
God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”  
So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir, through God.

The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.  
When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child.  
All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds.  
And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.  
Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God  
for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.  
When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus,  
the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

## **Excerpts from Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 67:2-8; Galatians 4:4-7; and Luke 2:16-21**

### **From Joe:**

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for January 1st, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. This octave (eighth) day of Christmas is the feast of Mary, Mother of God. The gospel from Luke is mostly the same as the one suggested for mass at dawn on Christmas day. It picks up after angels have announced the birth of a savior to shepherds in the field. Luke's narrative continues with the shepherds' visit to the manger scene, their return praising God, and the infant's circumcision on the eighth day. "He was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

The other readings also have references to blessings, to God making his face shine upon his people, and to God's people being adopted as his children through his son Jesus. In the first reading from Numbers, the Lord gives to Moses the words by which Aaron is to bless the Israelites: "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord let his face shine upon you and give you his peace." Psalm 67 exclaims, "May God bless us in his mercy, and let his face shine upon us. So may your way be known upon earth." In the second reading, from the letter to the Galatians, Paul writes, "God sent his Son, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father'!"