

Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God

Open with a prayer: Father, source of light in every age, the virgin conceived and bore your Son who is called Wonderful God, Prince of Peace. May her prayer, the gift of a mother's love, be your people's joy through all ages. May her response, born of a humble heart, draw your Spirit to rest on us your people. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sharing of life question: How was your Christmas?

Facilitator reads focus statement: Our first reading speaks of blessing, the second reading speaks of Jesus as our brother, the Gospel speaks of the wondrous event of God becoming man.

Now read the readings for this coming Sunday. Pause briefly at the end of each reading.

FIRST READING: Numbers 6:22-27

These verses were most likely chosen for this feast because Mary was seen as "highly favored" among the "most blessed" daughter of Israel. The verses consist of a formula of blessing that Aaron and his sons are to use to bless their people. It is presented as an instruction given by God to Moses. Commenting on this reading, Sr. Rea O'Donnell writes: *Blessing for a Jew is an exchange of life. For God to bless a human being is for God to pour all the divine life and love into that human being. For a human being to bless God is to surrender all one's life and love to God. Mary was both blessed and blessing. "Oh wondrous exchange!" Mary and the Lord God have exchanged all that they are, surrendered to each other, and blessed is the fruit of that union, Jesus.*

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 67

This psalm is both a thanksgiving and a prayer of petition. For God to bless Israel is a witness to all nations of God's care.

SECOND READING: Galatians 4:4-7

This reading is often chosen for Marian feasts because of the phrase "born of a woman". We can assume that Paul was not thinking of Mary in a special way. His phrase "born of a woman" simply means that Jesus is fully human. Yet from early on, the church saw that Mary had a special role in our salvation. Also, upon reflection, the church came to believe certain things about Mary. One such belief is that Mary is the Mother of the whole Christ (human and divine). This means that she is the Mother of God, even if God is the one who created her. The reading also beautifully underlines our sonship in Christ. If Christ is our brother through Mary, all of us are adopted children of God. Because of our adoption, we call God "Abba" -- a very endearing title meaning "dada".

GOSPEL: Luke 2:16-21

Commenting on this gospel, the authors of Foundations in the Faith help us to see Mary's role in our salvation:

Mary's role in the salvation won by Christ is presented here, first as she is greeted by the shepherds with her newborn child in the manger, and then as she faithfully fulfills the prescriptions of the Law regarding circumcision, naming her child "Jesus" in accord with his divine destiny. Mary, as she "treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart", is an image of how every believer can be part of God's saving plan - by contemplating and cooperating with the mystery of a God who, by virtue of his birth of Mary, has become completely one with our human condition. Mary's motherhood assures us of the full humanity of Jesus. The Christ is God Incarnate in order to "redeem those who were under the law...Thus, we are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What verse spoke to you most and why?*
2. *At this time what is the biggest blessing in your life?*
3. *In the gospel we find Mary "pondering" the events of her Son's birth in her heart. Do you tend to ponder the events of life? If so, how does such reflection help you? If not, why not?*
4. *What role, if any, does devotion to Mary play in your spiritual life?*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Name one way you can act on the readings Suggestion: This week take time to ponder the awesome reality that we are adopted children of God.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION