

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
January 1, 2015/ Cathedral of Saint Paul
Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2: 16-21

We continue our reflection in relation to the events of Christmas just passed and close the Octave of Christmas with a commemoration of the divine motherhood of Mary. This is our belief that because she bore for us our Redeemer, she is rightly said to have been the Mother of God.

Sacred Scripture itself tells us of the dignity of Mary, but not primarily by recounting the facts of her physical motherhood, though it certainly includes these. The focus instead is on what Mary did. Saint Luke envisages the greatness of Mary by showing her to be blessed among women. Her consent takes place through a free, personal, grace-filled and inspired act of faith. Several centuries later Saint Augustine would write: “Mary is more blessed because she embraces faith in Christ than because she conceives the flesh of Christ.”¹

She is situated along the line of the Old Testament patriarchs, who made their own free decisions to accept God’s will, thus paving the way for salvation history. In Mary and through Mary, the new and definitive covenant is made possible. The Blessed Virgin’s decision to accept God’s invitation through an angel made possible our Savior’s birth. The biblical witness focused not so much on the how, but rather on her simple and unreserved acceptance of God’s plan, within the context of human history. At its root, today’s feast is about our salvation.

The incarnation of the Word is without question the absolute pinnacle of salvation history, for God so loved the world that he gave us His only Son in the fullness of time, born of a woman. Saint Paul articulates this in

¹ “Beatior ergo Maria percipiendo fidem Christi quam concipiendo carnem Christi.” *De virg.* 3.3

our second reading today, calling each of us as adoptive sons. Any sense that we are no longer slaves to the Law is due to the coming into our world of a Savior.

God does not enter our lives in a manner completely extraneous to us. Rather he transforms the world by entering into the very depths of humanity, becoming one with us in all things but sin. Either God stands infinitely distant from His world, or He draws His creation ever closer to Himself and into His divine life. Today's Feast helps us to discover why He chose the latter possibility.

For this to occur, it was fitting that He should be born of a woman, and God spoke His irrevocable Word, becoming a real part of our world. Today's feast recalls that this happened because a maiden knelt down at the appearance of God's messenger and responded with an unconditional gift of herself, saying "Be it done to me according to your Word."

Mary is thus said to be, among her hundreds of titles, "gate of heaven," and "portal of eternal mercy." Most importantly for us, because Mary placed her entire being at the disposal of God's gift of grace, her divine motherhood belongs intrinsically to the history of our redemption and provides us with a real relationship to Mary. We are living in the history of redemption that she has decisively influenced.

As we begin a new calendar year, how appropriate that we begin by opening ourselves to God's plan for our lives. The Church gives us a model, and we mark Sacred Time, not by the dropping of a ball in Times Square, but by the chief events of our salvation history. We begin the Year of the Lord 2015 recognizing that this year, like all previous to it, belongs to Him. He is the Lord of all time.

We would do well to emulate the example of our Blessed Mother in treasuring all things in our hearts, entrusting this upcoming year to her intercession and protection. Because she believed, we have been blessed. Because she gave a definitive “Yes,” another year of grace is made possible for us who remain. She received in her Blessed womb the Savior of the World, opening the way for our salvation. Through her intercession, may our salvation be brought to its fulfillment. Amen.