

From the PA's Desk

Thank You!

A special note of thanks to the people who remembered me with cards, gifts, candies, and other assortment of treats during this Christmas season. Also, thank you to all the ministers who made it possible to celebrate our Christmas Masses for our parishioners and all of our visitors who came to celebrate with family and friends. May this holy and blessed season bring you God's joy, peace and happiness as we continue to be His instruments and disciples in our world. I have mailed out my thank you cards, but I always worry if someone was missed or the card was lost in the mail. Please know of my gratitude for all of you making me feel at home here. I don't have any relatives living in the area, but this parish feels like family to me, so thank you! Peace and Joy in the Lord.

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. (Luke 2:19)

On this New Year's Day, you might say, "I'm looking forward to watching all the football games and parades on TV today." Or you might say, "This is a great day to look back over all the blessings of the past year."

The Church celebrates New Year's Day in a special way too by honoring Mary as the Mother of God. But Mary isn't just the Mother of God; she is our mother as well. And as the Catechism teaches us, because Mary is our mother, she is also our "Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix" (CCC 969).

This holy day was put on the calendar because of opposition that naming Mary the Mother of God, meant that she existed before God. But the Church declared that no, Mary was created by God and Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is God Himself made man, came to the earth through this holy woman, the Mother of the Church. (Confused? So were they, I think, but it's all part of trying to put understanding God, who is above our language, into words and figuring out how to explain His presence.)

We must remember that Mary is seen always in relationship to Jesus, her Son. Nothing we say about Mary (and there is very little written about her in the Gospels) can be understood apart from Jesus. Some Christian denominations think we worship Mary, and that simply isn't true. We worship God alone, but we remember and honor certain members of our faith tradition because of the example and witness they gave us. In fact, in the Orthodox Church, there can never be an image, whether icon, statue, or painting, without Jesus with her. They recognize the close connection that exists between Mary and God, and therefore we turn to Mary in

intercessory prayer and petition because we believe her closer to God and thus can take our prayers to him for us. This is similar to the way we might want something but are afraid to ask one parent, so we go to the other and ask them to ask for what it is we need. So, as this Christmas Season continues in the Octave, or the eight days of the celebration of the Birth of Jesus, we have a special day set aside to honor Mary as the Mother of God.

I once heard a beautiful insight that helped me appreciate my relationship to Mary more than ever. Someone once said: "What son doesn't love someone who loves his mother?" When we remember Mary and show our respect and admiration of her, I think Jesus is pleased.

So what roles does Mary fulfill for us believers today? Let's look at two key ways.

First, we know that Mary pondered and treasured everything that came from God. As today's Gospel says, she dwelt on what the shepherds told her. She also pondered and treasured Gabriel's visit at the annunciation. She pondered and treasured how the Magi were led to the manger by God's star. She pondered and treasured what the young Jesus said when they found that he had stayed behind to teach the elders in the Temple.

Right now, try to see how Mary is asking you to take time to ponder who Jesus is and what he has done for you. Imagine Mary asking you to treasure him above everything else.

Second, take a look at Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). This prayer shows how much Mary loved to praise and glorify God. Some parishioners have asked me about my "cross-ring" and on the inside of it, it's stamped with Magnificat prayer which I pray constantly throughout the day. For me, that prayer sums up my relationship to God.

Right now, try to see how Mary is asking you to join her in praising God with all your heart. Imagine her inviting you to dedicate the first affections of your heart to Jesus by rejoicing in him, singing to him, and worshipping him.

Mary is not only your mother; she is your prayer partner as well. So join her today, and pray your own Magnificat.

"Jesus, let my soul magnify you! Let my spirit rejoice in your salvation!"

Evangelization Meeting:

Next Tuesday there is an Evangelization Team Meeting to discuss our plans to run the ALPHA program next Lent, which will run until Pentecost in June. Look for more information to follow, and everyone is welcome to join us in the planning.