

“Hail, Holy Mother, who gave birth to the King.” [Is 9:1]

A. NUMBERS 6:22-27-- The Context. This book records the 38 years of Israel's wanderings in the desert following the sealing of the covenant at Sinai. It was written to show the consequences of Israel's murmuring and rebellion against God and how God's grace and mercy always prevail. [RG, 71] **Today's text** records the priestly blessing that Yahweh instructed Aaron to give to the Israelites: God will bless them, keep them, look kindly on them and give them peace. [TCB, 134]

B. PSALM 67. The Context. This is a petition for a bountiful harvest made in the awareness that Israel's prosperity will persuade the other nations to worship its God. [TCB, 689]

C. GALATIANS 4:4-7 The Context:. Paul wrote this in either 48-50 A.D. or 54-55 A.D. to emphasize justification through grace by faith to counteract false teachers, to authenticate his mission and teaching and to manifest the total sufficiency of Christ as the only requirement for life. [RG, 423] **Today's portion** emphasizes that with Christ's incarnation, Christians are now not slaves to the control of others, but rather are children of God and heirs of Christ's promise of eternal life. [TCB, 299]

D. LUKE 2:16-21--The Context: This gospel dates to a time between 63 and 90 A.D. by Luke a well-educated member of a wealthy family writing from Antioch Syria for a Greek speaking audience. Luke aims for a clear, orderly, faith affirming presentation of the work and deeds of Jesus. [RG 345-346], **Today's pericope** tells of the visit of the shepherds to Jesus birthplace and Jesus' incorporation into the people of Israel through circumcision. [TCB, 102]

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO ME PERSONALLY TODAY?

The Feast of the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God on January 1 is of recent origin. Its inspiration comes from the document *Lumen Gentium* of The Second Vatican Council. What is interesting in this document is that Mary is revered not primarily because she was the mother of Jesus but rather **because she was his first faithful follower**. What is highlighted is her response to God and she is set before us as **a model of how we should be before God**.

The opening scene in St Luke's Gospel where we find Mary encountering the angel gives us one of the fastest diagnosis and treatments in all of history. "Do not be afraid Mary, you have found grace with God." The visitor, "Doctor Gabriel," notices at once how fearful Mary is and he immediately gives her the correct prescription. **He tells her to trust in a loving caring God**.

In the Gospel stories about Mary we see her often in fearful situations. Fear is a condition from which none of us are free. If we try to overcome it by our own means we will tend to become more and more insecure. We will become more and more compulsive and addictive in our efforts to control the world around us. But if we can let go of fear , as we do when we try to meditate, **we yield to the realization that we are loved by God our fear will lessen**.

When Jesus was about 30 years old he left home and the family carpentry business. At first, when he worked a lot of miracles and healed people, he was very popular. **Later, he challenged people's behavior** and told parables and stories that drew attention to the hypocrisy of the political and religious leaders of his time. When this happened the leaders conspired against him and had him tried on false charges and condemned to crucifixion. **Mary was on the sideline of many of these happenings**. She was at the foot of the cross when Jesus died. She received no instant or magical relief.

HOW WILL I EMULATE MARY AND EXPRESS MY FAITH IN DEEDS?

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Today, too, there are many mothers standing at the foot of the cross. It may be the cross of an unfaithful or cruel husband or of a drug dependent child. There are men carrying the cross of family situations that they cannot handle, and of fretful wives that nag them so much that their homes become a hell. **Mary is an example to us of someone who neither asked for nor got easy magical solutions for her problems from the God with whom she was so close.** Yet she lived for him alone and was ever faithful.

It is often easier to light a candle in the church than it **is to follow the example of Mary, who expressed their faith in deeds rather than in words.** [Fr Gerry Pierse, CSSR]

It is a wonderful thing that this gospel story should tell that the first announcement of God came to some shepherds. Shepherds were despised by orthodox good Jewish people of the day. The herdsmen were not able to keep the details of the ceremonial law; they could not observe all the meticulous hand-washings and rules and regulations. Their flocks made far too constant demands on them; and so the orthodox looked down on them. **It was to these simple men of the fields that God's message first came.**

But these were in all likelihood very special shepherds. We have already seen how in the Temple, morning and evening, an unblemished lamb was offered as a sacrifice to God. To see that the supply of perfect offerings was always available, the Temple authorities had their own private sheep flocks; and we know that these flocks were pastured near Bethlehem. It is most likely that these shepherds were in charge of the flocks from which the Temple offerings were chosen. It is a lovely thought that **the shepherds who looked after the Temple lambs were the first to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**

We have already seen that when a boy was born, the local musicians congregated at the house to greet him with simple music. Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem and therefore that ceremony could not be carried out. It is a lovely thought that the minstrelsy of heaven took the place of the musicians of earth, and angels sang the songs for Jesus that the earthly singers could not sing.

Al through these readings we must have been thinking of the rough simplicity of the birth of the Son of God. We might have expected that if he had to be born into this world at all, it would be in a palace or a mansion. There was a European monarch who worried his court by often disappearing and **walking incognito among his people.** When he was asked not to do so for security's sake, he answered, "I cannot rule my people unless I know how they live." It is the great thought of the Christian faith that **we have a God who knows the life we live** because he too lived it and claimed no special advantage over common men. [Barclay, *Gospel of Luke*, 22-24]

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

How will I embrace the gifts and graces which God offers me each day this coming year?

How will I follow Christ this year in emulation of Mary's quiet faithfulness? Specify...

When I am faced with a tough challenge this year, will I remember that God loves me?

Will I resolve during this coming year to follow Mary's model with deeds rather than with words?

[**Sources:** *Scripture readings- The Catholic Bible, NAB translation, Home Study Edition, (TCB), and its Reading Guide (RG); The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, [JSB] Jewish Publication Society; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, (JBC) 1990 edition; Dictionary of the Bible (DB), J.L.McKenzie, SJ; Daily Study Bible Series, Luke (DSBS), Wm Barclay; Gospel Reflections by Father Gerry Pierse, C.Ss.R..at www.bibleclaret.org. [Editor: Michael Hosemann]*