

## **Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**

### **Jan 1, 2023**

The life of Jesus begins with Mary. Therefore, it is appropriate that we begin the New Year with a Feast of Mary, the Mother of God.

Mary, Mother of God.

For us Catholics and Anglicans, those words roll off the tongue so easily. We've heard them our whole lives, and have prayed those very words thousands of times in the Hail Mary. In fact, we've heard them and said them so many times that it's easy to overlook just what a profound thing we are implying every time we speak them.

Mary, Mother of God.

And above all, the patron Saint of our Church here in Wytheville is Mary, Mother of the Church. Today is therefore a special occasion for us.

That title for Mary is commonplace for us, but that wasn't always the case. In fact, in the early days of the Christian Church they were very controversial, and were argued about among learned people of all kinds. Some of it stemmed from the Church trying to understand Mary's place in the story of our salvation, Mary's role in God's plan to redeem the world. But most of the controversy surrounding this title for Mary arose because there was some controversy as to who Jesus was. We sometimes forget that the Church had to wrestle with these very big questions, and do their best to clarify for the faithful questions that had basically been unanswered in those first few centuries of Christianity.

Who is Jesus? What does it mean to call him Son of God? Does that mean he is a man? Or is he God? Or is he sort of a God? Who is Mary? What was her role in all of this? Was the birth of Jesus (apart from his conception) like every other birth? Or was it different?

These are the questions that needed "answers", that is, needed to be thought over, argued over, prayed over, and ultimately defined for the faithful. And so, at the Church council at Ephesus in 431 A.D. the Church declared that it was entirely appropriate to refer to Mary as Mother of God.

Actually, what the Church accepted as a title for Mary was “Theotokos” – Greek word for “God-bearer”.

By doing so they were affirming two things:

(1) - that Jesus is God, the Second Person of the Trinity, and (2) - that Mary did indeed bear and give birth to Jesus.

And for some, both of these things were a little unbelievable, a little too hard to accept. These ideas were pretty controversial then . . . and for some, are still controversial.

Sometimes it’s hard for us to appreciate just how challenging and “hard to wrap our minds around” the teachings of Christianity and Catholicism in particular. We on the “inside” become so indoctrinated with certain teachings that we fail to realize how difficult these teachings can be for people on the “outside”.

Sometimes I wonder what I would think of Catholicism had I grown up in a different Christian tradition, or what I would think of Christianity itself, if I had grown up in another faith tradition. My guess is that, it would all seem a little too hard to accept.

Would I be open enough to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to be led where God wanted me to be, or would I resist and be unable to embrace that which God wanted me to embrace? Honestly, I really don’t know.

“And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.”

I think it’s important to see Mary not as someone who had all the answers or, had everything completely figured out or, knew precisely God’s plan for her, but rather as someone who simply stepped out in faith, and said “yes” - even though she would continually wonder about these things for her whole life - from the manger to the empty tomb. The incredible things she was invited by the angel to accept were not obstacles to her faith, but rather were opportunities to deepen her faith and her trust and her hope in a God, she could not see, and in a baby, whose very existence she could not satisfactorily explain.

And so, if you sometimes wonder about a lot of the teachings of the Church, good for you. Keep wondering. Keep asking questions. Keep

appreciating just how incredible and unbelievable and inexplicable these stories are. And keep on reflecting on these things in your heart, as Mary did, not in the hope of getting “answers” - but trusting that the search itself is evidence of faith, a deep kind of faith that is always looking for greater meaning and understanding and communion with our God who (paradoxically) is beyond all understanding.

And while we're at it, let's be respectful of and understanding of those who find the teachings of our faith hard to accept, whether that is a spouse, a child, a friend, or a stranger. We could have easily been them. For many of us, or some of us, we ARE them.

Mary, Mother of God . . . .

Today, we are starting a new day and a new year with inner knowledge and understanding of the greatness of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Mother of God. We greet each other with the same blessing as in the first reading of today: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you his peace. May the peace of the Lord remain within us, our families and communities and bring us the joy and happiness in the year to come.

Mary, Mother of God (and Our Mother and above all our Patron Saint), pray for us.