

Commentary on the Readings for January 1, 2017

The Feast of Mary, the Mother of God

Since the early days of Christianity, Mary has been known and venerated as the Mother of God in Jesus Christ, her Son. However, this caused much concern and objection from various groups and even dignitaries within the Church. It wasn't until the **Council of Ephesus in 431 AD** that Mary was officially declared to be the **Mother of God**, and this became her first official title.

The reason Catholic Christians honor Mary as we do is, as we said in the commentary for Christmas (last week): "M" is for Mary: How could we celebrate a divine birth without a holy mother? The theme of today's readings refers to or points to this sacred belief.

The **First Reading** is from the *Book of Numbers (6:22-27)*. This might seem a strange Bible passage to commemorate the motherhood of Mary; however, "Aaron's Prayer" has often been called the greatest blessing by the Jewish people because it promised God's greatest gift of personal protection. It was looked upon as the "words" of the First Covenant. Mary was God's greatest "partner" in bringing to fulfillment The Promise and objective of that Covenant, the birth of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

The **Responsorial Psalm** is (*67:2-8*). This beautiful prayer is a meditation on the blessing mentioned in the first Reading; however, by the time this Psalm was written (2nd or 3rd century BC), the concept of the Messiah to come was commonly known and awaited. Therefore, the "blessing" it refers to is, of course, the birth of the Savior.

The **Second Reading** is from St. Paul's *Letter to the Galatians (4:4-7)*. In this brief passage, Paul has summed up the essence of the birth of the Savior and the meaning of both Mary's role and that of her Son, Jesus. When we accept Mary as our mother and her Son Jesus as our brother by adoption (baptism into the Catholic Church), His Father becomes our Father in Heaven, and we become heirs of heaven. What greater reason do we need to honor Mary?

The **Gospel Reading** is from *Luke (2:16-21)*. I am sure that we all recognize this passage as part of the Christmas story. What crèche does not have a few shepherd statues and some sheep to round out the cast of characters that honored the Holy Family the night of the first Christmas? However, if we looked at each character, Mary would stand out as the most important representative of mankind. She was the Father's "partner" in bringing salvation to the world by her overwhelming "Yes!" in cooperating with God in the process of the Virgin Birth. What more could be said? What more need be said? "**Mary, full of grace, pray for us!**" **MFB**