



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
At Home

Mary Birmingham

The Octave Day of Christmas Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God | Years A, B, & C



Vertograd (Garden) an Icon of Our Lady, (Theotokos-Mother of God),
Convicted Vineyard, 1670; Tretyakov Gallery



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Marian Prayers of St Anselm, #3

Mother of Salvation
Blessed Lady,
you are the Mother of Justification
and of those who are justified;
the Mother of Reconciliation
and of those who are reconciled;
the Mother of Salvation
and of those who are saved.
What a blessed trust,
and what a secure refuge!
The Mother of God is our Mother.
The Mother of the One in whom alone
we hope and whom alone we fear is our Mother!
The One who partook of our nature,
and by restoring us to life
made us children of His Mother,
invites us by this to proclaim
that we are His brothers and sisters.
Therefore, our Judge is also our Brother.
The Saviour of the world is our Brother.
Our God has become, through Mary, our Brother!

(St. Anselm, A.D. 1033-1109)

Catholic
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& Creed**
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Sharing Faith

- ▶ Heresy abounded in the fourth and fifth century. One particular heresy concerned the nature of Christ.
- ▶ Mary's title was at the heart of this debate. Since the early second century Mary was referred to as *theotokos*: God-bearer. Mary was referred to as the Mother of God.
- ▶ However, Nestorius, a patriarch of Constantinople objected to the term. He insisted that Mary was only the mother of the human Jesus, not the divine Christ.
- ▶ It took two councils to definitively reject Nestorius' teaching (Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451).
- ▶ Once and for all the Church declared that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Both natures were united in the one person, Jesus Christ.
- ▶ As such, Mary could rightly be referred to as the Mother of God. She gave birth to Jesus who was both fully human and fully divine, thus she gave birth to God among us.
- ▶ Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox Christians refer to Mary as the Mother of God.
- ▶ It makes good sense to honor Mary for her role in God's plan of salvation a week after we honor the birth of Jesus. Mary's feast brings the Octave of Christmas to a close.
- ▶ An octave is an eight day celebration of a specific feast and all the elements associated with that feast. In a sense it takes an octave of days to fully comprehend and unfold the mystery we celebrated.
- ▶ Christmas gives glory to Christ as the Prince of Peace. We also honor Mary as the Queen of Peace.
- ▶ This feast also falls on a day in which we celebrate the World Day of Peace.

Since most groups do not meet over the Christmas holidays, this reflection is intended to be a meditation on the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God that can be done in the home or with the family. After celebrating this feast with your parish community, reflect on what you celebrated in the quiet of your home.

First Reading: Read Numbers 6: 22-27

- ▶ The important part of this reading that relates to this feast is the last verse of the reading. The author calls upon the name of the Lord. According to biblical understanding the name of a person refers to that person's essence or his or her entirety, the whole of the person. This reading contains a famous blessing called the Blessing of Aaron. All of God's saving deeds throughout salvation history are

recalled in this blessing. Christians similarly honor Jesus' name as he too is God.

You may either spend time in quiet meditation or journal with the following questions.

Questions for your reflection:

- ▶ In what way do you honor God's name in your life?
- ▶ If this reading honors all of salvation history, it is an invitation to reflect on what it means to be saved. What does it mean to you to be saved?
- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that you are saved?

Second Reading: Read Galatians 4:4-7

- ▶ Paul is dealing with controversy in his communities. Some Jewish converts to Christianity felt that new Christians must be grounded in the Jewish faith as well as in Christianity. Thus, they must be circumcised as a sign of their covenant relationship with God. Circumcision was a sign of membership in God's family.
- ▶ Paul was attacked by other Christians who felt he was not as knowledgeable as other apostles since he did not personally know and walk with Jesus. Paul boldly insisted that he was right and they were wrong. He was rather bold and would not have won any awards for finding a peaceful solution to the controversy. He was right; they were wrong. Period!
- ▶ Paul insisted that circumcision was not necessary. He nearly alluded to it being a savage act. He insisted that salvation is won only through the cross and resurrection of Christ. No external observance or ritual can earn salvation. Christ already won it for us. Salvation was a free unmerited gift from God. Paul insisted that observance of the law out of love for God is one thing, but the inherent danger in the law is that scrupulous observance can become a means for a person to think they can save themselves.

You may either spend time in quiet meditation or journal with the following questions.

Questions for your reflection:

- ▶ What does the controversy in Paul's community have to do with your life?
- ▶ Can you think of a way today in which scrupulous observance of the law might be dangerous to your soul?
- ▶ Do you know any individuals who are similarly scrupulous? Would they prove or disprove Paul's point?
- ▶ What can you do as a Christian to keep from falling into the law's trap?
- ▶ Have you ever already fallen into such a trap by thinking: "I am following all of God's commands, thus, he should do such and such for me?"
- ▶ What is Paul trying to teach you as an individual follower of Christ?

Gospel: Read Luke 2: 16-21

- ▶ In today's Gospel Jesus is given his name, "Jesus."
- ▶ The conferral of a name in Biblical literature often implied the future destiny and mission of the one named.
- ▶ Jesus means "the one who saves."
- ▶ While nothing in today's reading is extraordinary—there were others with Jesus'

name and she was presenting Jesus to the temple for circumcision as would every other Jewish parent, the intent is to show that Mary was an obedient and faithful servant of God. She did all that was required of her and all that the angel told her she must do. Once again Mary said, “Yes”.

- ▶ While the event in today’s Gospel is not extraordinary, we also know through faith and the Gospel that Jesus is the one who will save the world and his destiny is indeed beyond extraordinary.
- ▶ There is power in Jesus’ name. When we call upon Jesus we know that he is in our midst.
- ▶ Mary did not doubt or question God’s call to her. She simply trusted that Jesus would be great as the angel said he would.
- ▶ The peace that was offered to the world in the advent of God’s Son is a peace that overshadows every human person. Because Jesus took human form he elevated all human beings to reflect the face of God. We too share in God’s divine nature. Our souls reflect the divinity of Christ as a result of his incarnation. He made all creation holy—that includes us!
- ▶ Mary is our icon of faithful, obedient and hope-filled trust.
- ▶ She reminds us that we are to pattern our lives after hers.
- ▶ We too are called to abandon our lives into God’s loving care.

You may either spend time in quiet meditation or journal with the following questions.

Questions for your reflection:

- ▶ When was the last time you said “yes” to God?
- ▶ Do you trust in God’s care for you and that he walks with you every day of your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of that trust?
- ▶ What can you do to grow in your trust and hope in God’s presence in your life?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that because Jesus’ took human flesh he made all flesh holy—all creation was made holy because of the coming of Jesus? In what way are you holy and a reflection of God’s love?
- ▶ Where is growth in holiness needed in your life?
- ▶ What one thing are you willing to do to be more like Mary, the humble, willing servant of God?

Implications

- ▶ After reflection on today’s scriptures, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God’s call?

Concluding Prayer

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you Lord as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.