

Beloved in Christ, the church wants us to begin this New Year with the priestly blessings as God directed the High Priest to bless the people. The Lord lets his face shine upon you and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace (Num.6:24-26)! This is the mystery of this Christmas time! God has made himself a Child so that we could love him and see His **face** and know His **name**; that's what the Gospel reading is all about today. The Child that we discover lying in the manger in the Gospel today looks upon each one of us with the *Face of God* and by *his Holy Name* we are blessed and we have salvation (Lk.2:16). We can also imagine the shepherds, listening to the angels and running in haste and arriving to find Mary and Joseph adoring the child in the manger. As we welcome this New Year and as we follow the example of the shepherds; we are called to go over *in haste* to Bethlehem, just as the shepherds did. We cannot hesitate; we cannot wait to come to Jesus, to look at his face and to be with him.

Today's second reading helps clarify the theology: Mary Mother of God; without naming Mary, Paul asserts that "**God sent His son, born of a woman, born under the law**" (Gal.4:4). Paul further stated that "God sent the spirit of the Son into our hearts, that makes us crying out 'Abba, Father!'" In fact, what Paul is trying to say that we are brothers of the Son of God and that makes us call Mary our Mother. Again, our understanding of Emmanuel as God with us should help us to call Mary Mother of God.

As the world celebrates the beginning of a **New Year**, the Church celebrates **the Solemnity of Mary; the Mother of God**. It is the oldest of all Marian feasts in our liturgy. At the beginning of a New Year, the church invites all of her children to take Mary as **our spiritual mother**, just as we take Jesus as **our spiritual brother and Savior**; this is, ultimately, to our good, because Mary is a reflection of the Church's prayer and insight, being led by the Holy Spirit to develop an understanding of Mary's role in the salvation history. When we call Mary, "Mother of God"; many think that we are attributing divinity to Mary. This difficulty has a long history dating back to the Council of Ephesus in the year 431, and is rooted in the **Christological heresies** of early Christianity. Nestorius claimed that Jesus has two natures, a divine person and a human person and that Mary was the mother of the human person, and not the "Mother of God." The Council condemned Nestorius and taught that Jesus is only one person, a divine person, having a divine nature from all eternity and in time taking a human nature from Mary. What was born of God." Cyril of Alexandria stated that **by denying Mary as the mother of God, you are denying the divinity of Jesus ...goes against Biblical orthodoxy** (Council of Ephesus 431)

Others think that the Catholic Church started the devotion to Mary; therefore, it is only for Catholics. The truth is that Mary was honored long before the Catholic Church came into existence on Pentecost Day. Three decades before Pentecost, Mary was honored with the Immaculate Conception. During the Visitation to Elizabeth she exclaimed: "blessed are you among women... **that the mother of my Lord should come to me**" (Lk1:42-43); and Mary prophesied, "**From this day forward, all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me**" (Luke 1:48). As His last will in the New Testament, Jesus nailed to the cross, gave Mary to be our own mother through the person of John. "**Woman, there is your son.**" **Then to John, "This is your mother"** (John 19: 26-27). Jesus gave His mother to John and to all Christians. The apostles themselves prayed with Mary. (Acts 1:14) Mary was present in the three principal events of Christianity: The Incarnation, the Paschal Mystery, and Pentecost.

Finally, dear friends, on the first day of the New Year, we have gathered together for the worship, as the family of God, to praise God for having sent his only Son into the world "**born of a woman**" (Gal. 4:4), that is, for having chosen Mary, "**one of our family**", to be truly the mother of His Son. Secondly, entrust ourselves to his care and pray for ourselves, our dear ones, and the world as a whole. It is in doing so that the Lord's face will shine upon us and be gracious to us with his blessings of peace (Num.6; 25). Thirdly, God has given us **365/366 days**; **let** us manage our time well; and change our bad character; so that it will help us to know God, love him and serve him. May this New Year help us to grow more in holiness, so that at His second coming, he will find us watchful in prayer and ready to be counted among the blessed and live with him forever and ever. Amen!