

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD 01 January 2023

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Since 1969, January 1, the Octave Day of the Nativity, has been celebrated as the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, the commemoration of the conferral of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, and the World Day of Peace. In his Apostolic Letter *Marialis Cultus*, Pope Paul VI explained: "This celebration, placed on January 1 ...is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation. It is meant also to exalt the singular dignity which this mystery brings to the 'holy Mother...through whom we were found worthy to receive the Author of life.' It is likewise a fitting occasion for renewing adoration of the newborn Prince of Peace, for listening once more to the glad tidings of the angels (cf. Lk 2:14), and for imploring from God, through the Queen of Peace, the supreme gift of peace."

In 431, at the Council of Ephesus, Mary was given the title *Theotokos* (birth-giver of God), translated in English as the Mother of God (in Greek, Μήτηρ τοῦ Θεοῦ). You will see it written on icons as *MP ΘΥ* (the first and last letters of the Greek words in the title). Mary is *Theotokos* because her son Jesus is both God and man, human and divine. The title for her is used in the Orthodox, Eastern Catholic, Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditions.

We have a beautiful weaving of themes through this day, all themes of light, hope, new beginnings, and amazing possibilities: Mary as Mother of God, the naming of Jesus and his acceptance into his Jewish tradition, our adoption as children of God, the recognition of the extraordinary gift of peace to people and to Earth, and the birth of a new year.

**Mary, Mother of God, Theotokos:** the angel Gabriel brings invitation to Mary, asking her to accept God's call, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God" (Lk 1:30-35). Mary consents to the invitation, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:28). When Mary visits her cousin, Elizabeth becomes the first one to recognize that Mary is to be the Mother of God. She proclaims prophetically, "Most blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:42-43).

Pope Paul VI says so beautifully that, through Mary, "we were found worthy to receive the Author of life." In his homily on this day in 2022, Pope Francis echoes these same words, "The New Year begins under the sign of the Holy Mother of God, under the sign of the Mother. A mother's gaze is the path to rebirth and growth."

We know that Mary did not take lightly what she has accepted to do. We are told, after the shepherds have visited the baby in the manger, "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). When Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple for the purification, we are told after Simeon speaks, "The child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him" (Lk 2:33). And, again, after the twelve-year old Jesus remains behind in the temple where they had come to celebrate the festival of Passover and there is a conversation between Jesus and Mary and Joseph, we are told, "His mother treasured all these things in her heart" (Lk 2:51). Mary, the mother of Jesus and the mother of God, is a woman of deep contemplation.

**The Naming of Jesus and his acceptance into his Jewish tradition:** like all of us, Jesus is given a name and, like many of us, at the same time he is welcomed formally into his faith tradition.

In Luke's Gospel, we are told twice about this name. the Angel Gabriel says to Mary, "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus" (Lk 1:31). And the narrator tells us in Lk 2:21, "After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." The very first words in the Gospel of Matthew tell us the name, "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1). In that same Gospel, the angel tells Joseph, "She (Mary) will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). At the end of the first chapter, we are told, "he (Joseph) named him Jesus" (Matt 1:25). Neither Mark nor John tell us when Jesus receives his name. We know that the name comes through Latin from Greek from the Hebrew and Aramaic *Yeshua* or *Y'shua*, meaning "YHWH saves."

Jesus' acceptance into the Jewish faith tradition is the same as every Jewish male's, through circumcision, as we noted in the words from Luke's Gospel. Neither of the other three Gospels tell us that Jesus is circumcised. Luke whom we believe to be a Gentile is the only one who comments on this rite of initiation into the Jewish religion.

***Our adoption as Children of God:*** In the letter to the Galatians, Paul tells us, "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of the Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!" (Gal 4:4-6). Mary, the Mother of God, is also our Mother. We dare to call God "Abba! Father!" God calls us by name, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (Is 43:1). In the prayer at the end of our reflection, we will say the words about Jesus in intimate relationship with us, "Name above all names: you call us your siblings, claiming us to share in your work; exalted above all creation, you humbled yourself for our sake; able to do all things, you choose to work through us."

***The Extraordinary Gift of Peace to People and to Earth:*** Pope Paul VI established this day as the World Day of Peace, imagining peace threaded through the nativity in Luke and Matthew – the glad tidings of the angels to the shepherds (Lk 2:14), the adoration of the Prince of Peace by the Wise Ones and by the shepherds, Mary as the Queen of Peace, one who treasured the words and pondered them in her heart. We know only too well the absence of peace in our world today – the prevailing incidence of COVID, the unjust war against the Ukraine, the political instability and turmoil in Peru, the overtaxing of our health systems in Canada, increasing world poverty linked with the pandemic, increasing costs of food and home heating, increasing impact of drug use, the intergenerational trauma of poverty and violence, the racism prevalent in Canada and globally against Indigenous peoples and immigrants, domestic abuse against spouses, elders, and children.

In his message this year for the World Day of Peace, Pope Francis speaks to both the COVID pandemic and the war in the Ukraine as he answers the question, "What is being asked of us?":

First of all, to let our hearts be changed by our experience of the crisis, to let God, at this time in history, transform our customary criteria for viewing the world around us. We can no longer think exclusively of carving out space for our personal or national interests; instead, we must think in terms of the common good, recognizing that we belong to a greater community, and opening our minds and hearts . . . in a spirit of responsibility and compassion. We must revisit the issue of ensuring public health for all. We must promote actions that enhance peace and put an end to the conflicts and wars that continue to spawn poverty and death. We urgently need to join in caring for our common home and in implementing clear and effective measures to combat climate change. We need to battle

the virus of inequality and to ensure food and dignified labour for all, supporting those who lack even a minimum wage and find themselves in great difficulty. The scandal of entire peoples starving remains an open wound. We also need to develop suitable policies for welcoming and integrating migrants and those whom our societies discard.

***The Birth of a New Year:*** when we see the interweaving of all the threads binding this day together, we find hope. This Son, this Jesus, “born of a woman,” teaches us the ways of peace. His mother Mary treasures the words and ponders them in her heart. The Spirit of peace, gentleness, and hope is poured out abundantly on all – human and other-than-human. The New Year is a symbolic moment when we treasure the words as Mary did and ponder them in our hearts, when we begin anew, when the door opens to greater possibility, when we renew our commitment to “Mercy: Imaging the Face of God in All Creation.”

Let us bring all these themes together in two reflections – the first from Thom Shuman (*Majestic God, Names above all Names, Spirit of Grace*) and the second from Roddy Hamilton (*On this edge of years*):

Majestic God,

we cannot begin to imagine you, yet you have made us in your image;  
we wonder why you notice us, when we are surrounded by creation's glory;  
we have been made stewards of life, and you choose to share your own with us.

Name above all names:

you call us your siblings, claiming us to share in your work;  
exalted above all creation, you humbled yourself for our sake;  
able to do all things, you choose to work through us.

Spirit of Grace:

when we look for majesty, you bring us to a manger;  
when we yearn for glory, you hand us a mop;  
when we want to exalt ourselves, you point us to the Cross.

On this edge of years

the crossroads between past and future

we come as who we have been

and offer you who we might yet be

Take this offering of ourselves, a new promise to be your people here  
holding a renewed vision of your reign here

Take this, take us

that we might be light and follow you anew  
as we journey across borders of time  
and find new years, new places to be your renewed people. Amen.

On this edge of years from 2022 to 2023, let us, invited like Mary to be God-bearers in our world and invited to be siblings with Jesus crying out “Abba! Father!”, come to our God as who we have been and offer you who we might yet be. Let us renew our promise to be co-creators in re-shaping our world of justice, peace, hope, and joy. Let us find the courage to be God’s renewed people for a renewed Earth. “May God bless you and keep you; may God’s face shine upon you and be gracious to you; may God’s countenance upon you and give you peace” (Num 6:24-26).

In the diversity of the images of Mary as Mother of God below, let us ponder more deeply the wonder and the beauty of inclusion in ways that we have never before imagined.



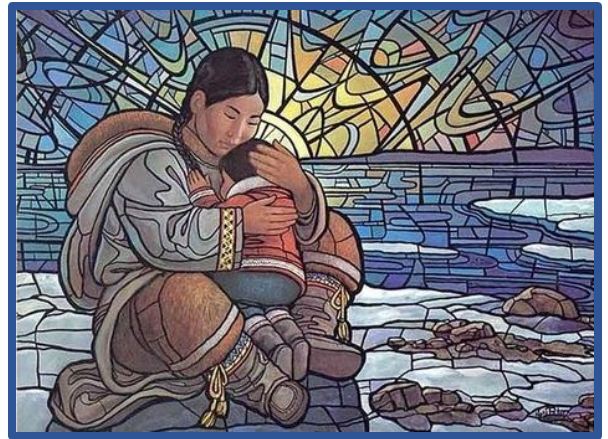
Maximino Cerezo Barredo cmf (Peru)



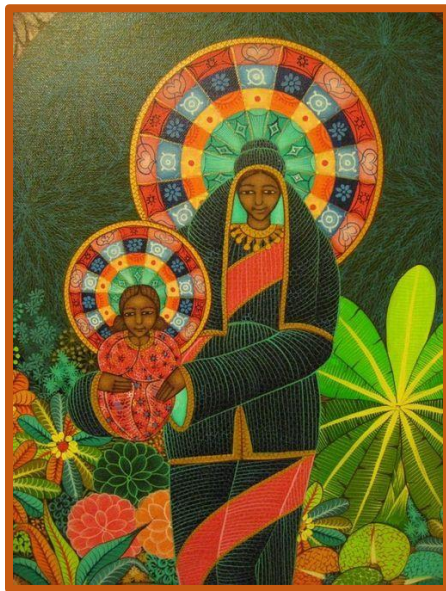
Tsolak Shahinyan (The Ukraine)



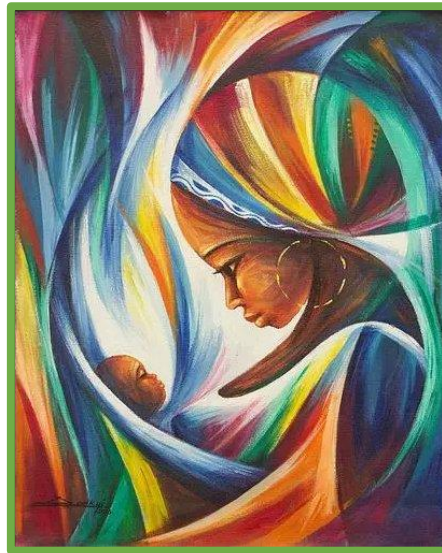
Jojo Sabalvaro-Tan (Philippines)



Nori Peter (Inuit, Canada)



Ismael Saincilus (Haiti)



Artist Unknown (Africa)



Li Ma (China)