

Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God - January 1, 2016

St. Paul packs so much into a few short verses from his letter to the Galatians. The living word of God passed on to us through the ages from the hand of Paul is so rich and full we can hardly take it all in, much less understand completely what it means.

In the fullness of time, Paul says—in other words, at the “right time”, or in “God’s time,” God sent His Son, born of a woman. How can this be, we wonder, the Eternal Son of God, the One through whom all things were made, becoming part and parcel of his own Creation? How can this be, we ask, the One whom the entire universe cannot contain now being limited to Mary’s womb, dependent upon her for his very life?

St. Paul does not tell us how this can be but does tell us why, why the 2nd Person of the Divine Trinity would humble himself to become human like us. So that we might be made into members of the family of God, so that through Him we might become adopted sons and daughters of God. The Son of God becomes the Son of Mary so we might become sons and daughters of God. What a marvelous exchange! What an incredible mystery of faith!

The proof of our dignity as God adopted children, as St. Paul puts it, is that the Spirit of the Son has been poured into our hearts. The same Spirit that overshadowed Mary at the Annunciation and made the miracle of His conception in the womb of Mary possible; the same Spirit that descended upon the adult Jesus in the waters of the Jordan and propelled him into his ministry of teaching and healing and casting out demons; the same Spirit which raised Jesus from death to new life; the same Spirit breathed by the Risen Jesus upon his terrified followers cowering in a locked room after his death. This Spirit brings the powerful presence of the Crucified and Risen Jesus into our small lives, so we can relate to the almighty God as His Beloved Son does, by addressing Him as “Abba, Father.”

Imagine being invited, even empowered by the Spirit to be one with the Son in order to relate to the Father as Jesus did—in absolute confidence and trust. How can this be? We creatures made of dust now vessels of the eternal God, impregnated with the Spirit of the Risen Lord, empowered to have the same relationship of intimacy and trust with God the Father as Jesus did. It is a mystery beyond our ability to understand completely, beyond our grasp.

Paul does not stop there—because the Spirit of the Risen Jesus has transformed us

into adopted children of God, joined us forever to the Son of God, we share in the Son's inheritance—the fullness of life, eternal life. This is our inheritance, this is our destiny.

Wow! Talk about packing a lot into a few short verses. It's like the eternal God coming to us in something as small as a newborn babe. How to take all this in? How to understand it all?

Mary, the Mother of God and our mother in faith, teaches us how to respond to the Word of God which goes beyond what we can initially understand or comprehend. Mary, the Mother of the Eternal Word made Flesh, shows us how to allow God's living word to take our flesh and to come to life in and through us.

In the Gospel of Luke, whenever Mary receives the word of God, she never understands it completely upon first hearing, but rather surrenders to it and reflects upon it in her heart. She takes a stance toward God's word which is the way faith-filled Jews do: God's word is to be received even if it cannot be understood in the moment. Then slowly, with time and reflection, pondering this word in one's heart, the full meaning will unfold. This is what faith looks like.....

This is exactly what Mary did upon receiving the Archangel Gabriel's incredible message that she was to become the Mother of the Son of God. She had questions about what this meant and how it was to come to pass—"How can this be"—but she eventually surrendered in trust, not understanding in the moment completely what was being asked of her, but trusting that God will reveal to her over time the meaning.

At the birth of Jesus again she receives the word of God from a different sort of messenger—shepherds coming to adore her child—who inform her that indeed he is the promised Savior of the world. Once again, she does not understand completely what this means or how it will come about, but she does not reject the message of the shepherds. Instead, she reflects on these things in her heart—she holds their words in her heart and ponders them.

When Joseph and she finally find the 12 year-old Jesus in the temple, after a frantic 3-day search throughout Jerusalem, and he tells them: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?", the Scriptures tell us that they (Joseph and Mary) did not understand what he said to them, but that his mother kept all these things in her heart.

As our mother in faith, the Blessed Virgin Mary teaches us a life-giving way to respond to the Word of God when we do not understand it. Her example goes beyond the

American way of understanding before committing. We Americans are so pragmatic, which can be a good thing, as we try to understand what is being asked of us before acting. But that is not the way of faith, not the way of the Gospel, as our mother teaches us. Rather, trusting the One who speaks to us his saving word, we surrender our lives into his hands in faith, with her, trusting that He will reveal in the future more clearly what is being asked of us.

That the living word of God, which may not make sense to us today, will unfold its meaning in our lives if we will but be patient and reflect upon this life-giving word.

What might Mary, our mother in faith and Mother of Mercy, be inviting us to reflect upon in our hearts, during this Jubilee of Mercy? How would she want us to receive Her Son, who comes to us in hidden and mysterious ways which may not initially understand?

Perhaps, with Mary's help, we are being called to ponder the following words of her Son, to hold these words as a treasure in our heart throughout this New Year.....

When you welcome the stranger, the King of Kings says, you welcome me.

When you visit the prisoner, the Crucified Lord says, you visit me.

Forgive and you will be forgiven....give and gifts will be given to you.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi