

## **Mother of God, Catechist**

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Sun, 06/05/2016 - 20:00

### **Catechist Background and Preparation**

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Numbers 6:22-27

Ps. 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:16-21

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

Read the following Word in Liturgy section. This gives you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the entire outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

### **The Word in Liturgy**

Today's celebration reflects the several liturgical traditions associated with this day over the centuries: Holy Name of Jesus, the Circumcision, the Octave of Christmas, and Mary, Mother of God. The common denominator for all of these feasts, of course, is that each in its own way expresses some aspect of the mystery of the incarnation. Modern-day popes have also designated January 1 as a World Day of Prayer for Peace, although there is only tenuous connection between that prayer intention and today's readings (cf. Numbers 6:26). Today's celebration is the most ancient and, indeed, the only Marian feast indigenous to Rome, and the calendar reform of 1969 has given it a place of prominence as a solemnity of Mary.

The most solemn benediction in the Jewish scriptures is found in the Book of Numbers, today's first reading, in which the "name" of God is invoked on the people. For the ancient Jews, to invoke God's name on someone was equivalent to rendering present the Almighty. This Aaronic blessing was prayed over the people by the priests at the conclusion of prayer and eventually became incorporated into the daily prayer of the Temple in Jerusalem. Our current Sacramentary has guaranteed its continued use in Christian worship by including it as one of the solemn blessing prayers at the end of Mass. The prayer's threefold repetition is a Hebrew way of intensifying the sentiment expressed. This text seems unrelated to the Marian character of the celebration. Rather, it reminds us that the Christmas season is always about the blessing of God's saving grace that has been "invoked" on us in the birth of Jesus (a name which means "Yahweh is salvation").

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul is very concerned to explain that salvation comes to Jew and Gentile alike as a result of what God has done in Jesus, not from our own efforts to observe the Mosaic Law. Here, his reference to God's son, "born of a woman" (v. 4), has deep consequences for Christian belief in the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus, as well as for Mary's role in accomplishment of God's saving plan. Christian consciousness recognized early on that authentic faith in Jesus as true God and true man demanded the proclamation that Mary is the Mother of God, just as surely as she is the mother of his full humanity. There are saving implications in what theology describes as this union of two natures in one person, achieved in the womb of the Virgin Mary. As St. Thomas Aquinas has said, "so that he, made man, might make men gods" (Opusc. 57:1-



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4). Paul points to the link between the human birth of Jesus and our adoption as God's children (v. 7).

Mary's role in this divine plan is proclaimed in the gospel. The infancy narratives are always christological assertions, even when they seem merely to dwell on quaint details of Jesus' birth and early childhood. Mary's role in the salvation won by Christ is presented here, first, as she is greeted by the shepherds with her newborn child in the manger and, then, as she faithfully fulfills the prescriptions of Law regarding circumcision, naming her child "Jesus" in accord with his divine destiny. Mary, as she "treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart," is an image of how every believer can be part of God's saving plan—by contemplating, and cooperating with the mystery of a God who, by virtue of his birth of Mary, has become completely one with our human condition. Mary's motherhood assures us of the full humanity of Jesus. The Christ is God incarnate in order to "redeem those who were under the law... [Thus we are] no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir" (Galatians 4:5, 7).

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