

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
1st January 2023 - Mary the Mother of God

Readings (Year A): 1st: Numbers 6:22-27. Ps: 66:2-3,5,6,8. 2nd: Galatians 4:4-7. **Gospel:** Luke 2:16-21

‘How did you get on over Christmas?’ ‘oh much the same or quite different time this year; good to see families back after Covid: Glad it’s all over for another year.’ Similar conversations as we meet people in the days after 25th.

Today we stand at the gate of a new year. It is a year numbered from the first Christmas, Anno Domini, a year of the Lord.

Christmas is not just a few days for getting sentimental about the figure of a baby lying in a manger before we get on with the serious business of real life for the rest of the year. The message of the coming of God to us in our human flesh is vitally relevant to every day and every moment of the era that opens before us.

Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. Mary contemplates Jesus’ birth and childhood, not from a distance, but as a participant in the mystery. Luke’s insight suggests that Mary is either the direct or indirect source of his information, since she alone could relate these hidden details of the story.

The *motherhood* of Mary is of central importance in all of this.

Mary is the one who was open to the Word of God, welcoming Christ with openness and obedience. Her welcome of Christ would cost her dearly, of course, for she becomes the *Bearer of God, the Theotokos or Mother of God*.

St Augustine points out that Mary had been filled with the presence of God in her spirit long before she became filled with God’s presence in her flesh. But as *receiver* of God in her openness, and *bearer of God* in her spirit and her womb, she became the *Mother of God* who expresses and gives forth Christ to the world. Bearing her Child and “bearing witness to God” are the same. Giving forth her Son to the world, and giving witness to the Word-Made-Flesh are the same.

Mary treasured these things and pondered them in her heart - contemplative role.

Mary is presented as the one who treasures all the happenings, and ponders them in her heart. This is a contemplative role.

Luke repeats it again later on, after Jesus is lost and found in Jerusalem “about the Father’s business”: Luke 2:51: “and his mother kept all these things in her heart”. What is this insistence of Luke, that Mary somehow conserves and contemplates the happenings of Christ?

The Second Vatican Council quotes St. Ambrose to say that Mary is a model of the Church. If she is a companion of Christ, the Church must be and is a companion of Christ.

If she is the one who listens, open to the Spirit, so too the Church must be the one who listens, open to the Spirit. And if Mary holds on carefully to the events around Jesus Christ, so too the Church must hold on carefully to the events in the story of Jesus, and contemplate the Godly meaning of them all.

Mary and the Church safely look after the Story of the Saviour, for it to be new and renewed in every person and every generation.

In the first address by an Archbishop of Canterbury to the synod of bishops in Rome 10 years ago, Rowan Williams spoke about the profound connection between **contemplation and the task of evangelisation**, saying ‘we must be rooted in a profound confidence that we have a distinctive human destiny to show and share with the world. Contemplation is the only ultimate answer to the unreal and insane world that our financial systems and our advertising culture and our chaotic and unexamined emotions encourage us to inhabit. To learn contemplative practice is to learn what we need so as to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly.’

This is why the Church states of Mary: “The Church contemplates in Mary, as in a faultless model, all that she, the Church, longs and hopes ever to become.”

As we move into 2023

Mary, contemplative woman, treasuring and pondering, pray for us

Mary, contemplative saint, sustained through darkness and suffering, pray for us

Mary, contemplative mother, at peace even on Calvary, pray for us.

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