

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

January 1, 2019



REFLECTION

As the new civic year begins, it is good to take stock of where we are in our spiritual lives. Do we need to pray more often? Participate better at Mass? Read a spiritual book? Kick a bad habit that has been hanging around? Reflect more often on how our actions affect others? We have an incredible spiritual resource in our Mother Mary, whom we honor today as the Holy Mother of God. Whatever our goals, she is an amazing gateway to holiness. St. Louis DeMontfort, who had a special devotion to Mary, wrote that the easiest way to Jesus is through Mary. If “to Jesus through Mary” is confusing, think of it this way: Jesus is a loving, devoted son. Will he refuse his mother’s requests? Absolutely not. Scientists have discovered that a mother can carry fetal cells in her body long after she has given birth. Mary is so close to Jesus that she is connected to him intimately for all eternity. It is to our great advantage that she is a loving “go-between” for us and God. Imagine Mary going about her daily life: raising Jesus from a tiny baby to a man. Even though it’s not mentioned in the Bible, we can correctly assume that, as Jesus’ mother, she did numerous, loving, and everyday tasks for him. On the Cross, Jesus entrusted the entire world to Mary as our mother. No favor is too small or unimportant for her to ask of him. Don’t be afraid to ask her for help in the areas in which you want to improve.

? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today’s readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Brainstorm ideas in which you want and need to grow in your faith this year.
- ❖ What is the one thing you want to work on first? Write it in a letter to Mary.



ACTION

Pray about what you need to change most this year. Focusing on the top one or two changes, write a letter to Mary and ask her for help with changing these traits, habits, or behaviors. You can write to her as you would a good friend and trust her as your confidant. Mary wants to hear all about your struggles and to take them to Jesus for you. If writing to Mary seems strange, then try this action. Close your eyes and imagine Mary. What does she look like? How does she walk? How does she speak to you? Does she seem to be very interested in knowing more about you? As you try to imagine her, remember that when she gave birth to Jesus, she was about your age—a teenager! Tell Mary that you would like to have a relationship with her and ask her for guidance.

Find musical settings of the “Ave Maria”/“Hail Mary”  in Latin or English on YouTube, Spotify®, Pandora®, AccuRadio, or another website. Listen to the song as your prayer for the day.





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SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

LECTIONARY #18ABC

Numbers 6:22-27

Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:16-21

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

We are still in the midst of Christmas Time, and today the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. One of the most outstanding characteristics of Mary is her willingness to know and do God's will. While we would like to follow her example, we wonder how she was so sure of it. Today's Gospel gives a clue. She reflected on events that happened and were happening. She meditated. In our busy lives today, we often overlook meditation as a prayer. Though the seasonal image of shepherds open the Gospel reading for today, the heart of the reading is found in its focus on the motherhood of Mary.

Q FOCUS: *The blessings of God are for all people.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

The week following the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, is filled with many feasts recognizing important people in the history of our faith: the memorials of St. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, Bishops and Doctors of the Church; St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Religious and first native born citizen of the United States to be canonized; and St. John Neumann, Bishop. Each of these can reveal the life stories of those who devoted themselves to God. Teens may relate to

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's story as some of the other historical saints lived lives very removed from the lives our current students are familiar with.

Church Teaching Connections

"Mary Most Holy can serve as your example. She was able to receive the Word because she was a woman of silence—not barren or empty silence, but rather one rich and overflowing. The silence of the Virgin Mother was also full of love, for love always prepares us to welcome the Other and others" (*Vultum Dei quaerere*, 33).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 2:16-21

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

The child is born! What an amazing time for Mary (and Joseph)! It may have been overwhelming, and the message of the shepherds may have even surprised her. She held all these things in her heart and, surely remembering Elizabeth's words, "Blessed are you," reflected upon all these encounters with God. *(You may need to recap the Gospel story of the Visitation for teens.)*

► **What does the word "blessing" mean to you? How do you define "blessing"?**

A blessing is the acknowledgment that good has come from a particular person. In our case, all blessings come from God. Think back to today's First Reading *(you may need to recap this story)*. The Lord gives Moses a message to pass on and this message is for all of us. He says: "The LORD bless you and keep you! The LORD let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you! The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace." God indeed blesses us. He "keeps" us which gives us a sense of safety. He will always keep us and will never abandon us. His face shines upon us. Remember that the light that shines upon us means that we are good, we are whole, we are complete. When he blesses us, the Lord looks upon us kindly and gives us peace. There is no judgment, no punishment—just kindness and peace. What a great reminder to start the new year! We are blessed!

► **In what ways does God bless you?**

Let's return to today's Gospel. The Gospel continues the story from Christmas.

► **Who recalls the Christmas story and can recap it for everyone?**

The angel of the Lord had appeared to a group of shepherds on night watch, and announced the birth of Christ. The shepherds also saw a chorus of angels in the sky praising God. In today's Gospel, the shepherds rush to Bethlehem to see for themselves what the angel was talking about.

► **Let's talk about the shepherds for a few minutes. Who can tell me what you know about shepherds?**

Shepherds took care of sheep. They were poor, powerless, and were pretty low on the social totem pole. They usually didn't own the sheep they watched. They were hired to keep the sheep safe. Yet, the angel of the Lord came to them first and told them the Good News of Christ's birth first. They came to the stable in Bethlehem even before the Magi did, and saw that everything the angels told them was true. Outside of Mary and Joseph, they were the very first people to see Jesus with their own eyes.

► **Why do you think the angels would choose the shepherds to hear this message?**

► **Why wouldn't the angels choose someone more powerful, who would have had more ability to spread the word?**

We don't know for sure why the angels chose the shepherds. Maybe they thought that rich people would be too distracted by their possessions and lifestyle to pay attention to their message. Perhaps those that had power would doubt or feel threatened. Or maybe they wanted to tell the people of the world something about Jesus, that he wouldn't care how important people were, or how much stuff they had, because he came for everyone.

The shepherds did indeed tell everyone they met the truth of what they saw, and we can imagine how excited they were right after that visit in the stable. They proclaimed and praised God, and everyone who heard them was amazed.

We all know true peace only when we stop being distracted by all the stuff of this world and focus our attention on what is truly important: the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of love, peace, and compassion. It was God's peace that guided the events of that holy night.

► How can you become humble as a shepherd and look past the distractions of the world and focus only on the truth that God reveals to us?

Mary keeps this experience of the shepherds with her, reflecting on it over time. We hear this often of Mary, that she holds things in her heart for reflection. The solemnity we celebrate today, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, invites us to pause and to reflect on the mystery that God became human through Mary, a young peasant girl who accepted God's invitation to participate in salvation, bearing Jesus, the Christ, into the world. Mary willingly participated in this mystery, even though she did not know what the future would hold, nor did she always understand what was taking place in the present.

► In what ways do you, like Mary, hold experiences in your heart, reflecting on them over time in order to perceive God's action in your life?

We may learn much from Mary as we hear again that she held these things in her heart. The mystery of God's love for us, which we celebrate every Sunday and feast day, is greater than we can comprehend. In reality, every day is a time for us to think about God's love, and how we are, or are not, reflecting and living that love through our lives.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 110.

The word "blessing" has more to do with awareness of God's presence in our world. It recognizes the good in each person, place, and thing and the good that can come from those as well. Invite students to "bless" each other and be mindful of blessing things during their week.

We begin the year with a beautiful reminder of God's blessings: "The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!"

Jesus came for *all* people; we hear it in the story of the shepherds being the first to witness the birth.

Mary trusted and followed; she held all things in her heart and reflected on them. We too are called to hold and reflect.

Act on the Word

Hold All Things in Your Heart

Provide teens with a few minutes of quiet, contemplative prayer. Invite teens to find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Ask teens to be still for five minutes and listen for God to speak to them. Say: Make space for God to enter your heart and speak to you. God will often use the "still, small voices" that can easily be drowned out by the noise of our daily lives. What is God saying to you? After five minutes, invite teens to share (but only if they are comfortable doing so).

Closing Prayer

To conclude today's session, pray together the Hail Mary, another Marian prayer, or the following prayer:

*Heavenly Father,
you gave us Mary as a mother who loves and
guides us.*

*Help us always to look to her
as our model of the perfect disciple.*

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.