

Read

Numbers 6:22-27

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

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:16-21

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

January 1, 2025



REFLECTION

This week, we hear about a group of seemingly insignificant and unimportant people who were the first to hear the news of Christ's arrival. God sent angelic messengers to a group of shepherds who became the first to visit and greet the newborn Savior.

We, too, may feel insignificant or unimportant. We may wonder if our lives really matter in the grand scheme of things. Yet, just like the shepherds, God has a special plan and invitation for each of our lives. The shepherds respond to their invitation by sharing the Good News. They couldn't contain their excitement and joy at what they had seen and experienced. We are also called to share the Good News of Christ with those around us!

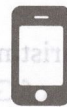
As we go about our daily lives, let us remember the shepherds. Let us listen for God's invitation and treasure the moments of encounter with Christ, allowing them to shape and transform us so that our lives become a witness to the Good News of Christ's love.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How does this story challenge our assumptions about power and importance?
- ❖ How did you learn about the Good News of Jesus? What does it look like to share that Good News with other people?

ACTION

The shepherds' encounter with Jesus led them to glorify and praise God. How can you glorify God or share your faith this week? Consider inviting a friend to church or offering to pray with someone who feels abandoned or unloved by God. Or you could share God's love through your actions, doing a chore for someone or volunteering at a local charity.



Do an image search for "shepherds nativity paintings" to see how others have envisioned these seemingly unimportant characters.



January 1, 2025

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

LECTIONARY #18ABC

Numbers 6:22-27

Psalms 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

Today's solemnity is part of the octave of Christmas, eight days of reflection on the gift of the Son of God becoming incarnate in the person of Jesus. Today we reflect on the singular importance of the role Mary played in our salvation history. The Gospel reading tells us of the shepherds who found the Holy Family in the manger, and how Mary reflected upon their message in her heart. As the teens hear this Scripture, they are invited to take time to reflect on Mary's life and her witness of faithfulness and devotion to God. The young people are encouraged to grow in their own relationship with God so that they can bring Christ to the world.

Q FOCUS: *Mary is the Mother of God, a model of faithfulness and trust in God.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

The Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God is the oldest Marian feast in our liturgical calendar. Since the Council of Ephesus in 431, Mary has been celebrated and honored with the title of Mother of God, or *Theotokos*, "God-bearer." Mary holds a place of honor in our faith because her faith and acceptance of God's will literally brought Christ into the world and brought him to all people. January 1 is also the World Day of Prayer for Peace, established by Pope Paul VI in 1967. As we celebrate Mary, who

bore the Prince of Peace into the world, we faithfully pray that Christ's peace may reach to every end of the world.

Church Teaching Connection

"Today, we have before us the point of departure: the *Mother of God*. For Mary is exactly what God wants us to be, what he wants his Church to be: a Mother who is tender and lowly, poor in material goods and rich in love, free of sin and united to Jesus, keeping God in our hearts and our neighbor in our lives. To set out anew, let us look to our Mother. In her heart beats the heart of the Church. Today's feast tells us that if we want to go forward, we need to turn back: to begin anew from the crib, from the Mother who holds God in her arms" (Pope Francis, Homily, January 1, 2018).

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 octave of Christmas (the eight days following Christmas) concludes with today's solemnity honoring Mary. We recognize Mary's special role in salvation as the *Theotokos*, the "God-bearer," the mother of God. For centuries, Mary has been praised because she believed, accepted, and followed God's will. Jesus' human nature depended upon Mary's acceptance of God's plan for her. As his mother, she carried Jesus in her womb, gave birth to him, raised him (with St. Joseph's help) according to Jewish law and customs, encouraged him to start his ministry, and was with him in every stage of his life, even at his crucifixion.

► **How does your mother, or other significant women in your life, model faithfulness to God?**

The Gospels tell us of Mary's faithfulness and dialogue with God, and of her own reflections that she kept in her heart. When the angel Gabriel appears to her to share the news of God's plan for her, she ponders his greeting (Luke 1:26–29). He then told her she would have a son named Jesus and he would be the Son of God. After hearing the whole message of the angel, Mary accepted God's plan for her (Luke 1:38). In the reading today, we have the shepherds sharing the news they received from angels about

Jesus with Mary and Joseph. When Mary heard these amazing things, she again "kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart."

These examples of Mary's deep faith show us the way that her life was always turned toward God and the way her heart was always open to following God. She was focused on God's will for her life and was responsive to God's calling. She took time in prayer to reflect upon God's plans for her and asked questions when she was unsure. She took counsel in her own heart, drawing on her faith. In each moment of her life, Mary chose God.

► **Where do you hear God's call for your life?**

From the words of Scripture? From listening at Mass? Somewhere else? How do you respond to that call?

Although we do not have Mary's sinless nature, which was necessary for her to bear Jesus, her expression of that holiness is what God intends and desires for all of us. Her ability to ask questions and reflect on the meaning of things in her heart, while turning to God and accepting his will even when she doesn't fully understand, makes her a model of faithfulness. While Mary alone was deemed worth to carry the Son of God, we too must allow ourselves to be transformed by grace so that we may carry Christ into the world through our actions and words.

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.

Mary is the Theotokos, the God-bearer, the Mother of God.

Mary's life is a model of faithfulness to God.

We are called to bring Christ into the world in our own lives.

Act on the Word

Ponder in Our Hearts

For this activity, you will need journals or paper, pens, candles (or electric candles), and quiet, meditative music. You will also need handouts with the questions noted in this activity to give to the teens, or you can write the questions on the board.

As a large group, begin by rereading this verse from today's Gospel, "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." Share with the teens that this description of Mary's reflection shows us how Mary was at prayer. She kept God in her heart and let God speak to her as she reflected upon the meaning of what was unfolding in front of her. Mary had a personal and active relationship with God. In today's activity, we will spend time in silence as we reflect on God working in our lives and how we can grow in our relationship with him.

Ask the teens to spread out and take their paper or journals to a quiet place in the room where they are comfortable. If possible, dim the lights some and use candles and soft music to set the tone for their prayer time.

Tell the teens that they will have several minutes now to spend with God in prayer, reflecting on how God is working in their lives. They can use the handout with questions on it to guide their prayer or they can find those questions on the board. They will not be asked to share their reflections, so encourage them to be as personal as they would like in their journaling and bring everything to God. Share with them that we are doing this activity on the first day of the year so we can focus ourselves on

God as we start the new year. Reflection can and should happen every day of the year, and it is most helpful when we form a habit of daily prayer.

A list of reflection questions that the teens can use to guide their prayer time can include the following:

- * Where is God at work in your life?
- * What is God asking of you today?
- * How can you help bring Jesus' peace into the world?
- * How does Mary's life give you a model for being a follower of Jesus?

Closing Prayer

*O God,
you gave us Mary to be a witness
of faith, truth, and your light.
Help us to contemplate your mysteries
and share our blessings
with our brothers and sisters
to renew our Church and world
in this year of grace and hope.*

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.

► How does your mother, or other significant women in your life, model faithfulness to God? The Gospels tell us of Mary's faithfulness and dialogue with God, and of her own reflections that she kept in her heart. When the angel Gabriel appears to her to share the news of God's plan for her, she ponders his greeting (Luke 1:26-29). He then told her she would have a son named Jesus and he would be the Son of God. After hearing the whole message of the angel, Mary accepted God's plan for her (Luke 1:38). In the reading today, we have the shepherds sharing the news they received from angels about