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The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God

As the secular world begins a new year, Holy Mother Church concludes her celebration of Christmas Day by reflecting upon Mary and her role as the Mother of God.

As the world calls us to revelry and drunkenness, the Church calls us to contemplate the "King of heaven and earth" who is born in Bethlehem and adored by the shepherds.<sup>1</sup> With Mary, we, too, are called to "[keep] all these things, reflecting on them in [our] hearts" (Luke 2:19).

The Church honors Mary in a special way today at the conclusion of the eight-day celebration of Christmas because it is through her Son, Jesus, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, that the Lord has had pity on us and blessed us (cf. Psalm 67:2). It is through the Virgin Mary's Child that "the LORD has let his face shine upon [us]" (Numbers 6:25). It is through the Son of God and the Son of Mary that the Lord looks upon us kindly and gives us peace (cf. Numbers 6:26). It is through Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, "born of a woman," that the blessing of Aaron - so loved by Saint Francis of Assisi - is fulfilled (Galatians 4:4).

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<sup>1</sup> *Introit* of the day.

We turn, then, to Mary today, giving thanks to God for giving Jesus - and us - so holy, so beautiful, so lovely a Mother. And as we look to Mary, she directs our gaze to her Son "lying in the manger" (Luke 2:16). Yet why is this holy Child found in a cave used as a stable? The "Bread of Life" (John 6:48) is laid in the trough "because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7).

"When the fullness of time had come" (Galatians 4:4), the Son of God chose to be born of a Virgin Mother so that the nations might "be glad and exult" (Psalm 67:5). The birth of the Christ Child was

the moment that Israel had been awaiting for centuries, through many dark hours - the moment that all mankind was somehow awaiting, in terms as yet undefined: when God would take care of us, when he would step outside of his concealment, when the world would be saved and God would renew all things.<sup>2</sup>

Is it any different today?

Are not countless people searching for God, even without knowing it? It takes but a glance around to see that people today continually search for happiness, for peace, for joy but never arrive at it.

A great many will be looking for such happiness tonight in their revelry. They will look around and search, but they will not look to the Child "wrapped in swaddling clothes" and so they

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 25 December 2007.

will not find that which they seek because they have no room for him (Luke 2:7).

What joy must have filled Mary's heart as she prepared to give birth to the "Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32), the One whom Elizabeth recognized as the Lord (cf. Luke 1:43).

The questions and concerns she first raised to Gabriel at the announcement of so marvelous a birth have given way to a holy joy, a joy that was the preparation to welcome her Child. We see that

The swaddling clothes were ready, so that the child could be given a fitting welcome. Yet there is no room at the inn. In some way, mankind is awaiting God, waiting for him to draw near. But when the moment comes, there is no room for him. Man is so preoccupied with himself, he has such urgent need of all the space and all the time for his own things, that nothing remains open for others - for his neighbor, for the poor, for God. And the richer men become, the more they fill up all the space by themselves. And the less room there is for others.<sup>3</sup>

Mary stands before us today as the one completely open to God's will and for this reason she is the Mother of God and Mother of the Church.

The Mother of Jesus and our Mother points us always to her Son lying in the manger. In doing so, she reminds us that "God does not allow himself to be shut out. He finds a space, even

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

if it means entering through the stable; there are people who see his light and pass it on."<sup>4</sup>

At the threshold of this new solar year, Mary invites and encourages us to enter it meditating upon the birth of the Savior, of the One who brings true and lasting peace. She directs our gaze to the face of God and asks us: "Will you make room for my Son?"

Together with the shepherds, let us go "in haste to Bethlehem" to find the Holy Family (Luke 2:16). Let us, too, listen to the proclamation of the angels: "a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord" (Luke 2:11). Let us beg the Son of Mary and the Son of God to bless us in this new year with his peace. Let us say to him: "May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the people's praise you!" (Psalm 67:6). "Bless us, O newborn King. Let your face shine upon us and be gracious to us. Amen!"

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*