

Mary, Mother Of God, January 1st, 2018

Numbers 6:22-27

Previous to this time in Scripture, God's covenantal blessing had been passed from fathers to sons. The story of Jacob and Esau, for example, in Genesis 27 centers on their competition for their father's blessing. However, from the Exodus onward, Aaron and his sons are commissioned by God to serve as the priestly fathers of Israel and in today's reading they are instructed as to how they are to pass on the blessings of the covenant. Just as the Patriarchs had passed on the covenantal blessing to their sons in the past, the priests of the Levitical order are enjoined to pass on the blessing to their spiritual sons. The blessing form we find in this reading is still used as a solemn form of blessing at the end of the Eucharist. Our priestly fathers in the Church continue the task of passing on the blessing.¹

22The Lord said to Moses:

23“**Speak to Aaron** Aaron was the brother of Moses and was designated as the speaker for him. He and his sons were selected by God and installed as priests with Aaron as high priest.⁴ **and his sons and tell them: This is how you shall bless the Israelites.** One of the reasons we read this passage today on the solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, is that it attests to her roots in the ancient traditions of the Hebrew people.¹⁷ Say to them:

24“**The Lord bless you and keep you!** This prayer for protection, grace and peace can be provided by God alone in all their fullness.³

25**The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!** There are dark days in everyone's life when it seems that the Lord's face is hidden. The blessing has this in mind when it asks that the Lord's face shine upon us.² The Hebrew language had no words for abstractions so they were described in physical terms.¹⁸

26**The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!** Our word “peace” is a weak translation of “shalom,” a word that implies “every good thing in full measure.”²

27**So shall they invoke my name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them.**” God's promise is irrevocable. When this blessing is invoked with sincerity and received gratefully, God says with utter certainty, “I will bless them.”²

The Catechism tells us that “every baptized person is called to be a blessing and to bless.” Consequently, lay people may preside at certain blessings such as those for food and family members. They do not confer the blessing as ordained persons do, but they ask God to do so.⁶ The more a blessing concerns church and sacramental life, the more is its administration reserved to the ordained ministry.⁵

Galatians 4:4-7

Brothers and sisters:

4**When the fullness of time had come,** This implies the arrival of a pre-designated moment in history and reminds us that we are involved in a divine plan that stretches back into eternity.² **God sent his Son,** The verb translated here as “sent” developed in the early Church with a specific religious meaning: to send someone in the service of the kingdom with authority fully grounded in God.⁸ **born of a woman,** This is Paul's strongest statement of the Incarnation (God becoming human).⁷ St Paul, who so often speaks of Jesus' divinity, here emphasizes that he was truly man. Thus the Blessed Virgin Mary, by becoming the Mother of Jesus Christ, who is God, is truly the Mother of

God, as the Council of Ephesus later defined.⁹ **born under the law**, Because Jesus was born of a Jewish woman and was circumcised according to the law of Moses⁷, he was born under the law. The law referred to here is the ceremonial law (not the moral law of the Ten Commandments). The whole of the ceremonial law with its covenant curses,¹² ritual injunctions and restrictions as to what could and couldn't be touched, eaten, etc. was a discipline used by the Father during his people's infancy to prepare them for the time when they would receive the full inheritance, the blessings, of the Father. To be heirs, to get into the will, we must be made sons and we do this by our incorporation into the Body of Christ through Baptism.¹

5to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. Jesus participated in all that the law required so that he could show us he is master of all law and came to give us something beyond a law-based relationship with God. He transforms our legal relationship to God into a parent-child relationship.²

6As proof that you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" In its emphatic form this meant "my father!" Without the Spirit we would never be able to utter this cry.⁸ This is the same word as our Lord used in his personal prayer. However, it is not a word ever used by Jews to address God, probably because it contains the kind of trust and tenderness that small children have in their dealings with their father. Jesus, however, did not hesitate to use it and to encourage his followers to use it. In this way he invites us to relate to God with the trust and tenderness of a child towards its father.⁹

7So you are no longer a slave The Christian is free of the Law.⁸ **but a son, and if a son then also an heir, through God.**

By acknowledging Mary as the Mother of God we are reminded of the humanity of Jesus Christ. If it was truly God who was born with a human nature, He could not be generated by a human action —hence the Virgin Birth. In truly being the Mother of God it was unthinkable that Mary could be mother of anyone else —hence the doctrine of her Perpetual Virginity. If Mary was truly to be the New Eve she could not be subject to the Original Sin brought about by the first Adam —and hence the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception brought about by the redemption won by the new Adam. Since the corruption of the grave came from Original Sin and the New Eve was truly the partner of the New Adam who reversed Original Sin she could not be subject to the consequences of Original Sin —hence the doctrine of the Assumption.¹⁰

While we are familiar with the prophecies that foretold the coming of Christ, there were also prophecies about his mother. In Genesis 3:15 God tells the serpent that "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." In Isaiah 7:14 it is written: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel." There is also the prophecy of Micah 5:2-3 which foretells the birth of the Savior in Bethlehem from a woman who will "bring forth" the "ruler of Israel."¹¹

Luke 2:16-21

The birth of the Savior Messiah is the key event in the history of mankind, but God wanted it to take place quietly and consequently the world went about its business as if nothing had happened. The only people that He told about it were a few shepherds who were the first witnesses of the birth of the Messiah.¹⁵

16The shepherds These people were on the bottom rung of the social ladder. They were despised by those who upheld the law for they were quite unable to keep the details of the ceremonial law as they could not observe all the meticulous hand-washings and rules and regulations.¹⁵ **went in haste**

to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. The manger is a box that held feed for the animals and here the baby lying in the manger becomes a sign that Jesus will feed us with himself, by his teaching and in the Eucharist.⁷

17When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. An angel had told them that a Savior had been born in David's city and that they would find him wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. (Luke 2:10-12)

18All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. Eleven hundred years passed and the Muslims had ruled Palestine for nearly half a millennium and converted most of the population from Christianity to Islam. Yet, when the First Crusade arrived, Bethlehem welcomed the Crusaders as deliverers, for it had remained almost entirely a Christian town! The shepherds of the first Christmas –they and theirs- had kept the faith!¹⁶

19And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Mary herself must have told this to Luke. Here we see Mary as a true teacher of prayer.¹³

20Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

21When eight days were completed for his circumcision, Circumcision was the symbol of the covenant between God and Abraham and his seed. It was a sign and token of membership in the body of Israel. Mere human birth did not bring a child into the body of God's chosen people. Another rite was required as recorded in the Book of Genesis (17:9-11) when God said to Abraham, "This is how you shall keep my covenant between myself and you and your descendants after you: circumcise yourselves, every male among you." In his lifetime Jesus would have seven bloodsheddings of which this was the first, the others being the Agony in the Garden, the Scourging, the Crowning with Thorns, the Way of the Cross, the Crucifixion, and the Piercing of his Heart.¹⁴ **he was named Jesus**, This name means "Yahweh saves."¹³ The salvation that is promised is not a social salvation, but rather a spiritual one. He would not necessarily save people from their poverty, but he would save them from their sins.¹⁴ **the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.** (Luke 1:31) Jesus' name has a divine and not a human origin. It was announced by Gabriel even before Mary consented to be his mother.⁷ It was also given to Joseph in a dream by an angel of the Lord.(Mt.1:21.) However, "Jesus" was not a name that he had before he assumed a human nature. It properly refers to that which was united to his Divinity, not that which existed from all eternity. At his Second Coming he will take the name "Judge."¹⁴

Some of the information for this commentary was taken from: (1) The Commentary Notes of Tim Gray, (2) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Aelred R. Rosser, (3) "The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch," (4) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (5) "Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (6) "Catholic Replies 2" by James J. Drummey, (7) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Lawrence E. Mick, (8) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (9) "The Navarre Bible: Romans And Galatians," (10) "The Truth About Mary" by Robert Payesko, (11) "Introduction to Mary" by Mark Miravalle, S.T.D., (12) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Galatians e³ Ephesians," (13) "The Navarre Bible: St. Luke," (14) "Life Of Christ" by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, (15) "The Gospel Of Luke" by William Barclay, (16) "The Founding of Christendom" by Warren H. Carroll, (17) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Mary A. Eble, and (18) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online Founded By Dr. Scott Hahn.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.