

Mary Mother of God (January 1st, 2020)

Numbers 6:22-27

This is one of the earliest blessing formulae that the Bible has conserved for us. It is referred to in some psalms and it was used by priests in the temple liturgy. It consists of three petitions, each beginning with the name of the Lord. Some ancient authors saw in this triple invocation an advance announcement of the Blessed Trinity. It goes on to pray for protection, grace and peace — three gifts which sum up man's aspirations and which God alone can provide in all their fullness. The Church carries on the tradition of blessing the faithful during liturgical ceremonies, especially at the end of the Eucharistic celebration, beseeching God to show them his favor. The Roman Missal includes this text as one of the optional blessings the priest can use at the end of Mass.

22The Lord said to Moses:

23“Speak to Aaron and his sons and tell them: This is how you shall bless the Israelites.

Formal blessings are generally reserved to persons chosen for spiritual leadership. Aaron is the brother of Moses. While on Sinai, he and his sons were designated and installed as priests with Aaron as the high priest. They were entrusted with this blessing to show how essential it is for the people's well-being. The Catechism points out that sacramentals derive from the baptismal priesthood and every baptized person is called to be a “blessing,” and to bless. Hence lay people may preside at certain blessings; the more a blessing concerns the whole church and sacramental life, the more is its administration reserved to the ordained ministry.

Say to them:

24‘The Lord bless you and keep you!

25The Lord let his face shine upon you, This act is a sign of divine pleasure. and be gracious to you!

26The 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.”

27So 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.”

Galatians 4:4-7

This seems to be St. Paul's expansion of an early Christian hymn. In verses 1-11 (of which our section is a part) he is giving a summary of human history from the point of view of the salvation which God offers men.

Brothers and sisters:

4When the fullness of time had come, The point in history when God's intervention for man's salvation took place. It began with the Annunciation. The “fullness of time” reminds us that we are involved in a divine plan that stretches back into eternity. **God sent** The fact that he was sent implies a mission. In the early Church the verb used here took on a specific religious meaning: to send someone in the service of the kingdom with authority fully grounded in God. **his Son**, The Son did not appear arbitrarily, but came for a purpose. **born** The original text says literally that he “was made from woman.” **of a woman**, This points to Mary, the Mother of God. This is the first and foremost revealed truth about Mary from which all her other roles and all her other honors flow. This doctrine, which was defined at the Council of

Ephesus, in 431 A.D., proclaims that the Virgin Mary is the true Mother of Jesus Christ who is God the Son made man. To prepare a body for His Son, God wanted the free cooperation of a creature. For this, from all eternity, God chose for the mother of his Son, Mary, a daughter of Israel. The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the chosen mother, so that just as a woman (Eve) had a share in the coming of death, so also should a woman (Mary) contribute to the coming of life. born under the law, Jesus was subject to the Old Law so that he could liberate us from it. He participated in all that the law required so that he could show us he is master of all law and that he came to give us a New Law: it is a law of LOVE because it makes us act out of the love infused by the Holy Spirit, rather than from fear; it is a law of GRACE because it confers the strength of grace to act by means of faith and the sacraments. It is a law of FREEDOM because it sets us free from the ritual and observances of the Old Law. It inclines us to act spontaneously by the prompting of charity and it lets us pass from the condition of a servant who “does not know what his master is doing”: to that of a friend of Christ and even to the status of son and heir. Jesus fulfilled the Old Law to the point of taking upon himself “the curse of the Law” incurred by those who do not abide by the things written in the book of the Law, and do them.” He transformed our legal relationship to God into a parent-child relationship.

5to ransom those under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons. Elevation from the rank of slave to the rank of child is a dramatic move. Becoming an heir to the Father’s riches is even more dramatic.

6As proof that you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son This refers to Christ’s resurrected spirit, which has accomplished our redemption and reinstated us as true sons and daughters by adoption. **into our hearts, crying out “Abba,** This is the same word as our Lord used in his personal prayer. However, it was not used by the Jews to address God, probably because it contains the kind of trust and tenderness that small children have in their dealings with their father. It carries all of our best associations with “my father”: intimate, caring, loving, full of authority and dependable. **Father!”**

7So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then also an heir, Now that we are legitimate children of God, we are entitled to inherit all the promises made to us through Christ. **through God.** This reminds us that Christmas celebrates not only the historical birth of Christ but also our rebirth through baptism, by which we become children of God. As the ancient Christian writers often put it, God shared our life that we might share God’s life.

Luke 2:16-21

16The shepherds These were the poor and they were the first to receive the message of salvation. The patriarchs were shepherds and so was David. “To shepherd” was a synonym for ruling. God himself is called the shepherd of Israel. **went in haste** They hurried because they were full of joy and eager to see the Savior. “No one seeks Christ half-heartedly.” **to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.**

17When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. The adoration of the shepherds has been depicted in millions of crèche scenes as well as other numerous works of art.

18All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. The birth of the Savior Messiah is the key event in the history of mankind, but God wanted it to take

place so quietly that the world went about its business as if nothing had happened. The only people he tells about it are a few shepherds.

¹⁹And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Luke's insight suggests that Mary is either the direct or the indirect source of his information since she alone could relate these hidden details of the story.

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, This rite was established by God under the Old Covenant to mark out those who belonged to his chosen people: he commanded Abraham to institute circumcision as a sign of the Covenant he had made with him and all his descendants. The rite was performed either at home or in the synagogue and in addition to the actual circumcision, the ceremony included prayers and the naming of the child. he was named Jesus, Jesus means "Yahweh saves," that is, Savior. We confess this in the Creed: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven". This name was given the Child not as the result of any human decision but it was the choice of God communicated by the angel to the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. Like John, Jesus is named at his circumcision. The event initiates his full solidarity with God's covenant people, Israel.

Some of the material for this commentary is taken from: "The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch," "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," "The Catechism of the Catholic Church," "The Navarre Bible: Romans and Galatians," "workbook FOR LECTORS AND GOSPEL READERS: 2004" by Aelred R. Rosser; "workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998" by Lawrence E. Mick, "Introduction to Mary" by Mark Miravalle, S.T.D., "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke," and "The Navarre Bible: St. Luke."

The oldest surviving image of Mary is an early third-century painting on the wall of the Roman catacomb of Priscilla. Mary is holding the Christ Child in her arms, while a man to her left, holding a scroll in one hand, points to a star above Mary's head with the other. Scholars surmise that this is the prophet Balaam, who predicted that "a star shall come out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel. Early Christians interpreted this prophecy as referring to the Messiah.

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