

Solemnity of Mary, The Holy Mother of God 2016

Many take great offense that the expression “Merry Christmas” has been replaced with the greeting “Happy Holidays.” It is understandable why many take offense since the motivation for this change is often to remove any mention of the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ from the end of December and to transform this time into a non-denominational, non-religious, non-theistic celebration of whatever you want to celebrate, just so long as you do not offend anyone, except of course Christians who have had their religious holy day taken away from them.

The wonderful irony of this concerted effort to remove Christmas from the public sphere through the use of the word holiday is that many people do not realize what the word holiday means. This word derives from the Old English word *hāligdæg*, which is a combination of two words: *hālig* which means holy and *dæg* which means day, giving you the word holy day. The original use of the word holiday was to wish someone well on the occasion of a specific religious celebration. In the

past, when the expression “happy holidays” was used in the English speaking world, it was understood to be wishing someone a blessed celebration of Christmas. But the expression “happy holidays” also referred to the feasts that followed Christmas Day in what is known as the Octave of Christmas (including such feasts as St. Stephen’s Day, the feast of St. John the Evangelist, the Holy Innocents and the days of the Christmas Octave that end with the celebration of today’s feast, the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God).

Therefore my friends, to wish someone Happy Holidays is quite wonderful if what we mean is to wish them blessings not only on Christmas Day, but also for the 8 days that follows which give extended honour to the birth of the Only Begotten Son of God. Try telling others what it actually means to wish someone Happy Holidays; it can become a blessed opportunity to share our faith with those who do not know Christ or are hostile to our faith.

With that long introduction behind us, may I say something of the great solemnity that we celebrate today, the motherhood of Mary.

We encounter Mary today in the Gospel of St. Luke after the birth of Jesus. The appearance of angelic choirs have drawn shepherds and many in Bethlehem to visit the newborn Messiah of Israel. We can only imagine the reactions people must have had when Mary allowed them to see their Messiah, perhaps even permitting them to give Him a kiss or hold Him in their arms. God did not desire the first visitors of His Son to be the rich and powerful of this world, but those who were poor and humble of heart, people of lively faith who believed the Messiah had come and did not hesitate to invite others to come and see the newborn king and His mother.

All we learn from St. Luke as to Mary's reaction to what took place in the days following Christmas is that she pondered all of these things in her heart. First and foremost she must have pondered the appearance of her son: What He looked like, how to tell what cry meant He was hungry or tired or distressed. She would have noticed His features, which considering Our Lord's human DNA came only from His mother meant He resembled herself. She would have known His

heartbeat, His voice, His smiles, everything that He was and she hoped that He would one day be.

We can speculate what Mary considered to her son's future to be: When would God reveal Him as the Messiah, how would He deliver His People from their sins, how would other children accept Him, and what future was in the store for the family. As of yet they had not yet been visited by the Magi nor learned of the murderous plans of King Herod nor heard the prophecy of Simeon that Jesus would suffer greatly for His people, and that a sword would pierce Mary's heart. For now, Mary was left to ponder and be filled with joy that her Son was the Son of God and she was His mother.

Mary offers us a beautiful way to begin a New Year: by pondering the face of Jesus Christ. We are invited to imitate her example in beginning another year with Christ at the centre, sharing with Him our hopes for the year, asking for the necessary graces to endure the struggles that we will face and the courage to continue being His disciple.

Today's Solemnity also invites us to consider another important and often forgotten moment in the life of Christ: His circumcision. All faithful Jews made sure that their newborn boys were circumcised on the 8th day after birth as an external sign that their sons belonged to the People of Israel with whom God had formed a unique covenant. Once circumcised, Jesus was forever united to the People of Israel, a bond that He continues to have with the Jewish People to this day and for all eternity.

The Rite of Circumcision was also the time that a male child was officially given his name. In obedience to the commands of the archangel, Joseph gave him the name Yeshua, which was a common name in those days and meant "God Saves."

Only Mary and Joseph knew the reason for giving their son the name "God Saves"; for it would be through Him and Him alone that humanity would be set free of slavery to sin. What Mary and Joseph did not know was the price their son would pay to obtain our salvation. However, in a sense, as He was being circumcised and for the first time

experienced the loss of His own Precious Blood, Mary in that moment had her first experience of suffering with her son, seeing Him in pain and wanting to console Him, just as she would when she met Him along the way to Calvary, bearing the cross for our sins.

Mary continues to make herself available to anyone who would go to her to find refuge and encouragement. She has tasted a suffering much greater than ours, and so she can be seen as trustworthy and steadfast in helping us to carry the crosses that we bear.