

Also beginning of the New Year and Day of Prayer for Peace

Num 6:22-27

Gal 4:4-7

Lk 2:16-21

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Promises

As we begin a new year today, resolutions are probably on our minds. Promises made to ourselves, promises made to others, maybe even promises made to God. So what are our resolutions? I will give up smoking. I will work harder at a relationship. I will spend more time in prayer.

We all know though that making promises can be a tricky thing. Sometimes they require the cooperation of another person; they very often demand perseverance and commitment. There's a couple that I knew who were married for fifty-four years. They experienced the highs and the lows, the certainty and doubts, the 'for better and for worse.' Sickness was there, especially as the wife struggled with cancer for fourteen years. Through it all, she refused to remove her wedding ring, even during surgeries. Once I walked into her hospital room and she was adamantly telling the doctor that she wouldn't take off her ring. It was a sign of a promise made, of love. That ring never left her finger for fifty-four years. That woman was my mother.

Today we remember another mother, the eminent mother - Mary, mother of God, mother of the Promise; Mary, patroness of our parish. In today's Gospel, we hear the familiar Christmas story of Mary with her baby at the manger. In fact, you may recall, this is the same Gospel proclaimed on Christmas morning. However, a significant final verse is added today. In it we are told that the child "was named Jesus," the name the angel Gabriel told Mary she should give her baby boy.

True to her word, true to her promise, Mary called her child Jesus. Her initial "Yes" to God's plan continued to evolve. Mary's promise was not for one day, nor was it an easy one. She pondered its meaning at the manger, as she surely pondered it at the cross.

Mary knows how hard promises can be. She lived in a world of many broken promises, much as we do today. Broken relationships, broken treaties. Conflict in families, elusive peace among peoples. Yet, Mary placed her faith and

hope in the God who saves- the very meaning of her son Jesus' name- "God saves." The Son of God, "born of a woman," as we heard in Galatians, born of Mary, sent to make her and all of us children of God.

Mary is mother of the Promise, mother of us all. It is interesting that the root of the word 'promise' comes from the Latin for 'sending forth.' For God in unconditional love sent forth the Word, made flesh, through Mary. It is from her womb that Mary sent Jesus, God's promise, into the world. She gives us Jesus the Christ, so that, through his death and resurrection, we may be saved - that we might live as daughters and sons of the unbroken promise. And as children of God, we are called to make known the Promise, to send forth this message of hope to our world. As St. Augustine once said, "Christ is truth and peace and justice, conceive him in faith, give birth to him in works, so that what Mary's womb did for the flesh of Christ, your hearts may do for Christ's law."

Through our words and actions, we can participate with God, as did Mary, in bringing truth and peace and justice to our world. As the Church, the Body of Christ, we model Mary's motherhood. And how do we do this? Often it is in the simple, ordinary things of life. The Promise is born every time we volunteer at the soup kitchen in Overbrook, when we visit a cancer patient at Bryn Mawr Hospital, or when we tutor a teenager from a broken family at Lower Merion High School. Christ comes to the world each time we speak out against violence in all its forms.

We can resolve this New Year's to make known the promise, to make known the message, as the shepherds did in today's Gospel. And in this Eucharist, we can join them in "glorifying and praising God" for all we have heard and seen. For a mother named Mary and her son named Jesus. For the God who provided my mother and who provides us with the grace and strength to keep promises. For the God who saves and blesses - 'The Lord bless us and keep us! The Lord let his face shine upon us, and be gracious to us! The Lord look upon us kindly and give us peace!'