

**Homily for January 1st, 1999
Solemnity of Mary Mother of God**

By Father Charles Bowes

Numbers 6:22-27

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:16-21

Mary shows what it is to trust in the face of confusion, doubt, and anguish.

“Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart,” says St. Luke, Chapter 2. The evangelist shows his readers that it was not easy for Jesus’ contemporaries, even his mother, to comprehend fully who Jesus was and the impact of his life. It was not immediately clear to Mary, and therefore she held each piece of revelation in her memory and pondered its meaning.

The Greek word for ponder is literally “throw together.” It implies a period of discernment, of reflection on the many different moments of insight and experience which, when taken together, begin to give one a clearer sense of God’s ways. St. Luke later describes Mary as present to hear the prophetess Anna speak the role her Son is destined to assume. Likewise, St. Luke describes Mary as disconcerted at the boy Jesus’ remaining in the Temple.

Mary finds herself pondering the meaning of all the events that surround her child. Almost immediately as she mothers her child, she learns how his presence can cause both understanding and astonishment in people’s lives. She senses that her child, whom an angel

promised would rule the house of David forever, is a king who wants to give himself to the lowly and the marginal, like herself and the shepherds. She marvels that God can make use of people like herself and the shepherds, counted among the least, to proclaim his glory. She treasures all these events and reflects on them in her heart. Mary plumbs these treasures in the deepest part of who she is; she allows them to touch her profoundly. She models the prayer of discerning how God is speaking to us in the events of our lives.

For St. Luke, Mary is the perfect model for Christian believers because she trusts God’s word and responds in the midst of confusion, doubt, and anguish.

It is a fine way to begin a new year, in the Spirit, which animates the mother of the Lord. Trust is something in short supply with which we are graced in abundance through this holy meal and in this sacred gathering where we meet the body of Christ and become the body of Christ we meet.

Sally Cunneen, co-founder of the journal *Cross Currents* makes the observation that there is an extraordinary interest in the Mother of God today - her image appears in magazines such as *Life* and *Time*. Not bad for a peasant woman born in the farthest reaches of civilization more than two thousand years ago. Miss Cunneen asks why this popularity of Mary particularly

now, in this age of science and technology, among Protestants and Catholics, the churched and unchurched. In response to her questions she suggests that Mary has “a remarkable power” than enables her to transcend “cultural and religious bounds” and speak “to perennial human need.” ...And that perennial human need is that Mary shows what it is to trust in the face of confusion, doubt, and anguish.