

## **New Year 2021 Feast of Mary, the Mother of God**

*Have you wondered how January 1<sup>st</sup> became New Year's Day and how other cultures celebrate this day?* Jews celebrate New Year which begins on Rosh Hashanah on September 6th this year. The Muslims will have their New Year Muharram this year on August 9th. Chinese New year will be February 12th this year. The Romans started January 1<sup>st</sup> because that was the day when Roman consuls took office, celebrated with “*boisterous joy, superstitious practices and gross orgies*”. The Christians made this a day of penance as a reaction against the excesses of Pagans. Eventually it was made a feast of Mary as the “*Mother of God.*” Now, even if they have their own New Year, practically all big cities of the world celebrate January 1<sup>st</sup>. *The Church's New Year celebration is the first Sunday of Advent.* It makes little reference to January 1<sup>st</sup> as the start of a New Year as it falls during the octave of Christmas. Christmas is an important feast that is celebrated solemnly for eight days. After today, the liturgy continues to celebrate Christmas, but less solemnly, until the feast of the Baptism of our Lord.

Today as we begin the first day of New Year, is a good time to keep, like Mary, all the good things in our hearts—how we quietly survived the past year, the faithful friends who kept watch, and the simple blessings we received. As the church gives us Mary our Mother, who generously shared her blessing, our guide and model the Book of Numbers reminds us of God's blessing to be shared. *The LORD bless you and keep you! The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be*

*gracious to you! The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace!*

Through the centuries, these hallowed words have been repeated by the Hebrews millions of times and this biblical benediction is still popular today. This short but beautiful blessing is used as a dismissal at the conclusion of our liturgy in our churches.

These divine words were no doubt prayed over the head of Mary as she attended the worship services with her family when she was growing up. The church now finds it appropriate to read the priestly blessing of Aaron on this day when we honor Mary as the Mother of God. Our Gospel presents Mary as a model of New Life in Christ. *If we look at Mary, her life was not only a life of suffering but a constant giving to the will of the Father, doing it with joy in her heart.* Mary was a woman who valued the word of God, who treasured, meditated and pondered it. She kept everything in her heart, discerned, prayed and generously gave her total Yes to God. Mary's life continues to knock at the door of our hearts. As we face this New Year, we look back to the past in order to learn and be ready to face the future.

Well, looking back we know how the year 2020 turned out. There were major disruptions—we have to make drastic adjustments and recalculations. We were nervous and worried, we were cautious and even afraid. Nobody expected it to be such a turbulent year with so much unpredictability. Not many of us can say that it has been an enriching and fulfilling year. But most of all 2020 was a year to remember. Whatever the situation in which we find ourselves: a hardship, a worry

that bothers us, a frustration, a decision to make - God has a solution, an answer that is right for us. You may be so worried about your work or your health. We may be a parent who is concerned about a son or a daughter *who no longer goes to church, or who is involved in a harmful relationship. We may be a young person who is concerned about fitting in. We may be a person who is concerned about personal faith.* We have prayed for guidance and God's help, but He doesn't seem to hear our prayers. All that's left now is to pray and to trust. And Mary will help us do this.

Everything has a meaning and a purpose, even trying and difficult experiences, if we just quietly wait and reflect and pray over them in our hearts. *God has a solution, an answer that is right for us.* We tell God about it in prayer but we also listen to what God has to tell us about it. Let us today resolve to listen more to the voice of God, to treasure God's word and ponder it in our hearts. Then shall we be able to realize our New Year's resolution of a new life in union with God.

**Let us learn from Mary who said yes to God's will.** If we are looking for a New Year's resolution, we could do no better than to resolve to give Mary a bigger role in our life. Let us pause with Mary and take stock of what we have been blessed with, to serve as a well from where we can draw water in moments of dryness. *Like Mary, let us unite ourselves to Jesus in obedience to the Father's will and, by prayer and works of the apostolate, bring about Jesus in our hearts and souls. Mary, Mother of God, pray for us and with us. Amen.*