

## Solemnity Mary, Mother of God

January 1, 2023

Reflection by Sister Susan Quaintance, OSB

Nm 6:22-27; Gal 4:4-7; Lk 2:16-21

I read something yesterday that rocked my world. Looking at what the *Jerome Biblical Commentary* had to say about today's gospel passage I read this: "The shepherds tell others, Mary and Joseph included, about the good news . . ." Telling people they met on the way to the manger? Sure. Pouring out the story when they stopped for something to eat before they headed back to the fields? Of course. But Mary and Joseph? Apparently I have spent the last 60 years assuming that Mary and Joseph heard the angels, too. After all, they were a pretty important part of the story. But no, the shepherds filled them in, too.

So, then, with what felt like new eyes, I went back to read the first part of Luke, chapter 2. It was the 6<sup>th</sup> scripture, that Patti read so beautifully, at Lessons and Carols on Christmas Eve. For decades we've heard it as the Midnight Mass gospel. It's what Linus, alone on stage, proclaims in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. (A personal favorite in recitations of this passage.) To recap: the shepherds are out, living in the fields. The angel of the Lord, shining in glory, appears and says, "Today, in the city of David, a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord." Here's the sign: you'll find an infant, lying in a manger. Then the singing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom God's favor rests." No wonder Mary pondered: that was a lot to process!

OK, so my world was rocked. So what? But I read something else that helped me to take the next step. In its commentary on Mary's pondering, the *Oxford Biblical Commentary* says that "in Luke's narrative, [pondering] retains the idea of puzzlement." Mary's had so many weird encounters, with angels and humans, has heard several mysterious messages, and now has given birth in a barn, only to hear that her baby is, indeed, the Promise of God. Mary is pondering and puzzling; she cannot possibly be at peace.

And yet.

There has been much to unsettle us this Advent and Christmastide: in the world, in our city, in our community life, and in the personal issues we face. I am often disappointed in myself at how easily I get sucked in by anxiety, hopelessness, and gloom. Losses and unrealized expectations threaten who I am supposed to be.

But Mary, Mother of God, is an excellent guide in times like these. Perhaps the fact that she was Mother of God didn't actually result in the calm serenity that we see on Christmas cards and sing about in carols. She couldn't figure it all out, at least not all at once. Mary, though, opened herself to God's peace, the peace that is spoken about, in both the blessing in Numbers and the angels' song in Luke. We know, and all the commentaries remind us, that God's peace is not freedom from war or distress. It is a state of being whole, complete. God's peace is about integrity and unity – within ourselves and in our relationships with one another. We are not given peace in place of puzzlement. We are given it, if we can anticipate and accept it, in the midst of puzzlement.

To quote someone I referenced earlier, Linus, the first theologian to shape my thinking about Incarnation: “That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.”

“Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace to those on whom God’s favor rests.”

Amen.