

BLESSINGS OF PEACE IN THE NEW YEAR!

A series of questions I came upon recently began like this: How has Mary, a little Jewish girl from nowhere, grown to be such an immense personality? Why are two billion Hail Mary's said daily? Why did five million people, many non-Christians, visit Lourdes last year to drink the healing waters? Why did more than ten million walk to Guadalupe to pray to Our Lady? What do pilgrims to Medjugorje seek and find? Why is it thought that more girls have been named for Mary than for any other historical figure? Why the need to talk to her? Why are Mary hymns creeping into Methodist songbooks? What is it about Mary?

These are all legitimate questions. It is clear and obvious that there is something here. Mary has captivated and captured the hearts of many, many ordinary people all around the world. In the Gospel for today, Saint Luke says very simply that Mary "kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." What things?

There was her original betrothal to Joseph and all that that betrothal entailed. She had her hopes and expectations and all of that had to be set aside. What she wanted was to be replaced by what the Lord wanted.

There was the encounter with God's angel, Gabriel. How can a young woman interact with such a heavenly persona? There were her own questions and her own fears and thus Gabriel's greeting "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God," begins to make sense.

There is her lack of understanding but her acquiescence at the word that the angel brings. She must then, of course, try to explain all of this to Joseph, to her own mom and dad, to her family members. And then there are the rumors that start to circulate as they inevitably do in small towns everywhere. There the "story" and then what people think "really" happened. Mary has to live with that for the rest of her life. She knows, but there is always the innuendo.

There's her long trip to Elizabeth and Zechariah and the miraculous pregnancy of her relative. What did they talk about? What did Mary learn there over those next few months that would last her a lifetime?

There is the long trip to Bethlehem although this time much more arduous because she is late in her pregnancy and travel was hard. There is the late arrival and the lack of any adequate place to give birth. There is the stable, the animals, the shepherds, and the utter poverty of her situation. And the angels—singing.

What things did Mary keep in her heart? When she could not find him that year he turned twelve and she and Joseph grew frantic until there he was in the Temple. And after he went public and began his ministry, his teaching and the performing of his mighty works, she began to hear of things. And she heard the challenges that were coming not from the people but from the powers that be. She kept those things in her heart.

And when she could not be with him and when she was not able to converse with him and when what he did was not always clear to her she treasured those things in her heart. Yes there was much there. She reflected. Reflection is but one short step away from prayer. We move from thinking about to speaking about except the speaking is now with Our Lord. That is Mary's strength, her connection with the Lord.

She is a strong woman; she is a wise and loving mother. She makes the Incarnation believable and therefore she makes God accessible. On this feast of Our Lady, we are grateful.