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“Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Luke 2:19).

Num 6:22-27; Gal 4:4-7; Luke 2:26-21

How fitting that we mark the New Year by honoring Mary, the mother of God. If Eve is the mother of the human race, Mary is the mother of the new creation

inaugurated by Jesus, the first human being conceived by grace and the Holy Spirit, the Word of God made flesh.

Mary's role as mother did not end with the birth of Jesus. Together with Joseph, she parented him, showing Jesus how to be human, forming him in the same grace that filled her and the same Spirit that overshadowed her at his conception when she consented to be his mother: "Be it done to me according to your word." Luke makes the connection 30 years later in Nazareth, when Jesus read Isaiah's prophecy of the Servant of God: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and has anointed me... (Luke 4:18), and then echoed his mother, saying, "This word has come true in your hearing."

Mary never stopped pondering in her heart what each experience meant: The day Jesus was born, the faces of the shepherds and their story of angels, the prophecies of Simeon and Anna, the anxious days after the boy was lost, then found again among the elders in the temple, the wonder years in Nazareth, his departure to begin his ministry. Mary's reflections and her example reappear in the parables of Jesus, in his insights into the scriptures, in his gracious way with people, and especially his compassion for the poor and the sick, his advocacy of sinners and outcasts.

It is an awesome thing to be called the mother of anything. Soul diva Ma Rainey was called the "Mother of the Blues," giving voice to the suffering of the Black community during 250 years of slavery. Mother Cabrini and Mother Teresa brought God to the poor immigrants in Chicago and the untouchables in Calcutta. Mother Jones stood with the factory workers and miners in their struggle for justice. But to be called the "Mother of God" is to honor Mary for encompassing all the triumphs and tragedies of all mothers who have carried humanity with the self-emptying love of God.

We leave behind 2020, a year of extraordinary loss and suffering for millions of people in the pandemic and because of violence. One indelible reminder of the centrality of a mother's love in the life of every human being was that, in the final minutes of his life, George Floyd cried out repeatedly for his mother: "Mama." Birth and death were united in his plea for love from the one source of life and comfort we all need to survive, to breathe.

We enter the New Year as a world desperate for a mother's love. We will honor Mary best by bringing that love where it is needed most.

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