

LIVING FAITH

JANUARY 1, 2024

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR PEACE

NEW YEAR'S DAY



THE GOSPEL FOR TODAY-- Luke 2:16-21

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus,

the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Because of the special role that Mary had in God's becoming human in Jesus, the Redeemer of the world, we place each New Year under her care and protection. Mary's greatest title, the one which is so simple and yet proclaims a most profound mystery is the title which is the name of today's feast: Mary, the Mother of God. This is the most ancient title given to Mary, and it is also the first thing defined by the Catholic Church concerning her. That Mary is the Mother of God is a dogma of our faith.

The third ecumenical council of the Church held at Ephesus in the year 431 solemnly declared:

If anyone does not confess that Emmanuel is truly God and therefore that the blessed Virgin is truly Mother of God for she bore according to the flesh him who is the Word from God, let that one be anathema.

Mary is indeed one who "bore God"; she is the mother of God. The reason for this definition was not so much to honour Mary as it was to state the truth about her son Jesus Christ: he is truly God, and because born of woman truly human. The reason for Mary's importance and the veneration we owe her is her son Jesus and the quality of her love for him. Mary grasped the presence of God working in the most unsuspected places: in herself, in shepherds, in her home, in her husband and in her helpless child.

TALKING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- In what ways can Mary be a model or example for you? (Hint: read the one-line sentence in the Gospel.)
- Create a prayer to Mary – it can either honour her OR ask for her help.

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God.

We know that Mary is Jesus' mom. Why is she called the Mother of God? The Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are all three persons in one God. That means that we can call Mary, "Mother of God" or "Mother of Jesus!"



THE CHURCH TEACHES MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD

In his homily for the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God in 2018, Pope Francis had this to say about the feast and the mystery we celebrate today...



The year opens in the name of the Mother of God. *Mother of God* is the most important title of Our Lady. But we might ask why we say *Mother of God*, and not *Mother of Jesus*. In the past some wanted to be content simply with the latter, but the Church has declared that Mary is the *Mother of God*. We should be grateful, because these words contain a magnificent truth about God and about ourselves. From the moment that our Lord became incarnate in Mary, and for all time, he took on our humanity. There is no longer God without man; the flesh Jesus took from his Mother is our own, now and for all eternity. To call Mary the *Mother of God* reminds us of this: God is close to humanity, even as a child is close to the mother who bears him in her womb.

The word *mother (mater)* is related to the word *matter*. In his Mother, the God of heaven, the infinite God, made himself small, he became matter, not only to be *with us* but also to be *like us*. This is the miracle, the great novelty! Man is no longer alone; no more an orphan, but forever a child. The year opens with this novelty. And we proclaim it by saying: *Mother of God!* Ours is the joy of knowing that our solitude has ended. It is the beauty of knowing that we are beloved children, of knowing that this childhood of ours can never be taken away from us. It is to see a reflection of ourselves in the frail and infant God resting in his mother's arms, and to realize that humanity is precious and sacred to the Lord. Henceforth, to serve human life is to serve God. All life, from life in the mother's womb to that of the elderly, the suffering and the sick, and to that of the troublesome and even repellent, is to be welcomed, loved and helped.



We need to remain silent as we gaze upon the crib. Pondering the crib, we discover anew that we are loved; we savour the real meaning of life. As we look on in silence, we let Jesus speak to our heart. Only one thing is said about the Mother of God: "Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). *She kept them*. She simply kept; Mary does not speak...

THE CHURCH TEACHES

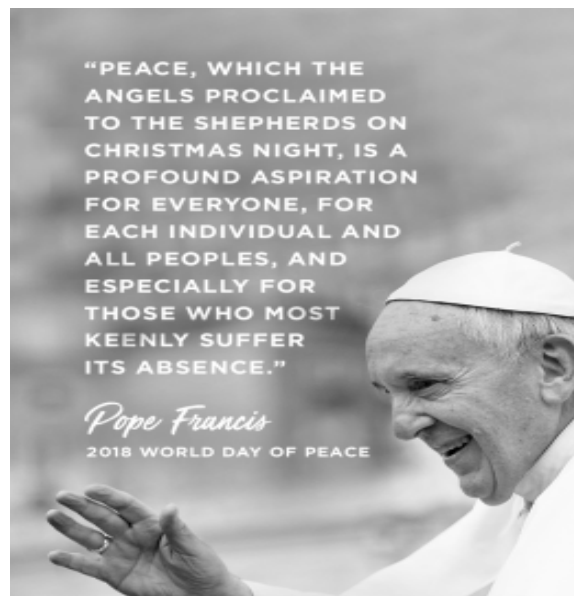
MESSAGE FROM POPE FRANCIS-- WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR PEACE

THEME: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND PEACE

The World Day of Peace — instituted by St. Paul VI in 1968 — is celebrated each year on January 1, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. The pope provides a message for the occasion, which is sent by the Vatican to foreign governments around the world.

We rightly rejoice and give thanks for the impressive achievements of science and technology, as a result of which countless ills that formerly plagued human life and caused great suffering have been remedied. At the same time, technological advances, by making it possible to exercise hitherto unprecedented control over reality, are placing in human hands a vast array of options, including some that may pose a risk to our survival and endanger our common home.

The remarkable advances in new information technologies, particularly in the digital sphere, thus offer exciting opportunities and grave risks, with serious implications for the pursuit of justice and harmony among peoples. Any number of urgent questions need to be asked. What will be the consequences, in the medium and long term, of these new digital technologies? And what impact will they have on individual lives and on societies, on international stability and peace?



Progress in information technology and the development of digital technologies in recent decades have already begun to effect profound transformations in global society and its various dynamics. New digital tools are even now changing the face of communications, public administration, education, consumption, personal interactions and countless other aspects of our daily lives.



Moreover, from the digital footprints spread throughout the Internet, technologies employing a variety of algorithms can extract data that enable them to control mental and relational habits for commercial or political purposes, often without our knowledge, thus limiting our conscious exercise of freedom of choice. In a space like the Web, marked by information overload, they can structure the flow of data according to criteria of selection that are not always perceived by the user.

The inherent dignity of each human being and the fraternity that binds us together as members of the one human family must undergird the development of new technologies and serve as indisputable criteria for evaluating them before they are employed, so that digital progress can occur with due respect for justice and contribute to the cause of peace. Technological developments that do not lead to an improvement in the quality of life of all humanity, but on the contrary aggravate inequalities and conflicts, can never count as true progress.

Artificial intelligence will become increasingly important. The challenges it poses are technical, but also anthropological, educational, social and political. It promises, for instance, liberation from drudgery, more efficient manufacturing, easier transport and more ready markets, as well as a revolution in processes of accumulating, organizing and confirming data. We need to be aware of the rapid transformations now taking place and to manage them in ways that safeguard fundamental human rights and respect the institutions and laws that promote integral human development. Artificial intelligence ought to serve our best human potential and our highest aspirations, not compete with them.

