

Mary Mother of God
January 1, 2017

“The Lord bless 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!”

What better way to begin the New Year than with this blessing? Mary herself probably heard it pronounced many times in her life.

The summary phrase of the blessing is “The Lord give you peace.” “Shalom” expresses the depth of the concept of peace. But *shalom* means more than peace; it means peace, justice and integrity in relationships. It implies safety and growth in wholeness as if the entire universe was woven together and functioning as God intended. The blessing of shalom prays that humanity and the entire universe may live the communion God created us to enjoy.

Today we celebrate the “Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.” That title would have surely overwhelmed her. But then she really didn’t have to worry about theology, dogma, titles and solemnities. Instead, she had a new baby, a confused but faithful husband and all kinds of unexpected visitors coming to witness the scene where her family was simply and literally trying to survive the experience.

When the shepherds appeared on the scene they knew far more than Mary could have expected. Delighted to discover her Son in the manger, they started spreading the word faster than they were really able to understand. Like many of us, those shepherds were quick to make proclamations about what they

thought God was up to. Like Jesus' own disciples, these first evangelists may well have had the right vocabulary, but it's highly unlikely that they fully comprehended what they had encountered.

The shepherds talked, others were "amazed," and we never hear a single word from Mary.

Luke tells us that "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." Generations to come would call her blessed, and the Fathers of the Church would defend her title as "Mother of God." But, from the day of Jesus' birth until his death, the little we hear from her amounts to no more than one question, "Son, why have you done this to us?" and a subtle request on behalf of others, "They have no wine," and a reflection of her own discipleship: and "Do whatever he tells you."

When Luke tells us that Mary kept things in her heart, the word he used indicates a long process of pondering, a life of discernment, trying to put together different pieces of a mystery. While the process didn't lead to quick conclusions, it doesn't mean she gave up on it. Luke's statement about her ongoing reflection is one of the reasons some conclude that Mary herself gave Luke the Nativity story.

St. Luke portrays Mary as contemplation in action. Mary had more to ponder than anyone else in this story. She had to question her experience and her response. She had to make sense of all that she had encountered while balancing it with the traditions of her people. She must have accepted living with more

questions than answers and far more hope than certainties. Don't we all have that in common?

Mary, Mother of the God who came in the flesh of a needy infant, learned to remain open to God's shalom, to allow her faith to exceed her uncertainties and her hope to give her resolve beyond her power to imagine. She sought to do God's will even in the simple events of everyday life. We look to the Mother of God to teach us how to live simply as contemplatives in action.

And to help us do just that, we will be offering once again the Alpha program starting January 29 at 12:30 p.m. in the Family Life Center.

Now I've talked about this before, and hopefully, some of you have talked to the nearly 140 people who have already experienced Alpha.

But if you have not heard of Alpha, it is 10-week program that begins with sharing a meal and table fellowship. Next, a 35 minute video will be shown highlighting one of the core components of the Christian faith focusing on a particular aspect of Jesus. Then, the larger group will break-down into small groups, with table hosts and helpers leading discussions that stem from the videos.

In these discussion groups, people are welcome to ask questions and look for answers with no pressure to contribute. And the really beautiful part of this is that these groups have formed genuine friendships that we pray will last for years to come.