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# Mary: Model and Paradigm of Belief for Christians

## Reflection for Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God Year C

By Father Thomas Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, DEC. 23, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://zenit.org)).- The Christian New Year is celebrated on Jan. 1, one week after the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Jan. 1 has been given several different names that reveal something of the nature of the feast.

First of all, the Christian New Year is within the Octave of Christmas (i.e., eight days after the birth of Jesus.) Before the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) the Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus or the Naming of Jesus (Holy Name of Jesus) was celebrated on this date to commemorate the Gospel account of Jesus' circumcision according to the ritual prescriptions of the Mosaic law, thus becoming officially a member of the people of the covenant: "At the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus" (Luke 2:21-24).

Following the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council, Jan. 1 has now been known as the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of the Lord, and it has also been designated as the World Day of Prayer for Peace.

We may wonder if New Year's Day has accumulated so many different meanings that people no longer pay attention to the feast. Is it also not true that the atmosphere of revelry attached to New Year's Eve hardly leaves anyone with the energy, desire or willingness to consider New Year's Day as a religious feast? Let us consider some of the biblical foundations for the various meanings attached to the Christian New Year.

### Feast of the Circumcision and Naming of Jesus

In antiquity and in the Scriptures, it is a common belief that the name given to a person is not just a label but part of the personality of the one who bears it. The name carries will and power. The name conjures up the person; there is a desire to know the name and even a reluctance to give it in the Scriptures.

Jesus of Nazareth was born in Bethlehem to Jewish parents (Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2). At his conception, it was announced by an angel that his name would be "Jesus." The Hebrew and Aramaic name "Yeshua" (Jesus) is a late form of the Hebrew "Yehoshua" or Joshua. It was a very common name in New Testament times. The meaning of the name is "The Lord is salvation" and it is alluded to in Matthew 1:21 and Luke 2:21.

"Yeshua" refers to the Savior and was one of the Christian ways of naming and identifying Jesus. The Greek *christos* translates the Hebrew *mashiah*, "anointed one"; by this name Christians confessed their belief that Jesus was the Messiah. In the New Testament, the name, person and work of God are inseparably linked to those of Jesus Christ. True disciples of Jesus are to pray in his name (John 14:13-14). In John 2:23 believing in the name of Jesus is believing in him as the Christ, the Son of God (3:18). The name of Jesus has power only where there is faith and obedience (Mark 9:38-39). Believing in the holy name of Jesus leads to confession of the name (Hebrews 13:15). Calling on this name is salvation.

## Solemnity of Mary, Mother of the Lord

The second person who is celebrated and honored on the Christian New Year is the mother of Jesus. This young woman of Jewish descent took upon herself the full responsibility of the word "yes" to a mysterious visitor at the Annunciation. By her response, she broke out of the cultural and religious boundaries of her time, manifesting great courage and faith. She literally brought heaven down to earth. Mary of Nazareth lived the memory of events and their meaning -- always showing the ability to interpret the whole thread of her life through repeatedly calling to mind words and events.

"Mary" comes from the Hebrew "Miriam" whose etymology is probably from the Egyptian word meaning "beloved." She is the disciple par excellence who introduces us to the goodness and humanity of God. Her womanhood is not in itself a sign of salvation but it is significant for the manner and way in which salvation happens. There is salvation in no other name but that of the man Jesus; but through this woman, Mary, we have humanity's assent to salvation. Only in this way can we speak of a feminine realization of God's salvation.

Today we celebrate the Mary, Mother of God, who is a model for every believer. I cannot help but recall the powerful words of Anglican Bishop N. T. Wright of Durham, England, during the 2008 synod on the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church. Bishop Wright, one of the papally-appointed fraternal delegates to the synod, spoke of the four great moments of Mary's life with four words: Fiat, Magnificat, Conservabat and Stabat. Through her "fiat," Mary gave assent to God's Word with her mind. Through her "magnificat," the Virgin Daughter of Nazareth reveals her strength and courage. In her heart, Mary meditated on and kept God's Word: "conservabat." Her fidelity to the end is described by the word "stabat" as she stood at the foot of the cross and waited patiently in her soul for the fulfillment of Simeon's prophecy and experienced the new, unexpected and perhaps unwelcome, but yet saving revelation.

God calls each one of us through Scripture in complete love and grace, and the response of the obedient mind is "fiat": Let it be to me according to your word. We, too, celebrate, with our strength, the relevance of the word to new personal and especially political situations: "magnificat." Then we ponder in the heart what we have seen and heard: "conservabat." But Scripture tells us that Mary, too, had to learn hard things: She wanted to control her son, but could not. Her soul is pierced with the sword, as she stands "stabat" at the foot of the cross. We too must wait patiently, letting the written Word tell us things that may be unexpected or even unwelcome, but which are yet salvific. We read humbly, trusting God and waiting to see his purpose unfold. Mary is truly a model and paradigm of belief for Christians.

## World Day of Prayer for Peace

The most recent "theme" attached to the Christian New Year has been the "World Day of Prayer for Peace." The World Day of Peace is an observance launched by the Church under Pope Paul VI in 1967. Christians are invited to begin a New Year praying for peace. The message of Pope Benedict XVI for the celebration of the 43rd World Day of Peace was made public several weeks ago and has as its theme: "If You Want To Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation," a deliberate play on Paul VI's famous words, "If you want peace, work for justice."

In his message this year Pope Benedict presents "a cosmic vision of peace" a peace which "comes about in a state of harmony between God, humankind and the creation. In this perspective, environmental degradation is an expression not only of a break in the harmony between humankind and the creation, but of a profound deterioration in the unity between humankind and God."

Benedict XVI has already earned a reputation as the "green Pope" because of his repeated calls for stronger environmental protection. The Pope's language in this year's message is quite forceful. "How can one remain

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indifferent in the face of problems such as climate change, desertification, the degradation and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase in extreme weather, and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical areas?

“How can one overlook the growing phenomenon of so-called ‘environmental refugees,’ meaning persons who, because of environmental degradation, have to leave -- often together with their belongings -- in a kind of forced movement, in order to escape the risks and the unknown? How can we not react to the conflicts already underway, as well as potential new ones, linked to access to natural resources? [...]

"These are all questions that have a profound impact on the exercise of human rights, such as the rights to life, to food, to health and to development."

Benedict accented a vision of the cosmos as a gift of God, which human beings have an obligation to “care for and cultivate.” The Pope called for “a profound and farsighted revision of the model of development,” based not only on the needs of today’s “living beings, human and non-human,” but those of generations to come.

At the same time, Benedict XVI insisted that protecting the environment is “the duty of every person,” one which demands changes in personal habits and attitudes. Benedict called for “new styles of life,” based not solely upon the logic of consumption but also “sobriety and solidarity,” as well as “prudence.”

For this reason, it is imperative that mankind renew and strengthen "that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying."

"Our present crises ... are ultimately also moral crises, and all of them are interrelated. They require us to rethink the path which we are traveling together."

Today, as we celebrate the Mother of the Lord who truly reconciled the many meanings given to today’s feast in her very life and witness, let us echo the words of St. Basil the Great whose feast immediately follows today’s celebration (Jan. 2):

“Let us give glory to God with the shepherds,  
Let us dance in choir with the Angels,  
for "this day a Savior has been born to us, the Messiah and Lord,"

He is the Lord who has appeared to us,  
not in divine form, in order to terrify us in our weakness,  
but in the form of a Servant, that He might set free  
what had been reduced to servitude ...”

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Basilian Father Thomas Rosica, chief executive officer of the Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation and Television Network in Canada, is a consultant to the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. He can be reached at: [rosica@saltandlighttv.org](mailto:rosica@saltandlighttv.org).

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