



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 7 January 2004

Reflection on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, celebrated on 1 January

1. "*Alma Redemptoris Mater... The Virgin Mother of the Redeemer...*". In the Christmas season we invoke Mary using an ancient, evocative Marian Antiphon which continues with the words: "*Tu quae genuisti natura mirante, tuum sanctum Genitorem* - to the wonder of all creation, you have brought forth your Creator".

Mary, Mother of God! The liturgy of the first day of the year, the Solemnity of Mary, Most Holy Mother of God, places a special emphasis on this truth of faith which is closely bound to the Christmas festivities. Mary is the Mother of the Redeemer; she is the woman whom God chose to carry out his saving plan centred on the mystery of the Incarnation of the divine Word.

2. *A humble creature conceived the Creator of the world!* The liturgical season of Christmas renews our awareness of this mystery, presenting to us the Mother of the Son of God as sharing in the crowning events of the history of salvation. The age-old tradition of the Church has always considered the birth of Jesus and the divine motherhood of Mary as two aspects of the Incarnation of the Word. "In fact", the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says of Mary, citing the Council of Ephesus, "the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. Hence, the Church confesses that Mary is truly "*Mother of God' (Theotokos)*" (n. 495).

3. *All the other aspects* of Our Lady's mission *derive* from the fact that she is "Mother of God".

They are clearly indicated by the titles with which the community of Christ's disciples honours her in every part of the world. First of all, those of "The Immaculate" and "Our Lady of the Assumption", since the One who was to bring forth the Saviour could obviously not be subject to the corruption that derived from original sin.

The Virgin is also invoked as Mother of the Mystical Body, that is, of the Church. Referring to the patristic tradition as it was expressed by St Augustine, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that she "is clearly the mother of the members of Christ... since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head" (n. 963).

4. Mary's whole life *was very closely connected to that of Jesus*. At Christmas, it was she who offered Jesus to humanity. On the Cross, at the supreme moment of the accomplishment of his redeeming mission, it was Jesus who bequeathed to everyone his own Mother as a precious legacy of the Redemption.

The words of the crucified Lord to John, his faithful disciple, constitute his testament. He entrusts John to his Mother, and at the same time consigns to Mary's love the Apostle and every believer.

5. In these last days of the Christmas season, let us pause to contemplate in the Nativity scene *the silent presence of the Virgin beside the Baby Jesus*. She lavishes on us the same love, the same care that she lavished on her divine Son. Let us therefore allow her to guide our steps in this *new year* that Providence has granted us to live.

This is the wish that I express to you all at this first General Audience of 2004. Sustained and comforted by her maternal protection, we will be able to contemplate the face of Christ with a renewed gaze, and walk more swiftly on the paths of good.

Once again, a Happy New Year to you who are present here, and to your loved ones!

The Holy Father then addressed the groups present in French, German, Spanish, Polish, Ukrainian, Slovak, Croatian, English and Italian.

To the English-speaking visitors

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience, including the groups from Denmark and the United States of America. I thank the choirs for their praise of God in song. Upon all of you and your families, I invoke the Lord's richest blessings for a peaceful New Year.

To the Italian-speaking visitors

I address a cordial thought to the Italian-speaking pilgrims. I greet you especially, the new priests of the Institute of the Legionaries of Christ, who have come with the entire community of Rome and with the consecrated lay virgins of "*Regnum Christi*". I urge you to draw from the Eucharist every day the grace and strength to be docile instruments and tireless labourers in the construction of the Kingdom of God.

I then greet you, dear circus people who have performed here in Rome during these Christmas festivities, and encourage you always to live your faith in Christ with joy.

To young people, the sick and the newly-weds

Lastly, my thoughts go to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. Dear friends, in these days that follow the feast of the Epiphany, let us continue to meditate on the manifestation of Jesus to all the peoples. The Church invites you to spread Christ's light with the witness of your life.