

Mary the Holy Mother of God

New Year's Eve unites the world. People everywhere rejoice as the earth laps around the sun, saying thanks for another year. Some of us will stay up partying till midnight; others will go to bed and greet the new year after a good night's rest. Either way, this night unites the human family.

Our birth unites us even more; we all enter the world the same way, through the patient gestation of a mother. If you are proud of your parents, it has little to do with you. It probably has more to do with their parents. We do not choose our parents; God assigns them. But we all have parents, and that unites the human family.

Therefore when Saint Paul describes Jesus to the Galatians, he seems not to say very much with the words "born of a woman." It basically means, "Nothing spectacular; Jesus entered the world like the rest of us." However, Jesus is God's Son. He isn't exactly like each of us, even though at first he seemed to be.

The expression "born of a woman" appears in two other places in the bible. Job (14:1) experienced devastating personal losses, which gave him a bleak worldview. He sums up the human condition this way: "[Everyone] born of woman is short-lived and full of trouble." Job thinks that misery unites us. In Matthew's gospel (11:11) Jesus says, "Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." We are all united with John the Baptist because of the way we were born. Yet within this unity, John was the best - until we became the children of God.

Today's solemnity honors Mary as the holy mother of God. It is not a celebration of her son who was born of a woman - we celebrated him last week. Today we celebrate her motherhood. Yet because of her son, we have become God's children. Jesus was born as God's son; we have been adopted as God's children. Jesus called God "Father", and he taught us to do the same. Our adoption makes us children and heirs to the kingdom of heaven.

As we celebrate this holiday, we do it as people born of women, people who all have something in common. As we celebrate this holyday, we do it as people born of the Spirit, people who have something else in common: Our baptism makes us God's children. We are adopted children of God because Mary became the Mother of God. She gives us reason to be happy as we begin a new year.

Tuesday, December 31, 2019