

Mary, The Holy Mother of God

Num. 6: 22-27; Gal. 4: 4-7; Lk. 2: 16-21

Awesome! LeBron James hit three triples in twenty seconds. Justin Leonard hit a hole-in-one. Awesome! We hear this word used in many different situations. Sometimes, it is used as a simple response to a statement. 'I'll be back. I just have to run a few errands and then take in a movie with a friend.' Awesome!

Awesome means: 'worthy of reverential fear or wonder'. I am not sure that the word applies in many of the instances in which it is used these days.

Since we are still in the Octave of Christmas, we continue to contemplate all the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus. In today's Gospel, we read about the shepherds who came from tending their sheep to visit the baby Jesus in the manger. After adoring Him, and knowing that He was the Son of God, they went out and spread the good news to anyone who would listen. The shepherds knew that something truly awesome had happened and Mary knew this too.

And what did Mary do? She 'treasured these words and pondered them in her heart' just as she did when the angel first appeared to tell her that she would soon be with child and give birth to the Son of God. Even though Mary did not fully comprehend what was happening, she obeyed the will of God and then 'pondered' everything in her heart.

If awesome is an overworked word these days, then the word: ponder is underused. To ponder means: to weigh mentally, to think over, to muse over. Pondering takes time. It is different than merely thinking. In this day of instant gratification, we are encouraged, no pressured, to think quickly and make snap decisions. To ponder is to think deeply, to pray, to meditate, to find the true meaning of something. Mary pondered and reached a decision to raise Jesus as a Jewish man in keeping with God's plan of salvation.

We read in today's Gospel that on the eighth day after His birth, Jesus was circumcised in accordance with the Jewish law. The drawing of His blood foreshadows His sacrifice on Calvary in accordance with the Father's will. On the Feast of the Holy Family, we read that 'when Mary and Joseph had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee...the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. Although He was the Son of God, Jesus was raised as a Jewish child and was obedient to His parents.

Mary is the Mother of God and she is our mother. As with all mothers, she teaches us by her example. And her example is one of obedience to God's will and cooperation with His divine plan. We would do well to follow her example. When weighty decisions need to be made, we should avoid the temptation to think quickly and superficially and to make snap decisions. We should 'ponder' and discern God's will for us. Having done this, we should then take action in cooperation with His plan with full confidence that we will receive that ancient blessing (Num. 6: 24-26):

*The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make His face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up His countenance upon you,
and give you peace.*