

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius

A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
January 1, 2015

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There is a rightful and necessary place for the observance of a Feast of Mary, Mother of God in the liturgical year. But there was confusion in the thinking of modern liturgical renewal to place this feast here on the Octave Day of Christmas. In 431AD it was decided at the Council of Ephesus that the title “*theotokos*,” **God bearer** or **Mother of God**, would be Our Lady’s chief dignity. This title is derivative of Christ’s *divinity*. Mary is Mother of God because her Son is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

The problem with placing such a commemoration on January 1st is that the whole Christmas cycle celebrates Christ’s *humanity*. The news of Christmas is not that the Word was God but that the Word was made flesh. The term “Incarnation” refers to God taking flesh. It is therefore more consistent with the celebration of Christmas to retain the Feast of the Circumcision, occurring as the Gospel says it does, on the 8th day, when Our Lord was formally given the name Jesus. The lessons appointed for today’s Mass even make reference to the Circumcision and the Holy Name, and do nothing to support the Marian doctrine actually being commemorated. When you combine the confusion of emphasis on two cardinal points of Christian belief with the celebration of New Year’s Eve and Day it all makes for a lack of focus.

Having said that, who can receive and accept Divine revelation and participate in the life of the Church while ignoring the exalted position of the Blessed Virgin Mary? We observe the feast of apostles. They have an *official* position in Christ’s Church. But Mary’s position is *natural* and *personal*, and therefore deeper, and therefore *more sacred*, than that of the apostles. For Catholics, devotion to Our Lord naturally calls forth devotion to His mother, from whom He took human flesh and birth. The whole Christmas cycle, (which begins with the Annunciation on March 25th and ends with Candlemas on February 2nd), is permeated with Our Lady’s maternity even while the spotlight is always upon her Son.

The title “*theotokos*” is never an ornament on the Christian piety tree. We don’t use the term **Mother of God** to gain theological brownie points! To neglect Mary is to despise Almighty God, for she is His ordinance. “Mother of God” means Almighty God has placed the Blessed Virgin Mary in His Church as a distinct power, to be

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an operative part of our religion. Because she has traveled all the paths of her Son, Mary knows how to guide us to our Lord Jesus. Because she is Mother of God she is the unique channel to and dispenser of Divine grace.

When we call upon Our Lady Blessed Mary, it is as children of the one who as *mother* nursed the Holy Child. We call upon a *woman* who inspires us to purity of life. We call upon a *wife* who has given countless men and women a vision of a sanctified home. In all these ways and more, we come to Jesus through Mary.