

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
January 1, 2018

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The placement of today's Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God is one of the less-fortunate decisions to come out of the modern liturgical renewal. This does not refer to the *propriety* of such a feast but rather to its *placement* here on the Octave Day of Christmas.

The council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. decided the title "*theotokos*" would be Our Lady's chief dignity. This is a Marian doctrine resulting from Christ's divinity. Mary is Mother of God because her Son is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

The problem is that the Octave of Christmas (and the whole Christmas cycle) celebrates Christ's *humanity*. The good 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*. Therefore placing The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God in this season blurs the focus of the Christmas message. On January 1st it is far better to retain the Feast of the Circumcision, which, as the Gospel declares, occurred on the 8th day, when our Lord was formally given the name *Jesus*. All the lessons appointed for today's Mass make reference to the Circumcision and the Holy Name and do nothing to support the Marian doctrine actually being celebrated.

Having said this, there is a rightful and necessary place in the liturgical year for a Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. For who can accept the Divine revelation given to Christ's Church, and participate in her life and fellowship, while ignoring the exalted position of the Blessed Virgin Mary? After all, the Apostles had an *official* position in the Church and we honor them. But Mary's place was *natural* and *personal*, and therefore *deeper* (and, may we say, *more sacred?*), than that of the Apostles.

For Christians, devotion to Our Lord naturally calls forth devotion to His mother, from whom He took human flesh and birth. And the whole Christmas cycle, from Annunciation to Candlemas, is permeated with Our Lady's maternity, even as the spotlight is always upon her Son.

The title "*theotokos*" is never an ornament on the Christmas piety tree! Protestantism used the term "Mother of God" to gain High-Church brownie points. But to neglect Mary is to despise God, for she is His ordinance. "Mother of God"

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means Almighty God has placed the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church as a distinct power, as an operative part of our religion, one who has traveled all the paths of her Son and therefore knows how to guide us to Him. Yes she is *Queen of Saints*. But Mary is much more. She is *Mother of God*, and therefore the special channel and dispensing instrument of all His graces.

All souls who delight to call Mary blessed can seek her fellowship and help, as children of one who nursed the Holy Child, as a woman who inspires us to purity of life, and as a wife who has given countless men and women a vision of a sanctified home life.