

Mary Mother of God – Year A 2026

Num 6:22-27; Ps 66; Gal 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21

I could not express better my wish for you all this New Year than the words that God asks Moses to use to bless the people of Israel:

*May the Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance up on you and give you peace.*

It is a beautiful blessing made more beautiful when its Jewish context grows into the Christian life and it is accompanied by the sign of the Cross over those who are blessed, the sign of Jesus who shares our life.¹ It is a blessing that I wish for you all, and which God wishes for you.

Just how profoundly God wishes it for you is evident in this great Solemnity that we celebrate today, Mary, Mother of God. A non-Catholic might be excused for assuming that this was just another Marian celebration that has no real place in the life of a Christian, but if they took a moment to listen – and if you take a moment to tell them – they might be convinced that it is foremost a celebration about Christ. Christ first, Mary second.

From the earliest age of the Church Mary has been called the Mother of God – St Irenaeus in the 2nd century – but it was not

until the Council of Ephesus in 431 that this title became most clearly stated in its importance as a vital part of Church teaching.

Mary is the Mother of God because Jesus claimed his humanity from her. The initiative is from God alone; the act is of God alone; the ‘yes’ is Mary’s. The Son who always existed and through whom everything came into being, became through Mary what he was not before: man and God.

This is what Christmas announces. With the world is different although it might look the same to jaded eyes. Joy is not the same. Sorrow is not the same. Death is not the same. It is not just because of ‘hope’ or ‘faith’ or ‘love’: they can be false friends if we do not know Christ. Christ alone makes them holy. Christ alone makes us holy. Christ makes us holy because he is one of us, he remains one of us, through Easter and beyond. But we then we simply must acknowledge Mary. Mary gave her free will offering to God, once and for always for you and for me. This was what was asked of her. Her ‘yes’ was enough to let heaven flood into the world, to let the Word of God become flesh. How can you minimise that? How can you truly honour God if you think little or nothing of Mary?

The Lord who lets his face shine on us reminds us of Moses who was allowed to see the back of God’s Glory on mount Sinai, and then who afterwards, when he came out the tent of meeting

¹ Num 2:23-26

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with God had to cover his own face which was radiating a great light as a result of those encounters. But then the Son of God is born of Mary, and this too changes. God who was close comes closer. The words '*the Lord lift up his countenance up on you and give you peace*' is no longer imagery or reflected glory: it is reality. Jesus the man is made visible to others in birth, at his presentation in the temple, in baptism, in his teaching and healing, at the transfiguration, and then at the defining moment of his Resurrection. He reveals the Divine. He came into the world to share our lives, and to lead us into his peace. And that is to Mary's honour, and reason enough for the whole world to love her. May you keep it in your hearts throughout the coming year, and ponder on it:

*May the Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance up on you and give you peace.*