

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God



Prayer for the New Year

O God,
who brought the shepherds
to Bethlehem
with angel song in their hearts,
teach us their simplicity.
Show us how to follow Mary
in her habits of cherishing
and reflecting.
Help us see the bright presence of
your Son Jesus in our lives.
As we begin a new year,
bring us closer to you
and to each other.
We ask this through the same Lord
Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and
reigns with you in the unity of the Holy
Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Sunday, January 1, 2012 Three Key Words

Today's Readings: Numbers 6:22–27; Psalm 67:2–3, 5, 6, 8 (2a); Galatians 4:4–7; Luke 2:16–21. Three words are touchstones in today's Gospel: *amazed*, *treasured*, *returned*. Why would God choose shepherds as heralds of his Son's birth? They were generally regarded as smelly and untrustworthy. Yet, perhaps because they were so unsophisticated and earthy, they could look beyond a scene which others might see as squalid (birth in a stable? a newborn in a feeding trough?). They had the grace to be amazed. Somehow, they saw the divine in the human, teaching us who follow to look for grace in unexpected circumstances.

Mary didn't seem surprised by what happened in Bethlehem; the angel's promise had prepared her for an

unusual son. But she *treasured* and reflected on what was happening. She models how we too should respond to the varied happenings of our days. Activity can easily become a blur unless we, like Mary, take time for quiet meditation. What is God showing me through these events, people, or places?

When the shepherds *returned*, it could have been as anti-climactic as the end of the holiday. After what was probably the greatest event of their lives, they went back to the routine of tending sheep. Instead of being disappointed, they praised and glorified God. They were different people. They carried within their hearts the rich truth: God dwells among us as one of us.