

## Mary, Mother of God, Year A

### GOSPEL

The shepherds hurried away to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds had to say. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen; it was exactly as they had been told.

When the eighth day came and the child was to be circumcised, they gave him the name Jesus, the name the angel had given him before his conception.

(Luke 2:16–21)

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Although there is evidence from as early as the mid-second century of Mary being honoured, it is not until the Council of Ephesus in AD 431 that we have strong evidence of devotion to Mary on any official level.
- The Church in Rome celebrated a number of Marian feasts by the late 600s, including Mary, Mother of God (1 January), the Purification of Mary (2 February), the Annunciation (25 March) and the Birth of Mary (6 September).
- While the New Testament gives us virtually no detail of Mary's life, early tradition in the Church suggested that she was the daughter of Joachim and Anna and was raised in the precinct of the temple in Jerusalem.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

The scriptural presentations of Mary, the mother of Jesus, differ quite markedly across the four gospels. She, along with Jesus' extended family, is portrayed quite negatively in Mark (Mark 3:21, 31) as thinking that Jesus has gone mad! In Matthew's story of the birth of Jesus, the leading role is given to Joseph rather than to Mary; however, both Luke and John assign a place of honour and importance to the mother of Christ. In Luke, Mary is hailed as 'blessed among women' and is present at prayer with the twelve in the upper room after the death of Jesus on the cross, and so is also one who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, just as she did at Jesus' conception. Unfailingly in Luke's Gospel, Mary is presented as a devout and pious Jew, who follows the Law but also, more importantly, cooperates fully with God's plan of salvation. What is perhaps most touching in Luke's presentation of Mary is the truly maternal image of a woman wondering about the future of this child she has just borne and pondering in her heart the things that are said about him.

- Mary is known as the mother of the Church and of all Christians. Contemplate how this image of Mary as our mother speaks to you.

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

- What things do you treasure and ponder in your heart?
- Sit quietly and imagine what Mary may have been thinking and feeling at this point?
- Spend some time pondering the mystery of God's immense love for humankind.
- Recall your own mother or the most significant woman in your early life. What strengths or gifts do you recognise in her? What influence did she have on your development and growth? Share your recollections together.
- Mary is honoured as the model of discipleship for the Church and for all believers. This week, be very conscious of responding to situations and to people as a faithful disciple of Jesus. Each time you feel you have acted as a disciple should, say a brief prayer of thanks to Mary.
- Use this adaptation of the opening prayer of today's solemnity as your prayer this week:

*Father, may the prayer of Mary and the gift of a mother's love be your people's joy through the ages.*

*May her response to your call, born of a humble heart, draw your Spirit to rest on your people.*

