

## Marian Studies

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Volume 41 *Proceedings of the Forty-First  
National Convention of The Mariological  
Society of America held in Providence, R.I.*

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Article 9

5-30-1990

### Mary in the Mysteries of Christ from Advent to the Baptism of the Lord: Contemporary Theological Reflections

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#### Recommended Citation

Jelly, Frederick M. (1990) "Mary in the Mysteries of Christ from Advent to the Baptism of the Lord: Contemporary Theological Reflections," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 41, Article 9.  
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## **MARY IN THE MYSTERIES OF CHRIST FROM ADVENT TO THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD: CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper follows upon the biblical and liturgical references to the role of Mary in relationship to her Son during the Advent and Christmas seasons. My part in this year's program is to provide some theological reflections about Mary's place in the mysteries of Christ on the basis of the particular ways in which she is portrayed to the faithful at worship in the Lectionary and Sacramentary throughout these initial periods of the liturgical year. Such reflections, more directly the result of systematics than of biblical or liturgical theology, will attempt to share some ideas that should be helpful to the preacher and teacher of the Christian faith in their ministry of showing Mary's unique role of disposing us in the contemporary Church to come closer to Christ in our call to faithful discipleship today.

Although there is indeed a theological logic in the sequence of the three papers in this series on Mary in the mysteries of Christ during the liturgical year, so that the contemporary reflections of a systematician follow upon those of the biblicist and the liturgist, Fathers Lazor, Melloh and I have prepared our papers independently of each other. This is important to note since it means that I must make explicit certain biblical and liturgical presuppositions to my contemporary theological reflections. I am reasonably confident, however, that such interpretations will be in basic harmony with the two previous papers delivered by my colleagues earlier this morning and yesterday afternoon during our annual national convention. Bearing this in mind, I shall consider the following topics in this order: 1) The basics of a liturgical and spiritual theology of the Advent and Christmas seasons; 2) Mary in the mysteries of Christ during Advent, including the special seasonal significance of her

**Immaculate Conception, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the special place of Mary in the fourth and final week of Advent, and the three special Eucharistic liturgies for this season in the *Collection of Masses for the Blessed Virgin Mary*, published by the Congregation of Divine Worship in 1986; 3) Mary in the mysteries of Christ during the Christmas season, including the Vigil Mass, the three Masses of Christmas, the feast of the Holy Family on the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, the solemnity of Mary the Mother of God on the Octave Day of Christmas, the solemnity of Epiphany celebrated in the U.S.A. on the Sunday between January 2 and January 8, the six special Marian Masses for the Christmas season in the *Collection* of 1986, and the feast of the Baptism of the Lord which concludes the Advent-Christmas cycle.**

**I. *A Liturgical and Spiritual Theology of the Advent and Christmas Seasons***

In the teaching of Vatican II's Constitution on the Liturgy, the most basic source for a liturgical and spiritual theology of any season during the Church's year of worship, is found the following:

Holy Mother Church believes that it is for her to celebrate the saving work of her divine Spouse in a sacred commemoration on certain days throughout the course of the year. Once each week, on the day which she has called the Lord's Day, she keeps the memory of the Lord's resurrection. She also celebrates it once every year, together with his blessed passion, at Easter, that most solemn of all feasts.

In the course of the year, moreover, she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ from the incarnation and nativity to the ascension, to Pentecost and to the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord.

Thus recalling the mysteries of the redemption, she opens up to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way present for all time; the faithful lay hold of them and are filled with saving grace.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Austin Flannery, O.P., Gen. Ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1988 Rev. Ed.), 28-29, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, chap. V, "The Liturgical Year," no. 102 (hereafter cited as *SC*).

The council is abundantly clear about the precise way in which the fruitful notion of "mystery" is being used in the context of her liturgical theology. "Mysteries" do indeed refer to the redemptive events in the life of the historical Jesus from the incarnation and his birth culminating in the paschal mystery, when he is glorified by the Father after paying the price of our redemption through his passion and death and when with the Father he sends the Pentecostal Spirit to animate his mystical body the Church. These "mysteries," however, whether they commemorate the redeeming activity of the earthly Jesus up to his atoning death or of the risen Lord appearing to the apostles, ascending to the right hand of the Father and continuously pouring forth his Pentecostal Spirit, are made present to us by the glorified Lord during the liturgical year. He is the one eternal high priest who always makes intercession for us in the heavenly sanctuary, and who is really and truly present to us in so many ways, especially during the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist: in the person of the presiding bishop or presbyter; in the inspired word of God in the Scriptures; in the midst of the liturgical assembly gathered together in his Name; in any of the sacraments, e.g., Baptism, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick, Ordinations of deacons, priests and bishops, Marriage celebrated in the Mass, and uniquely in the Eucharist.<sup>2</sup>

This rich and inspiring meaning of "mysteries" as used in a Roman Catholic liturgical theology is born of the Sacred Scriptures and its wondrous development in the Tradition, particularly of the Fathers of the Church. St. Paul was especially inspired by the Holy Spirit to appropriate the notion and term to describe the whole "*mysterion*" (Greek) of Christ and our redemption as a secret hidden within the triune God from all eternity and revealed through Christ and the apostles and gradually manifested to all the world through the mystery of the Church.<sup>3</sup> It is indeed significant

<sup>2</sup>Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 4-5, SC, no. 7.

<sup>3</sup>René Latourelle, S.J., *Theology of Revelation* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1966), 60-63.

in salvation history that this Greek term was transliterated by St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate version of the Bible and by the Latin fathers generally into "*sacramentum*." By these terms, "*mysterion*" and "*sacramentum*," the Fathers of the East and West meant a sacred reality broader than the precise concept of the seven sacraments of the Church. St. Augustine, for instance, used it to include the Lord's Prayer, the "Our Father," and particularly to apply to liturgical celebrations that make our redemption present to the faithful who are actively taking part in public and official worship.<sup>4</sup> Consequently the liturgical theology based upon the Scriptures and Tradition of the Fathers of the Church communicates the conviction that the celebration of the "mysteries" of our redemption in the liturgy is much more than a mere memorial; it is really an *anamnesis* rendering present to us in an efficacious manner what we are recalling, namely, the redeeming activity of Jesus Christ in our Christian lives today.

The spiritual theology arising from this conviction of our divine Catholic faith really calls forth in us a "liturgical spirituality." We are convinced that our liturgical and sacramental encounters with the risen Lord during the various seasons of the Church's year of worship offer to each one of us the special saving graces of Christ proper to that season or to his "mysteries" of redemption that we are celebrating together—"through him, with him, and in him"—as we conclude each Eucharistic Prayer right before beginning the Our Father. If we truly believe this, then it is only reasonable that our theology and spirituality inquire about the special graces proper to each season of the liturgical year.

In the Sacramentary we read the following instruction:

Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ's first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to

<sup>4</sup>Adrian Nocent, O.S.B., *The Liturgical Year: Volume One—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany*, trans. by Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1977), 187-189.

await Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a season for devout and joyful expectation.<sup>5</sup>

A theological reflection upon this general norm might well begin with the comment that we have a twofold expectation during the liturgical season of Advent.<sup>6</sup> Our Advent hope looks forward to a double coming of Christ. One is the first coming at Bethlehem, when the Word made flesh of the Virgin Mary at the annunciation was born into the world. The other is his second coming or the *parousia* at the end of time, when the whole world will be transformed in Christ. Even before the Advent liturgy was celebrated in the East, St. Cyril of Jerusalem during the fourth century was well aware of the truth that these two comings of Christ cannot be separated in the life of the Church whose liturgical worship is to actualize both or make them contemporaneous with us and all the faithful.<sup>7</sup> We cannot commemorate the first coming and prepare during Advent for the liturgical celebration of Christmas without also perceiving it in faith as a preparation for the *parousia*. This is an effective way to show the difference between an exegetical and a liturgical reading of the Bible.<sup>8</sup> When we hear the inspired word of God in the context of the liturgy, the message of Genesis cannot come to us without our simultaneously being mindful of the Apocalypse or Book of Revelation. The Sacred Scriptures must be proclaimed from beginning to end in light of our risen Lord's paschal mystery. And, as St. Thomas Aquinas taught, in each liturgical celebration of the sacraments there is a commemoration of the past redemptive event, an actualization of the grace then merited by our redeemer in the present, and an anticipation of his future coming in glory.<sup>9</sup> The Eucharist may thus be called an es-

<sup>5</sup>*The Sacramentary* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1985), 66\*, *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, no. 39.

<sup>6</sup>Nocent, *Lit. Yr. I*, 39-40.

<sup>7</sup>Nocent, *Lit. Yr. I*, 40.

<sup>8</sup>Nocent, *Lit. Yr. I*, 40.

<sup>9</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part III, quest. 60, art. 3.

chatological miracle because in this Blessed Sacrament we encounter the Christ whose life and death have redeemed us, who is here and now at this Holy Communion the perfect mediator of his saving grace, and who is the risen Lord in whose company with Mary and all the angels and saints we hope to live forever in heaven. The past, present and future seem to merge miraculously into a single eternal instant! And so it is most fitting that the liturgical theology and spirituality afforded by the first three Sundays of Advent relate both the first and second comings of Christ, his coming at Christmas and at the end of the world.

To reflect theologically further upon the meaning of our "devout and joyful expectation" during the liturgical season of Advent, we must inquire more about the nature of the Christian hope to which we are summoned in a special way by the Scriptures and liturgies of this period. As one author formulates the questions involved:

But if we live our faith and our Christian life as modern men, shaped by the cultural ambience of our age and concerned to meet the concrete and very complicated demands that contemporary life makes of us, can we really enter into the mysteries of the Church? Or must we first cut ourselves off from our normal surroundings and set aside our everyday questions and anxieties?<sup>10</sup>

To respond to such questions out of the Church's Judaeo-Christian Tradition, we must contemplate her use of the Old Testament or the Jewish Scriptures, since the expectations and waiting of ancient Israel were really the Church-coming-to-be. In the hopes and fears of the Old Covenant, she recognizes the attitudes and events fulfilled in the New Testament that continue to be actualized in our liturgical celebrations as the mysteries of our redemption today. Of course, we who are the New Israel, the body of Christ animated by his Pentecostal Spirit, cannot adopt a psychologi-

<sup>10</sup>Nocent, *Lit. Yr. I*, 41.

ical posture proper to a historical people for whom the Messiah had not yet arrived. We are able, however, to identify with their expectation and waiting as an anticipation of ours, since our Christian faith and hope inspire in us a longing desire of love to encounter the triune God definitively in the beatific vision and our glorified bodies after the second coming of our risen Lord Jesus. In a certain profound sense, therefore, our Christian expectation during the liturgical season of Advent is a prolongation of ancient Israel's. While the prophecies, types, psalms, etc. of the Old Testament do find their full meaning only in Christ and the Church, they shall reach their perfect fulfillment only at the Lord's second coming. Paradoxically, we Christians are called upon in the Liturgy of the Word, to hope for what has already been given to us, especially during our unique encounters with the risen Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The two Advent Prefaces synthesize very clearly and coherently the season's two themes of Christ's comings. Advent I prays: "When he humbled himself to come among us as a man, he fulfilled the plan you formed long ago and opened for us the way to salvation. Now we watch for the day, hoping that the salvation promised us will be ours when Christ our Lord will come again in his glory." And Advent II sings forth: "His future coming was proclaimed by all the prophets. The virgin mother bore him in her womb with love beyond all telling. John the Baptizer was his herald and made him known when at last he came. In his love Christ has filled us with joy as we prepare to celebrate his birth, so that when he comes he may find us watching in prayer, our hearts filled with wonder and praise."

But what does this Advent spirituality have to do with our world as a whole—this material cosmos—or with our human history saturated as it is with secular events? Is not the sacred liturgy during any season of the Church's year for the spiritual good of our immortal souls and does it really have no relevance to the world's progress? Such an interpretation is not Christian but pagan! It is blind to the cosmic dimensions of our redemption through the paschal mystery of



Christ who was sent by the Father to restore the order originally intended by our creator for the entire cosmos. By entering truly into the celebration of the mysteries of our redemption, we are responding to our eschatological vocation to be the true stewards of God's creation by helping prepare the whole world for its final transfiguration in Christ at his second coming.

Now we are in a better position to reflect theologically upon a liturgical spirituality for the Christmas season. Under the divine influence of the grace of faith, hope and love as perfected by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, our human minds are able to contemplate the solemnity of Christmas as a mystery, rather than a mere memorial or anniversary, of the nativity of the infant Christ. This is certainly not to minimize its historical meaning and value but to penetrate more deeply into its divinely intended significance. The cult of the crib ought not to blur our vision of faith but draw us to the deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ as the incarnation or the Word-made-flesh who profoundly transformed the history of the whole world as well as of each one of us.

From the most ancient liturgies of the Church, well before there was a season of Advent or Christmas, we can clearly see that Christ's birth was closely connected with his paschal mystery.<sup>11</sup> It was regarded as the first step towards his passion, death and resurrection. If the Son was to accomplish the Father's will for our atonement, he first had to become truly human—one of us. It did take some time in the Tradition to perceive December 25th as truly a "*mysterion*" or "*sacramentum*," as a liturgical celebration making present and actual the redeeming love of God in Jesus Christ. Even the great St. Augustine, who concentrated upon the one mystery of our passage with Christ from death to life, did not come to perceive the paschal elements that make Christmas a "sacrament." Pope St. Leo the Great did

<sup>11</sup>Nocent, *Lit. Yr. I*, 212-216.

arrive at that position, calling December 25th "*sacramentum natalis Christi*," "sacrament of the day of Christ's birth." He taught that the words of the Gospels and prophets instruct us "... 'to think of the Lord's birth, wherein the Word became flesh, not as a past event which we recall, but as a present reality upon which we gaze.'"<sup>12</sup> Surely Christmas does not celebrate the paschal mystery as Easter does, but it does make present to us the one sacrament of salvation according to its aspect or virtuality as the starting-point of our redemption. The precise mystery of the feast fastens our loving gaze of faith and hope upon the God who has become one of us in every way save sin, which is a distortion of our human nature as created in the image and likeness of the triune God. This mystery of the Word incarnate relates us to a God with whom we can really be in touch, with whom we can communicate in the Eucharistic liturgy, and who can continuously come to us as our glorified Lord calling us closer and closer to himself and with himself to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

## II. *Mary in the Mysteries of Christ during the Advent Season*

Having identified the mysteries of Christ for this liturgical season, we are now in a position to contemplate Mary's special place in them. Even before going into any detail about such theological reflections, I am confident that you have already made some general connections, e.g., her unique role as the mother of our redeemer and witness to the realism of the incarnation for the Christmas mystery and her preeminent example of faith, hope, love and obedience to the word of God in preparing for the coming of Christ for the Advent mystery. Prior to pursuing these reflections, however, let us listen to the teaching of Vatican II which is their firm foundation in the magisterium:

In celebrating the annual cycle of the mysteries of Christ, Holy Church honors the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, with a

<sup>12</sup>Nocent, *Lit. Yr. I*, 190.

special love. She is inseparably linked with her Son's saving work. In her the Church admires and exalts the most excellent fruit of redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be.<sup>13</sup>

This relatively brief passage teaches us a profound truth about Mary's special place in the mysteries of Christ. In the context of explaining the liturgical year, Vatican Council II speaks of her intimate association with her Son's "saving work" of applying the fruits of his redemption to us as "inseparable," which might be interpreted as meaning that Mary's continuous role in our redemption is divinely decreed. Also this particular passage anticipates the Christocentric and ecclesiotypical Mariology of Chapter VIII in Vatican II's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. There both approaches and emphases regarding the theology of Mary were wedded together very neatly and were shown not only not to be at odds but also to be complementary. More pertinent to our concerns in this presentation, however, is the fact that the Christocentric emphasis seems to relate Mary more explicitly to the mysteries of Christ during the Christmas season, and the ecclesiotypical emphasis, in which she is contemplated as the archetype of the Church, more clearly associates Mary with the mysteries of her Son during the Advent season.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Marialis cultus*, issued February 2, 1974, Pope Paul VI makes specific mention of Mary in relationship to the mysteries of Christ and to the members of the Church during Advent:

... during Advent there are many liturgical references to Mary besides the Solemnity of 8 December, which is a joint celebration of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, of the basic preparation (cf. Is. 11:1, 10) for the coming of the Savior and of the happy beginning of the Church without spot or wrinkle. Such liturgical references are found especially on the days from December 17 to 24, and more particularly on the Sunday before

<sup>13</sup>Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 29, SC, no. 103.

Christmas, which recalls the ancient prophecies concerning the Virgin Mother and the Messiah and includes readings from the Gospel concerning the imminent birth of Christ and his Precursor.<sup>14</sup>

In this way the faithful, living in the liturgy and spirit of Advent, by thinking about the inexpressible love with which the Virgin Mother awaited her Son, are invited to take her as a model and to prepare themselves to meet the Savior who is to come. They must be "vigilant in prayer and joyful in . . . praise." [cf. Advent Preface II] We would also remark that the Advent liturgy, by linking the awaiting of the Messiah and the awaiting of the glorious return of Christ with the admirable commemoration of his Mother, presents a happy balance in worship. This balance can be taken as a norm for preventing any tendency (as has happened at times in certain forms of popular piety) to separate devotion to the Blessed Virgin from its necessary point of reference—Christ. It also ensures that this season, as liturgy experts have noted, should be considered as a time particularly suited to devotion to the Mother of the Lord. This is an orientation that we confirm and which we hope to see accepted and followed everywhere.<sup>15</sup>

Most of what Pope Paul VI teaches here will receive further commentary in the theological reflections of this section of my paper. Suffice it to point out two general statements now, namely, his proposing the Advent liturgy as a norm for a balanced Christocentric marian devotion and that this season should be a propitious time for practicing special devotion to Mary. We preachers and teachers in the Church ought to bear in mind these two points and use our ministries to exemplify and share them with others who can benefit immensely from their application. We must be constantly vigilant to help our people preserve their marian devotion intact, i.e., keep it on course towards ". . . its necessary point

<sup>14</sup>Pope Paul VI, *Marialis cultus* (cover title: *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*) (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1974), 5, no. 3; hereafter cited as *MC*.

<sup>15</sup>Paul VI, *MC*, 5, no. 4.

of reference—Christ,” and to relate the private devotions of their popular piety, especially the Rosary and the Angelus, more harmoniously with the liturgy. As Pope Paul VI was careful to point out, following the teaching of Vatican II, such devotions should “. . . harmonize with the liturgy, not be suppressed . . .,” and, at the same time, also “. . . be harmonized with the liturgy, not merged into it.”<sup>16</sup> So private marian devotions such as the Rosary and Angelus should help us prepare for more prayerful participation in the liturgical celebration as well as sustain the special graces received thereby and also be purified and permeated by liturgical piety, but never be practices that actually become a part of the liturgy. For more extensive explanation of the many reasons why marian devotion, to be authentic, “must be permeated by the spirit of the liturgy,” we call your attention to the excellent paper given at last year’s convention by Fr. Thomas Thompson, S.M., “The Virgin Mary in the Liturgy: 1963-1988.”<sup>17</sup>

#### A. *The Immaculate Conception—December 8th*

As we have already noted in the text of *Marialis cultus*, this solemnity, occurring ordinarily between the first and second Sundays of Advent, has a Christocentric and ecclesiotypical as well as a purely marian character. It “. . . is a joint celebration of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, of the basic preparation (cf. Is. 11:1,10) for the coming of the Savior and of the happy beginning of the Church without spot or wrinkle.”<sup>18</sup> The liturgical celebration of the dogma of 1854, when Pope Pius IX defined Mary’s Immaculate Conception as a doctrine revealed by God, namely, that she “. . . in the first instant of her Conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was

<sup>16</sup>Paul VI, *MC*, 5, no. 4 and 23, no. 31.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas A. Thompson, S.M., “The Virgin Mary in the Liturgy: 1963-1988,” *Marian Studies* 40 (1989): 77-104.

<sup>18</sup>Paul VI, *MC*, 5, no. 3.

preserved free from all stain of original sin . . ."<sup>19</sup> has a two-fold theme: first a Christological one which relates the dogma to Christ and to Mary's motherhood of the Word incarnate, and an ecclesiological theme that relates her Immaculate Conception to the Church and ourselves.<sup>20</sup> Both these themes are neatly interwoven in the liturgical texts: the first opening prayer is primarily Christological—

Let us pray—Father, you prepared the Virgin Mary to be the worthy mother of your Son. You let her share beforehand in the salvation Christ would bring by his death, and kept her sinless from the first moment of her conception. Help us by her prayers to live in your presence without sin.

The alternative opening prayer for this solemnity is primarily ecclesiological—

Let us pray—Father, the image of the Virgin is found in the Church. Mary had a faith that your Spirit prepared and a love that never knew sin, for you kept her sinless from the first moment of her conception. Trace in our actions the lines of her love, in our hearts her readiness of faith. Prepare once again a world for your Son who lives and reigns. . . .

The prayer over the gifts and the prayer after communion both sustain this ecclesiological theme of relating her Immaculate Conception to God's freeing us from our sins through her inspiration and intercession. The proper preface for this solemnity shows how artistically the liturgy weaves together both the Christocentric and ecclesiological themes:

You allowed no stain of Adam's sin to touch the Virgin Mary. Full of grace, she was to be a worthy mother of your Son, your

<sup>19</sup>*Our Lady: Papal Teachings*, selected and arranged by the Benedictine monks of Solesmes, trans. Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1961), 80-81.

<sup>20</sup>Christopher O'Donnell, O.Carm., *At Worship with Mary: A Pastoral and Theological Study* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), 214.

sign of favor to the Church at its beginning, and the promise of its perfection as the bride of Christ, radiant in beauty. Purest of virgins, she was to bring forth your Son, the innocent lamb who takes away our sins. You chose her from all women to be our advocate with you and our pattern of holiness.

The Scripture Readings in the Liturgy of the Word for this solemnity all conspire to proclaim its twofold theme. The first reading from Genesis 3:9-15,20, portrays the consequence of the fall of our first parents, but more importantly provides the *protoevangelium*: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers . . ." which the Church's Tradition has appropriated to Mary and her Son in the context of the liturgy. This text was also referred to in the Papal Bull in which the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception was defined, namely, *Ineffabilis Deus*, as well as in the Apostolic Constitution, *Munificentissimus Deus*, in which Pius XII defined the dogma of her Assumption. And Vatican II teaches:

The earliest documents, as they are read in the Church and are understood in the light of a further and full revelation, bring the figure of a woman, Mother of the Redeemer, into a gradually clearer light.

Considered in this light, she is already prophetically foreshadowed in the promise of victory over the serpent which was given to our first parents after their fall into sin (cf. Gen. 3:15).<sup>21</sup>

The second scripture reading from Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12, explicitly teaches the predestination of us all to be the adopted children of the Father in Christ, but seems to insinuate that the most highly favored daughter of the Father, the mother of his own Son, was predestined to be uniquely graced by God. The Gospel reading is taken from Luke 1:26-38, his inspired account of the annunciation so familiar and dear to us all. The angelic salutation of Gabriel—

<sup>21</sup>Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 515, *Lumen Gentium*, chap. 8 on Our Lady, no. 55.

"Rejoice, O highly favored daughter! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women."—has often been used in the Catholic Tradition as a biblical basis for Mary's Immaculate Conception and was used even earlier by such Fathers as Sts. Justin Martyr and Irenaeus for her ancient image as the New Eve from which, according to John Henry Cardinal Newman, this dogma and that of her glorious Assumption clearly follow.<sup>22</sup> The evangelist of the third Gospel, particularly in this pericope, portrays Mary as does the entire liturgical celebration of her Immaculate Conception as the perfect disciple of Christ through the divine grace merited by him and as his perfect disciple from the beginning of the incarnation, the archetype of the Church.

The homilist for this marian solemnity during Advent enjoys the golden opportunity of relating Mary's unique grace and privilege as one of us redeemed to the spirituality of the liturgical season. Mary is the model *par excellence* for our twofold expectation, our awaiting and preparing for the coming of Christ in his mystery of Christmas as well as for his second coming at the end of time. We find in her virtue of hope for the Messiah to come a summing up and a surpassing of the best in the spirituality of ancient Israel's longing for the Promised One of God to redeem them. As pointed out earlier in this paper, we identify with such a deep longing, especially with Mary's, in our hope for the Messiah who has already come, since we look forward to the final fulfillment of his first coming only at the parousia. And in Mary's Immaculate Conception we behold in faith the eschatological image of the heavenly Church, sinless "without spot or wrinkle." Surely our human race was restored in her perfectly to the state of original justice before the fall by reason of the foreseen merits of her Son's paschal mystery. Although we do not yet taste the grace of utter sinlessness and the perfect love of an undivided personality, uninhibited by concupiscence or any consequence of sin, we are

<sup>22</sup>J. H. Newman, *The New Eve* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1952), 7, 22-33.



born into a world where grace has priority over sin and guilt, thanks to the Word made flesh of the Virgin Mary. These are the basics of but a few theological reflections which we preachers and teachers might develop and apply in our homilies and lectures about the Good News as embellished by Mary's Immaculate Conception in the mysteries of her Son during the Advent season.

*B. The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe—December 12th*

Also appearing in the first part of the Advent season is another marian liturgical celebration which has been raised just this past year from a memorial to a feast in our country. How fitting that is, since more and more Catholics in the U.S.A. are of Hispanic origin! But because it is not possible in a paper of this length to pay equal attention to each marian feast in the context of the liturgical seasons of Advent and Christmas, let it suffice for me to offer you one theological reflection based upon the opening prayer for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe: "God of power and mercy, you blessed the Americas at Tepeyac with the presence of the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe. May her prayers help all men and women to accept each other as brothers and sisters. Through your justice present in our hearts may your peace reign in the world." Although this feast is based upon the apparition of Mary to a Mexican Indian, Juan Diego, during December of 1531, and is an approved private revelation worthy of our pious belief but not required by Catholic faith as necessary for our salvation (such as the dogma of the Immaculate Conception), still it does have special spiritual significance for the Catholics of the Americas during Advent. As we have already considered, we are awaiting with great expectation what we have already received, the redemptive incarnation, but as stewards of its further and final fulfillment at the parousia when the entire cosmos is to be transfigured in Christ. You and I and our contemporaries are given this period of human history to translate from secular into salvation history in our hope-filled preparation for the parousia, no matter when or how it may take place. And

the grace of Christ, expressed in the virtues of justice and of peace as the fruit of fraternal love, is essential for the true progress of the world in accord with God's plan to restore all things in Christ, the Second Adam, to their pristine unity and harmony.

We are free to choose any of the Scripture readings from the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Lectionary for this feast. The American Liturgical Calendar for our four Dominican provinces does appropriately recommend as the Gospel Luke 1:39-47, which is the second joyful mystery of the Rosary, Mary's visitation, her mission of mercy to help Elizabeth prepare for the birth of John the Baptizer. This particular pericope ends with the opening verse of the Magnificat in which Mary is revealed by the evangelist as one of the *anawim*, one of the "poor of Jahweh," who places all her trust in her saving God. On this feast the homilist might well portray Mary as the true model of authentic liberation in the world today—not primarily concerned with her own rights but with the human dignity of others, especially those in most need of her Son's redemptive love or liberating grace. Being among those who have freely received this grace, we are called, like Mary, to share Christ the real liberator with the oppressed, many of whom are Hispanics as was Juan Diego!

### *C. Mary in the Fourth and Final Week of Advent*

Mary's place in the mysteries of Christ during this liturgical season reaches a certain peak on the Fourth Sunday of Advent and the weekdays from December 17th-24th. The final Sunday of the season has an alternative opening prayer which says: "Father, all-powerful God, your eternal Word took flesh on our earth when the Virgin Mary placed her life at the service of your plan." And the prayer over the gifts states: "Lord, may the power of the Spirit, which sanctified Mary the Mother of your Son, make holy the gifts we place upon this altar." The Gospels for the years A, B, and C fit in nicely with these liturgical texts which, doubtless, were inspired by them.

Year A brings us the glad tidings of Matthew 1:18-24, with the revelation of the pneumatological conception in a dream to the perplexed but patient and just man, Joseph, the spouse of Mary. In a homily on this particular passage for Advent IV, Joseph, who is relatively prominent in Matthew's infancy narrative, might well be portrayed—for the sake of seeing Mary more clearly in the mystery of Christ at this time—as the “upright man unwilling to expose her to the law” when he found her to be with child but not by him. He did not jump to make any rash judgments about how she became pregnant, but he did not shirk his responsibility to make a prudent and just decision in the perplexing situation. Until his virtue was rewarded by the revelation that Mary was with child by the power of the Holy Spirit, he could not presume to take her as his wife. At the same time, Joseph must have been confident that, whatever the explanation might be, his Mary was not unfaithful and so did not justly deserve the rigorous penalty of the law, death by stoning.<sup>23</sup>

The Gospel for Year B is Luke 1:26-38, again the annunciation story which, in light of the liturgical prayers, might develop thoughts about Mary's wholehearted “yes” to God's loving plan for the salvation of us all by his Son and hers. It was indeed a *fiat* born of a loving and intelligent faith and obedience, since she did discern the Spirit by asking how she could conceive the child without a husband. This was not the difficulty of a doubter deficient in faith! It was the reasonable question of a true believer responding to God out of her graced freedom. It is a fine opportunity for the preacher and/or teacher to proclaim the Christian paradox of grace and freedom in a very concrete way, during this most significant decision of human history. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that Mary's consent was freely given “*in loco totius humani generis*,” i.e., “in place of the entire human race,” since the wedding between humanity and divini-

<sup>23</sup>Frederick M. Jelly, O.P., *Madonna—Mary in the Catholic Tradition* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1986), 35.

ty in the Person of the Son of God, Son of Mary, was for the sake of the salvation of us all.<sup>24</sup> More dramatically, St. Bernard of Clairvaux preaches in a homily "In Praise of the Virgin Mother": "... on your word depends comfort for the wretched, ransom for the captive, freedom for the condemned, indeed salvation for all the sons of Adam, the whole of your race."<sup>25</sup>

Finally, Year C celebrates Advent IV with the Gospel of Mary's visitation (Luke 1:39-45) in which Elizabeth bestowed upon her the first macarism or beatitude of the third Gospel: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. But who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me? The moment your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby stirred in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who trusted that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled." On the testimony of Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, through the mediation of Mary, her child caused the unborn John the Baptizer to leap with a messianic joy in his saving presence. Is this not an excellent occasion on which to proclaim Mary's continuous ministry in heaven, mediating her Son's messianic joy by helping dispose us to be more alert to the many ways in which he is present to us in our daily lives—not only in the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist and of the other sacraments, but also in other persons, especially those in need—or to proclaim the human dignity and rights of preborn children, so many of whom are deliberately being aborted in our selfish society!

During the weekdays of Advent from December 17th through 24th, the Gospels are taken from the infancy narrative of Matthew on December 17th and 18th and from that of Luke for the remainder of the time till the morning Mass on December 24th. Explicit references are made to Mary in the opening prayers of December 17th, 19th, 20th, and

<sup>24</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, Part III, quest. 30, art. 1.

<sup>25</sup>St. Bernard of Clairvaux, cited in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. I—*Advent Season & Christmas Season* (N.Y.: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), 345.

23rd. How fitting that the one chosen to be most intimately associated with the mysteries of Christ be kept before our prayerful gaze as we make this final preparation for the special graces of Christmas! It is no wonder that Paul VI expressed his complete concurrence with those who favor making Advent a season especially devoted to Our Lady. We preachers and teachers of God's word should enter into the spirit of such a pastoral goal as we carry out our ministries during Advent.

*D. Eucharistic Liturgies from the Special Collection of Advent Marian Masses*

Finally, we should like to mention in passing that there are three new Masses that may be used on the Saturdays of Advent in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, namely, "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Chosen Daughter of Israel"; "The Blessed Virgin Mary and the Annunciation of the Lord"; and "The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary." May I call your special attention to the first one which should help us identify, through Mary, more vividly with the expectations of the ancient people of God as they yearned and longed for the Messiah? The proper preface for this Mass brings this theme out clearly:

You chose the Blessed Virgin Mary as the crown of Israel and the beginning of the Church, to reveal to all peoples that salvation is born from Israel and that your new family springs from a chosen root. She is by nature the daughter of Adam, who by her sinlessness undid the sin of Eve. She is by faith the true child of Abraham, who first believed and so conceived. She is by descent the branch from the root of Jesse, bearing the flower that is Jesus Christ our Lord.

One theological reflection in this context is that Mary is also an excellent guide for us to follow in realizing more deeply that we shall not appreciate our Christian faith as fully as possible if we do not adequately acknowledge our Jewish roots that have blossomed forth in that faith.

### III. *Mary in the Mysteries of Christ during the Christmas Season*

Recalling what we have already characterized as the liturgical and spiritual theology of Christmastide, namely, to celebrate the Word made flesh of the Virgin Mary as the starting-point of our salvation and the mystery of Christ as making God accessible to us in a truly human mode, we now come to contemplate Mary's unique place in that mystery. Once again let us listen to Pope Paul VI at some length:

The Christmas season is a prolonged commemoration of the divine, virginal, salvific motherhood of her whose "inviolable virginity brought the Savior into the world." In fact, on the Solemnity of the Birth of Christ the Church both adores the Savior and venerates His glorious Mother. On the Epiphany, when she celebrates the universal call to salvation, the Church contemplates the Blessed Virgin, the true Seat of Wisdom and true Mother of the King, who presents to the Wise Men, for their adoration, the Redeemer of all peoples (cf. Mt. 2:11). On the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph (the Sunday within the octave of Christmas) the Church meditates with profound reverence upon the holy life led in the house of Nazareth by Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man, Mary his Mother, and Joseph the just man (cf. Mt. 1:19).

In the revised ordering of the Christmas period it seems to us that the attention of all should be directed towards the restored Solemnity of Mary the holy Mother of God. This celebration, placed on January 1 in conformity with the ancient indication of the liturgy of the City of Rome, is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation. It is meant also to exalt the singular dignity which this mystery brings to the "holy Mother . . . through whom we were found worthy to receive the Author of Life." It is likewise a fitting occasion for renewing adoration to the newborn Prince of Peace, for listening once more to the glad tidings of the angels (cf. Lk. 2:14), and for imploring from God, through the Queen of Peace, the supreme gift of peace. It is for this reason that, in the happy concurrence of the Octave of Christmas and the first day of the year, we have instituted the World Day of Peace, an

occasion that is gaining increasing support and already bringing forth the fruits of peace in the hearts of many.<sup>26</sup>

Our comments upon this magisterial teaching of Paul VI are scattered throughout this third and final section of the paper.

A. *Mary in the Masses of the Christmas Vigil, Midnight, Dawn and Day*

If the homilist chooses to use the long form of the Gospel for the Christmas Vigil Mass, then he has both the genealogy of Jesus Christ, Son of David, as well as the revelation of the virginal conception to Joseph in Matthew's infancy narrative (1:1-25). Since we have already reflected a bit upon the latter, let us now address the former, namely, why the evangelist includes in his genealogy four Old Testament women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. What could they have had in common with Mary the Mother of Jesus? The most acceptable hypothesis seems to be that all five women were instruments of God's messianic plans although there was something extraordinary about the marital unions of each one: Tamar was instrumental in getting Judah to propagate the messianic line; through Rahab's bravery Israel was able to enter the promised Land; Ruth took the initiative with her husband Booz in their becoming the great grandparents of King David; and, Nathan's prophecy that the Messiah would be descended from the house and family of David was fulfilled only because of Bathsheba's intervention that Solomon succeed David as the king.<sup>27</sup> The theological message of Matthew appears to have been that God freely chose to work out his messianic plans at special moments during the history of Christ's forebearers through marital unions that were out of the ordinary, including Mary's virginal conception of Christ through the

<sup>26</sup>Paul VI, *MC*, 5-6, no. 5.

<sup>27</sup>Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *et al.*, Eds., *Mary in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 81-83.

power of the Holy Spirit. The preacher and/or teacher might dwell upon this mysterious way in which God works in our salvation history to show us that we are saved by the mighty deeds of God and not primarily through our own efforts. Our cooperation is efficacious only when God's grace takes the initiative.

Indeed the work of the incarnation is God's work *par excellence!* No human, including Mary, even though she was full of grace, could have merited that the Word become flesh, since he is the source of all grace and only God's gift can be the principle of merit. Not even Jesus in his human nature could have merited the incarnation since he would have had to preexist himself.<sup>28</sup> The second Scripture reading for Midnight Mass is taken from St. Paul's Letter to Titus (2:11-14) which opens with the words: "The grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all men." While Paul is pondering the paschal mystery, his words can aptly be applied to the Christmas pasch when our redemption got underway. In the Gospel (Lk. 2:1-14), reference is made to the journey that the young expectant mother Mary had to make with her husband Joseph in order to register in David's town of Bethlehem in compliance with the census decreed by the Roman Emperor. Luke the evangelist particularly narrates salvation history in the wider context of world history in keeping with the theological purpose of his Gospel to proclaim the Good News about the universality of salvation. It is also in keeping with his theme of God's special love of the poor that lowly shepherds are among the very first to hear the Good News about the newborn babe. The humble conditions in which Mary brought him forth in a stable-cave also fit into his literary mosaic of the holy family as members of the *anawim*, the poor of Jahweh. In such passages we behold a link between Luke's Gospel and what is authentic in liberation theology about the "preferential option for the poor."

<sup>28</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, Part III, quest. 2, art. 11.



The second Christmas Mass (at dawn) is again taken from Luke's Gospel (2:15-20) in which the main marian reference is: "Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart," after she witnessed the homage paid to her child by the shepherds. The evangelist, whose Gospel also has the theme of prayer, here is portraying his madonna as the woman of contemplative prayer. She practices a form of prayer proper to the wisdom teachers of Israel in which the salutary thought is turned over and over again in one's heart so that the word of God may take root more deeply in one's spirit.<sup>29</sup> We might say that this was her Rosary in the making, as she meditated upon the mysteries of her redemption and ours unfolding before her very eyes in the Word made flesh.

Although the third Christmas Mass (during the day) makes no explicit reference to Mary in its Gospel, the prologue to John (1:1-18), we preachers and teachers may well point out that, in light of other parts of God's revealing word, we can behold Mary as the one chosen by the Father to make it possible for the Word to become flesh and dwell in our midst. Also we might well indicate that she is the one who accepted him first and most fully and so is the most highly favored among us adopted children of God.

*B. Feast of the Holy Family on the Sunday within the Christmas Octave*

The Gospel for Year A of this feast is Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23, the flight into Egypt and the return to Nazareth; for Year B it is Luke 2:22-40, the presentation in the temple; and, for Year C it is Luke 2:41-52, the finding of the child in the temple. As always there are many possibilities for homilies with such rich readings during the Christmas season. Considering the tragic disintegration of family life in our society, however, the homilist might well feel impelled to concentrate his preaching on the dire need to introduce the val-

<sup>29</sup>Bertrand Buby, S.M., "Mary and Prayer," in *Mary, the Spirit and the Church*, Vincent P. Branick, Ed. (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1980), 92-96.

ues of the Gospel into the primary relationships within the family. My brief but pointed contemporary theological reflections are: for Year A, that there must be a mutual willingness between the spouses to make the sacrifices necessary for the good of the family, as Joseph and Mary became displaced persons for a time to protect their child; for Year B, that any offspring are more God's children than the parents' and that this can be acknowledged by their encouraging them to consider religious and priestly vocations in the special service of the Church, and that the wisdom of grandparents be heard, as Mary and Joseph listened to the prophetic words of Simeon and Anna; and, for Year C, that parents know how to command loving obedience from their children without interfering with their divine calling. These are but a few homiletic hints that can be developed in detail.

C. *Mary, Mother of God—January 1st, the Octave Day of Christmas*

This solemnity is the liturgical celebration of Mary's most glorious title, the *Theotokos*, bestowed upon her probably as early as the third century in the *Sub tuum* prayer and definitively given her in a dogma proclaimed at the Council of Ephesus (431).<sup>30</sup> It seems better translated into the vernacular as God-Bearer, Bringer-forth of God, or Birth-Giver of God, which manifests how intimately this unique vocation of Mary to be the holy Mother of God has introduced her into the mystery of Christ. *Theotokos* is really a Christological dogma, even though concretely it affirms the greatest grace and privilege of Mary. The Gospel every year is Luke 2:16-21, where the evangelist refers to her special contemplative prayer form of pondering the mysteries of her Son over and over again in her heart. It was inconceivable for Luke or any of the Fathers of the Church that Mary be called by God to be merely the physical instrument of mediating the Word made flesh to the world. More than just a bi-

<sup>30</sup>Jelly, *Madonna*, 90-97.

ological mother, God would give her the grace to be the worthy mother of God incarnate, conceiving Christ in her heart and mind through faith before she did so in the flesh in her womb. As the all-holy Mother of the Lord, Mary is the eternal witness to the real enfleshment of God and that his first coming is at the very center of our human history.

Historically, the dogma of Mary as *Theotokos* was the Church's response to the heresy of Nestorius who could not accept the revealed truth that a mere woman could be God's own mother without turning her into a goddess. His theological problem was with the "communication of idioms," according to which what is said of the human nature can be attributed to God since humanity and divinity are indissolubly wedded in the hypostatic union or in the Person of the Word incarnate. And so it can be truly said that God was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary because her maternal relationship terminates in the divine Person, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, who took his flesh and blood from her.<sup>31</sup> The Benedictus Antiphon for Morning Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours for this solemnity sums up the mystery in both a poetic and precise fashion: "Marvelous is the mystery proclaimed today: man's nature is made new as God becomes man; he remains what he was and becomes what he was not. Yet each nature stays distinct and forever undivided." This is an excellent example of the *lex orandi, lex credendi* axiom whereby the Church in her liturgical worship preserves and deepens the faith of all her children in a concrete mode distinct from but harmonious with the more technical way of dogmatic formulation in Chalcedonian Christology.

As previously pointed out in this paper, Pope Paul VI also made this solemnity on January 1st World Peace Day. It seems most fitting to pray for peace in a special way during this liturgical celebration, without having to offer a special votive Mass for peace in its place. The alternative opening

<sup>31</sup>Jelly, *Madonna*, 142-144.

prayer utters: "Father, source of light in every age, the virgin conceived and bore your Son who is called Wonderful God, Prince of Peace." There is an intimate link between celebrating the starting-point of our salvation through Mary's motherhood of the Prince of Peace incarnate and our imploring peace in the world, since through her he came to reconcile the world with God and so set the human race at peace once again. This is the peace that is the fruit of God's love within us, that is the tranquillity of order within each one of us, between each other, and between ourselves and our creator and redeemer, the triune God through Christ our Lord.<sup>32</sup> Also, we might do well to mention in our preaching today the rich symbolism of Mary's conceiving and bearing Christ as a virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit. The fact of the virginal conception and parturition is not intended to insinuate a negative attitude towards the sexual expression of love in marriage. After all marriage is a sacrament in the Church of Christ! Rather it is to underline the divine origin of the child who has only one human parent, his mother Mary, and whose father is God the Father. To have had Joseph as his natural father would have been misleading about the mystery of the incarnation in which it is essential for us to give our assent to both natures, human and divine, but as united in the one Person of the Word made flesh, Son of God, Son of Mary.

*D. Solemnity of the Epiphany—Sunday between January 2nd and 8th*

Mary in the mystery of Christ at the manifestation of her child to the gentile world, personified by the Magi according to the Gospel (Mt. 2:1-12), is the mother in whose arms we always behold the child as the savior of us all. If we have a truly balanced devotion to the mother, we will never fail to see her Son in this light, namely, as the Light of all peoples and not only of one nation. If our ministries do not

<sup>32</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, Part II-II, quest. 29, art. 3.

make this clear in the Church, but we allow our prejudices to keep certain kinds of people at a distance, Mary will gently but firmly remind us that we are concealing her Son instead of revealing his saving presence to all in the world. While it would seem impractical and perhaps even confusing to explain the literary genre of the story of the Magi or Three Wise Men in our preaching, our teaching ought to provide the students with a proper understanding of how the inspired authors of Sacred Scripture narrated the events of salvation history through various literary forms.

E. *The Special Collection of Marian Masses for the Christmas Season*

Six new Masses are being made available to the universal Church in honor of Our Lady during the Christmas season: "Holy Mary, Mother of God"; "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Savior"; "The Blessed Virgin Mary and the Epiphany of the Lord"; "The Blessed Virgin Mary and the Presentation of the Lord"; "Our Lady of Nazareth"; and, "Our Lady of Cana." For the purposes of this paper, let us reflect briefly upon the last one in the list, "Our Lady of Cana." During this liturgical period the Church celebrates three "epiphanies" or manifestations of Christ, namely, to the Magi (which has already been reflected upon for the solemnity of the Epiphany); to his first disciples, who began to believe in him through Mary's intervention at Cana; and to those who witnessed his baptism (cf. next and final section of this paper). The first Scripture reading is Exodus 19:3-8a, with its theme of "Whatever the Lord has spoken, we will do," and the Gospel, of course, is John 2:1-11, with its emphasis upon Mary's words to the servants at the wedding feast of Cana, "Do whatever he tells you." We preachers can readily develop in a variety of inspiring ways how these words of our spiritual mother are continually spoken by her to each one of us so that we might behold in our lives and those of our people the miraculous transformation of her Son's grace which changes the water of our weak faith into the wine of firm fidelity and dedicated discipleship.

F. *Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on the Sunday after  
January 6th*

The Christmas season ends with the beginning of the public ministry of Christ at his baptism by John in the River Jordan. There is no explicit marian reference on this liturgical feast, but the preacher might extend the words of God the Father in the theophany on that occasion to Mary's words at Cana: "Do whatever he tells you." "Inseparably linked with her Son's saving work," this is her spiritual advice to us so that we may enter more deeply into her Son's mysteries.

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