

SOLEMNITY OF MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD (ABC - 2025)

Today is the [eve] [the beginning] of a new year. And so, we all celebrate because the old is set aside and the new is brought in. Change is in order. We make all sorts of resolutions. We look ahead to new things and better times. We are filled with hope.

It is also the Christmas season, and Christmas celebrates what is new: new life in Christ, the newborn king.

Therefore, it's fitting that we celebrate this Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God, both during this Octave of Christmas and at the beginning of the new year. That's because both remind us of the new order of salvation and the new covenant which became possible by the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

With Christ's birth, the old order passed away. The covenant God established with Abraham was made obsolete. Now the Savior has come and mankind has been redeemed. Now there are new possibilities and new horizons which await us all.

Lest we forget how this all came about, the Church reminds us of Mary's role. She is the Mother of God and was given that title at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Now, to understand the significance of this feast, you have to know a little history. So, let's consider how things were in 431.

At that time, the Church had been free for over a hundred years; her freedom had been granted under the Emperor Constantine in 313 with the edict of Milan. The great Arian controversy over whether Jesus was God or a creature had been resolved, at least from a doctrinal standpoint with the Councils of Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople in 381. These councils ended Arianism at least within the empire's borders.

From a political standpoint, the great Roman Emperor Theodosius I, the last man to rule both the east and the west, had declared the empire officially Roman Catholic and forbade all pagan sacrifices in 391. By his death in 395, the Arians were finished within the empire and the Catholic religion had become the official religion of the empire.

But that was not the end of controversy. The Church was still considering the implications of the revelations she had received from her founder Jesus Christ. Mary was the mother of Jesus Christ, of His human nature, but could she also be called the Mother of God? After all, the divine Word, the Logos, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, had existed from the beginning as Saint John states in his Gospel, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."** Obviously, Mary was not present at this point. The world let alone the things within it did not yet even exist.

In 428, a priest, a former monk from Antioch, was appointed bishop of Constantinople, the capital of the Empire and one of the greatest cities in the ancient world. His name was Nestorius. He denied the Greek title Mary had been given, the title Theotokos and used another, for her, Christotokos, the mother of Christ, but not of God. This provoked much controversy.

To resolve this controversy, a council was called to settle the dispute. It met at Ephesus in the summer of 431. After some deliberation, the bishops in attendance declared that the term Theotokos, (which had been in use up to that time) did indeed have an orthodox understanding. They also declared that Nestorius, who had proposed that some other term be used to refer to Mary, was wrong. Furthermore, they ordered him deposed from his see.

So ended this controversy which confirmed the title bestowed upon Mary, Theotokos, Mother of God, which we affirm and proclaim this day, 1,594 (2025) years later.

Nestorius did not understand the person of Christ. He tried to separate Christ into two persons which cannot be done. Jesus Christ, has two natures, human and divine, but they are united in one person. It is that person, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity which Mary conceived and bore, not of course according to the Divine Nature, but according to His assumed human nature.

Saint Athanasius makes an important point in one of his letters about all this. He says that when the angel Gabriel addressed Mary, he spoke not of what would be born in her, but what would be born from her. The second person of the Holy Trinity did not just enter the womb of Mary but in fact took His flesh from her. To put it more clearly, He received our human nature from Mary, and then, representing the human race, He offered Himself as a sacrifice to the Father for our sins.

This feast celebrates new things. By it, the Church reminds us of Mary's role. She is the holy and blessed Virgin, the Mother of our Savior and the Mother of God.

So, it's especially fitting that we honor her at the beginning of the new year, during this Holy Season of Christmas which celebrates our newborn king. There is no better way to begin the new year than in prayer at Mass praising God for these great things. Amen.