

Mary, Mother of God

Today, Jan. 1, the octave of Christmas ends with the celebration of the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. It is a holy day of obligation, except the obligation for Catholics in the United States is lifted when the feast falls on a Saturday or Monday.

Jan. 1 also marks the Church's commemoration of the World Day of Peace, first observed 50 years ago in 1968. It seems appropriate and fitting to be celebrated on a Marian feast day, for peace is only possible through total self-sacrifice and surrender – through total love and obedience to the will of God, of which Mary is an icon for the Church.

It bears noting that Jan. 1 previously had been known as the feast of the circumcision of the Lord, because Jewish ritual prescribes that Jewish males would have been circumcised on the eighth day after birth, in accordance with the covenant God made with Abraham. As a member of a pious, practicing Jewish family, Jesus would have received this ritual induction into the Abrahamic covenant (see Lk 2:21). (By Michael Heinlein)

Did you know?

In the fifth century, a heresy led by Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople (r. 428-431) claimed that Jesus was actually two persons: one human and one divine – that his divinity was instilled on him after he was born. Thus, they reasoned incorrectly that Mary was the mother of Jesus but not the mother of God. Their rationale contradicted ancient Christian beliefs as well as proclamations and canons issued at earlier Church councils.

At the Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325, the Church Fathers had clearly determined that Jesus was consubstantial with the

Father and, therefore, Mary was the Mother of God. In response to the heretical message of Nestorius, another ecumenical council was held in 431 at Ephesus, Turkey. Led by St. Cyril (r. 412-444), bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, Mary was defended as *Theotokos*, God-bearer, and that Jesus was one person with a divine and human nature; Mary was the Mother of God. Nestorianism was condemned by the council and Nestorians excom-municated. The people of Ephesus, joyful over the council decision, went through the streets chanting, "Mary, Mother of God," which would become words prayed during our Rosary devotion. Some 1,500 years after the council, Pope Pius XI (r. 1922-1939) would claim: "If the Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary is God, assuredly she who bore him is rightly and deservedly to be called the Mother of God." (By D.D. Emmons)