

REFLECTIONS FOR CELEBRATING MARY'S FEAST DAYS

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The Blessed Virgin Mary is a gift from God in the Church. She was chosen to play an important role in the unfolding of God's universal plan of salvation for humankind. She holds a special place in the hearts of many people and is honored in many nations and cultures under many names and titles throughout the world. Her universal appeal is a sign of her influence in our understanding of the nature of the Church and the meaning of Christian discipleship. She is always viewed as the person who has the most intimate relationship with Christ and someone who helps us in the spiritual life.

Mary's unique relationship with Christ reminds us that the Church is always caught up in the mystery of Christ, and the members of the Church of Christ must walk with an attitude of trust. Mary is considered to be the first disciple, because she listened to the Word of God and acted upon it. Her example challenges us to examine anew the relationship of the Church with

the Word—both in an attitude of prayerful listening and in generosity of commitment to the mission of Jesus and the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world.

Mary is remembered throughout the liturgical year with particular feast days and memorials. This collection of universal reflections focuses on Mary in the context of the Church's liturgical cycle. Selected passages from the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament serve as the source and foundation of these Marian meditations. The Scripture passages shed light on Mary's role in the history of salvation and her uniqueness as a woman of faith, hope, and love. The reflections and prayers are introduced by particular titles attributed to Mary in the history and tradition of the Church. The titles reflect the Church's evolving understanding of the person and life of Mary in relation to Christ and the Church down through the centuries.

These meditations are intended to help people understand what it means to be an authentic Christian disciple in these challenging times and to inspire all Christians to follow in the example of Mary: to be more receptive to the Word of God, to be more contemplative, and to become proactive in the work of justice and peace in the world. These universal meditations not only honor Mary, but also praise the greatness of the Lord who is always present in the life of the Church and in the hearts of all Christian believers.

ADVENT SEASON

MARY, CHOSEN DAUGHTER OF ISRAEL

...and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah (Matthew 1:15-16).

Reflection: Generation after generation, God calls the human family to follow in the path of peace and love. As members of God's family, each of us has a special place in this lineage of hope.

Prayer: Lord, Mary carried your hope and love to a new generation. Help me to share your hope and love with everyone I meet.

Mary, Chosen Daughter of Israel, pray for us.

MARY AND THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.
Look, the young woman is with child and shall
bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel
(Isaiah 7:14).*

Reflection: Each of us is called to be a sign of God's presence in the world. We know that God is with us when we bear the gift of love, peace, and compassion throughout the day.

Prayer: Lord, you created me to be a living sign of your presence in the world. Give me the grace to bear witness to the reality of your love and peace in all my relationships.

Mary, Favored Daughter of God, pray for us.

THE VISITATION OF MARY

*The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior
who gives victory (Zephaniah 3:17a).*

Reflection: We search for God everywhere. Yet God is right here, in the center of our being, deep in our hearts. We must learn to still the chatter of our

minds and sit in quiet to listen for God's voice and loving direction.

Prayer: Lord, you were the center of Mary's life. May you be the center of all my thoughts and actions today.

Mary, visitor to all in need, pray for us.

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

... "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42).

Reflection: All Christians are called to a life of holiness. Our world is made holy when our thoughts and actions come from a pure heart of love and compassion.

Prayer: Lord, Mary was chosen to be the pure vessel of the Savior of the world. Prepare my heart to receive your Word and bear the fruit of holiness in the world.

Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us.

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, PATRONESS OF THE AMERICAS

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant....” (Luke 1:47-48).

Reflection: When we truly accept God’s presence in the people of every race and culture, then we will be able to eradicate all forms of prejudice and hatred in our homes, workplaces, communities, and world.

Prayer: Lord, Mary’s love did not diminish in oppressive times. Help me not to oppress others by my fear and prejudice.

Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us.