

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD – OLPH – 2012

(Luke 02:16-21)

We are still immersed in the spiritual and surrounded by the visual **splendour of Christmas**. Having contemplated the mystery of Christ's birth, we now celebrate the **Virgin Mary**, whom we venerate as **Mother of God**. Today's Scripture readings emphasize the Son of God made flesh and the "Name" of the Lord.

The first hint that the **Mother of God plays a crucial role** in the shepherds' coming to Christ is the fact that they "**went with haste**" to Bethlehem. This expression is not new in the gospel. Mary goes with haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth. The haste of the shepherds is modeled on Mary's haste and like her visitation it is not simply a social call but a sacred encounter with grace that transforms them. And the Mother of God is instrumental in their transformation.

And at the end of their stay "the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen." Since the Word made flesh could not yet speak, whatever they heard must have come from the lips of God's Mother and what they saw they beheld in her arms. The shepherds return to their lives no longer simple shepherds but astonishing evangelizers – **good shepherds** so to speak – transformed by the Mother of the Good News that they proclaim.

In the first reading, **Moses** – God's chosen instrument to liberate his people from slavery in Egypt – instructs Aaron on how **to give a blessing**. The words are simple: *The LORD bless you and keep you! / The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace!*

If you attend church regularly here at OLPH, you have noticed that at the beginning of the baptism rite, Father welcomes and blesses the child with a sign of the cross on the baby's forehead. He then invites the parents and godparents to also mark the child with the same sign of our Savior. Parents – and godparents – should continue that easy and simple practice of blessing. When a mom places the child in the crib, she can call to the dad to bless the child and then she does the same. **This blessing has great power.**

As we begin the New Year, I ask you to make **this resolution: Bless those who are close to you**. At first it may be awkward to do so, but at least begin with a blessing in your heart. When you see your child – or whatever person you live with – say, "**The Lord bless you.**" Little by little, you can extend that blessing to others: those you work with, your friends, people you meet as you go about your daily business. Your blessing will help them – and it will also help you

Today the Church listens once again to these words, while she asks the **Lord to bless the New Year** that has just begun, in the awareness that in the face of the tragic events that mark history, in the face of strife and war that unfortunately has not yet been fully overcome, **God alone can move the human spirit** in its depths and assure hope and peace to humanity. By now it is a firm tradition, on the first day of the year that, the Church throughout the world raise a unanimous prayer to invoke peace. It is good to begin a new stretch of the journey by setting out with determination on the path of peace. Today let us respond to the cry of so many men, women, children and elderly people who are the victims of war, which is the most appalling and violent face of history. Let us pray today that peace, which the Angels announced to the shepherds on Christmas night, may reach everywhere: “*super terram pax in hominibus bonae voluntatis*” (Lk 2:14) “**on earth peace to people of good will.**” I conclude with the priestly blessing Moses taught to his brother Aaron:

“The LORD bless you and keep you! / The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you! / The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace!”