January 1st: The Octave Day of Christmas, Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God

Gospel text (*Lk* 2:16-21): The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them. When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

"The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger."

Fr. Manel VALLS i Serra
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Today, the Church gratefully reflects on the Virgin's maternity as a model of her own motherhood to all of us. Luke offers the "meeting" of the shepherds and the Boy, who is with Mary —His mother— and with Joseph. Joseph's discreet presence reflects his important mission as guardian of the great mystery of the Son of God. All together, shepherds, Mary and Joseph, "the infant lying in the manger" (Lk 2:16) form a beautiful image of the Church in adoration.

"The manger": Jesus is placed there as a veiled reference to the Eucharist. It was Mary who put Him there! Luke speaks of an "encounter", of a meeting between the shepherds and Jesus. Faith does not materialize without the personal experience of an encounter with the Lord. Only that meeting, which has brought with it "seeing", and in a way "touching", allows the shepherds to become witnesses of the Good News, true evangelists who "made known the message that had been told them about this child" (Lk 2:17).

A first fruit of the "encounter" is pointed out for us here: "All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds" (Lk 2:18). We need to ask for the grace of being able to arouse that fascination, that admiration in those with whom we talk to about the Gospel.

There is still a second fruit of this encounter: "Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen"(Lk 2:20). The adoration of the Child fills their hearts with enthusiasm for communicating what they have seen and felt, and the communication of what they have seen leads them

to prayer and thanksgiving, to the glorification of the Lord.

Mary is an example of contemplation, for she “kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). She gave us Jesus, whose name means “God Saves”. His name is our Peace too. Let's accept His holy and sweet Name in our hearts and have it on our lips often!

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “The entire community of the city of Ephesus waited anxiously for the resolution [of Mary's motherhood synod] ... When it became known that the author of the blasphemies [Nestorious] had been deposed, with one voice we began to glorify God.” (Saint Cyril of Alexandria)

- “Jesus is the Son of God and at the same time he is the son of a woman, Mary. He comes from her. He is of God and of Mary. For this reason one can and must call the Mother of Jesus the Mother of God, “Theotókos” (Council of Ephesus, 431 A.D.” (Benedict XVI)

- “The Council of Ephesus proclaimed in 431 that Mary truly became the Mother of God by the human conception of the Son of God in her womb: Mother of God, not that the nature of the Word or his divinity received the beginning of its existence from the holy Virgin, but that was born from her.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, № 466)