

Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God

Everyone here knows what today is. Right? It's.... the 8th day of Christmas! Now that's something to celebrate! And it has nothing to do with "maids a milkin". On the 8th day of Christmas my true love gave to me.... Mary, the Mother of God's Solemnity. Yes, it's also New Year's Day. And we wish each other a Happy New year, in the willing suspension of disbelief that finally "this" year will bring prosperity and peace to the world. So we have fireworks displays around the world signaling a "new" beginning for the world. But tragically there are fireworks of another sort in a nightclub in Turkey, on the streets of Aleppo, in countless places around the world where there is nothing "new" and this year holds no promise of peace and freedom from terror. But still we wish, we want, we hope for a Happy New Year, even if each year that has preceded has had its "mixed blessings". Here's to a New Year of "mixed blessings". Hopes and fears!

So what about this 8th day of Christmas? This is not New Year's Day in liturgical time. The New Year began with the first Sunday of Advent and here we are in the Christmas Season. And we will be until January 9th, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. So what's so special about the 8th day? Well it's the Octave of Christmas. You all know what an Octave is in music. In **music**, an **octave** (**Latin**: *octavus*: eighth) or **perfect octave** is the **interval** between one musical **pitch** and another with half or double its **frequency**. The octave relationship is a natural phenomenon that has been referred to as the "basic miracle of music", the use of which is "common in most musical systems".^[2]

"Somewhere Over the Rainbow"/ Singing in the Rain". pitch)
An Octave symbolizes Perfection or completion. Like the scale.
Do re mi fa so la ti.... Please complete.

So an octave in Music is the basic “miracle of music” but what about a Church Octave? There are certain feasts of the year that are so important like Christmas, Easter and Pentecost that each of the single days are considered the same as the first day so Happy Christmas should be our Christian greeting today and not Happy New Year.

Now this octave of Christmas, this day has had various names through the centuries. It was the feast of the Circumcision of Jesus, since the tradition was for the male child to be circumcised on the 8th day. It was also called the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus. For a while it was the World Day of Peace. But now it is the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God. It is a feast in honor of Mary but it is so much more. By calling her the Mother of God, or theotokos, God bearer, the early church in the Council of Ephesus in 431 was saying that Mary gave birth of Jesus as “one person with a human and divine nature. Yes, the great mystery! And there is no way that we can understand how Jesus can be both human and divine but we believe that Jesus is 100 percent human and 100 percent divine. And Mary his mother gave birth to him as one.

Now let me show you something. Here is the child in the manger that we have as part of our display. Doesn't look very human to me? Anyone ever seen a new born baby looking like this? He also happens to be pretty big. There is no way this baby could be born of this Mary. And that's why we used “this baby” for our Christmas Pageant. Yes, a doll but small and vulnerable and wrapped in swaddling clothes. When I asked Mary in the pageant which baby Jesus she preferred she chose the one wrapped in swaddling clothes. When I asked her why, she said that “this one was more real”. Amen! The child born of Mary, though the son of God was “real” like us. A child who

wailed and wanted to be fed and changed and held and rocked to sleep. And Mary was theotokos, the God bearer, literally giving birth to Jesus who was both human AND divine. That old hypostatic union!

And so there is much reason to be “happy” this New Year’s day. It doesn’t have to do with prosperity and peace (although that would be nice!) but rather that we like Mary are God bearers. By virtue of our baptism, the divine life is within us and we can bring God to others. And perhaps that would be a good New Year’s resolution!