

JANUARY 1, 2010, FEAST OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Today as the New Year begins we commemorate the greatest of the Blessed Virgin Mary's privileges, her divine motherhood. All other favors she received, including her Immaculate Conception, were bestowed on her in view of the fact that she was to become truly the Mother of God.

The events that surrounded the introduction of this title help us to understand its significance. The title was used in the early Church, but it wasn't thought necessary to define it as a doctrine till a few hundred years later.

The expression "Mother of God" is not found in the New Testament. Other issues surrounding the mystery of salvation, in particular those dealing with the nature and person of Jesus Christ had to be clarified first. The Scriptures clearly speak of Jesus as divine, but nowhere does it define his relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit in explicit detail.

As time went on some considered him to be divine in the sense of only being more than man, but not fully equal to the Father. It was only after the bishops at Nicaea promulgated the teaching that Jesus is equal to the Father and is of the same substance, (the word they used was the Greek word "homousios"), Only then, was it clear that Catholic faith requires that Jesus be accepted as God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God. It was certain that the scriptures pointed with out question that Jesus was divine in the fullest sense of that term.

This was the most essential point to clarify before the Church could clearly teach that Mary is Theotokos, the Mother of God. Some of the early Church Fathers had used

this title of Mary already. Many of those Fathers had already put forth this teaching even before it was officially proclaimed by the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D.

St. Augustine who died a year before that Council was probably the teacher who gave it the most prominence. But there were other influential churchmen who refused to honor it.

Strange as it may seem, there were serious theologians in those early centuries who did not consider Christ to be a human being in a true sense. They considered him to be something like a Phantom, to have only a celestial body which just passed through Mary; he was not flesh derived from her flesh.

When Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, taught that Mary can only be called 'The Birth Giver of Christ' but not 'Mother of God', a crisis developed. This led to the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus that settled matter.

St. Athanasius had made it clear that since Jesus is a divine person with a human as well as a divine nature, whatever he does in his humanity is also done in his divine person. Therefore, since Mary gave birth to Jesus humanity, she is also the mother of his divine person. Because of that she is in the full sense of the term the Mother of God.

Obviously, Jesus as the Word of God had no other birth than the one eternal coming forth from the Father which continues through all eternity. It is through His taking on of humanity that he has a mother, but he acts as a divine person in doing so. Mary then is mother of the Word of God made flesh.

She herself does not become divine, but remains one of us creatures. However, she does enter into a most intimate personal relationship with the Blessed Trinity when she becomes mother of Jesus.

By the Power of God, she creates a new possibility for human-divine intimacy which began when the Word became flesh in her womb.

Her abiding union with God is, in God's plan, the fulfillment of God's promise of the new creation that each of us is intended to share in. She is not only the most perfect example of what we are to become, she is actively contributing to our joining her in the presence of her Son, by her intercession on our behalf.

When we honor Mary as the Mother of God, we honor the work of the Blessed Trinity in her. In particular, we acknowledge Jesus as her divine Son and our Savior. In uniting our self with her in prayer, we are drawn to greater conformity to her Son whom she fashioned not only in her body but, by also fashioned, and cared for in her motherly attentions. She directed and guided him in character and in soul. May she accompany us by her maternal care and prayer throughout this New Year and all the days of our life, to the end.