

JANUARY 1, 2026 FATHER JOHN BERTAO

Can you think of a better way of starting a new year other than praising Mary? Yes. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God.

In today's second reading, St. Paul tells the Galatians— And Paul is simply stating out to affirm that we are no longer subject to that law of slavery from sin. This is because Jesus, though a real man like ourselves, could call God his Father.

Just think. As Son and heir of God, Jesus, free of all restrictions and enslavements. And we, too, dipped into Christ in our baptism, through the waters of baptism, we are also free. Free to do, to choose, and of course, hopefully, free to always choose the best, to be in the kingdom one day. To be Christian, to be Christlike.

Now, keep in mind that all this depends on Jesus fully sharing in our human nature, which he brought to us. In his letter, Paul assures his readers, that's us, that Jesus was born of a woman. Not made. He was born of a woman just like we were, except his woman, his mother, totally perfect. This is where he begins his human existence. Thus, Mary.

At the Council of Ephesus, Nestorius wanted Mary to be called Christotokos, or Christ-bearer. But the council, instead of that, insisted that the man Jesus, who is fully God, derived his human being, his human humanity, his human being, from Mary. Hence, she was Theotokos, or God-bearer.

The whole person was God born of Mary, not just a human Christ, as some people wanted to call him. From Mary, Jesus gained his genes, his DNA, his flesh and blood, his temperament, his habits of mind, his warm personality. He was utterly, frankly and joyfully very, very human, in everything, of course, except sin.

Let's stop to think what Mary might have been thinking, what was going through Mary's mind and heart in view of the external attention that was taking place all around her in that stable. Like many newborn mothers, they know so much was beyond the reach of words in those first days after Mary's child was born.

Today, whether the birth happens at home or in a hospital bed, a new mother's eyes are watching all who come to visit to see her baby, wondering what comes next.

I remember when I first visited a friend of mine who had just given birth to a child. Everything was natural. She was tired. I walked inside. And of course, personal friends that we were— And she goes, "Oh, Father, it's so good to see you. I know we're not having a baptism yet, but your visit is just so important. I've had so many people come in, but your visit is so important because you bring Jesus to us in our lives, and I'm so glad to see you." That made me feel good, and of course, it made her and her husband feel very, very good.

You see, back then, things will never be the same again, just like my friends and for Mary. Nor should they.

Of all who visited when a baby is born, who will still be there? When will these people who visited Mary and Jesus be there when Jesus begins school? Through awkward teen years, who will be there? The child needs a friend and mentor who will be there, who will still come back to celebrate the big milestones or sit with them in sorrow. Mary was there all the way through.

And again, let's return to Mary in the stable. The shepherds expressed joy and praise for the miracle of life, and we should thank Mary for having said yes. Yes, and I quote, "Let it be done to me according to your word."

We thank Mary for following the angel's instructions in the name of her son: Jesus. The name "Jesus" in Hebrew means "the Lord saves." What a beautiful expression. "The Lord saves." Jesus.

My wish for you, my dear friends in Christ, for this new year and always, is a prayer taken from today's first reading from the book of Numbers. And I quote, as the Lord said to Moses, "Speak to Aaron and his sons, and say to them, '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.'"

Amen.