

The Blessing that Nurtures Believers

Submitted by Dr. Rosemary Murphy

It is fitting as we begin the New Year 2023, that the reading from the Book of Numbers (6: 22-27) for the feast of the Holy Mother of God offers us a timeless blessing. In our Catholic faith tradition, we often conclude special feasts, baptisms or weddings with this blessing. There are echoes of it in the priestly blessing at the conclusion of every Mass when we are sent forth to announce the Gospel of the Lord.

The ancient “Blessing of Aaron,” as it is often referred to, in its petition for protection, help, and peace, has nurtured Jews and Christian believers for centuries. As a faithful Jewish woman, we can assume that there were many times when Mary used these words to bless her son Jesus. And, as the first disciple, there were many times when Mary blessed the growing community of believers. In fact, living the Torah and often repeating the blessing of Aaron, were always in Mary’s heart and the source of her maternal strength.

The Gospel for this Sunday provides a beautiful image of Mary and a powerful glimpse into the reflections of heart. Luke describes the arrival the shepherds who “...made known the message” (Luke 2:17) that the angel had revealed to them. And, “Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” (2:19)

From the scriptures today, what Mary kept in her heart and for her daily reflection, Luke offers us for our reflection and lifestyle throughout the new year:

- *The good news of great joy, for all people,*
- *A savior, born in the city of David*
- *The Messiah of peace,*
- *The Lord, the fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation.*

Let us go forth today and live as Mary lived, always reflecting on our Savior’s presence and blessing all the people we encounter: *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 and give you peace.* (Numbers 6: 24-26)