

MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD
2018

1 January

What a year it must have been for Mary! She was visited by an angel; she became pregnant; she married a man who reported strange dreams; shepherds and astrologers showed up to honor and praise her baby; at the Temple a prophet and prophetess told her that her child would fulfill the hopes of Israel, and that she herself would be pierced by a sword; then she had flee to Egypt to protect the lives of herself and her family.

That was a whole lot to take in in one year. I wonder how she could have been at peace with so much going on. Yet the Gospel tells us she pondered in her heart, reflecting and mulling over what she had seen and heard and experienced. Somehow in the midst of all that Mary was able to have a sense of peace.

There are times in our lives that are smooth flowing, and other periods that are filled with tension and change. It seems like our country and our church are in one of those periods now, at least that's the way it feels to me. But somehow in that midst of this we must find time to ponder and reflect, and find a sense of calm and peace.

In the midst of all this, I remind myself to hear God's words of blessing for peace. The *shalom* in the blessing is not merely an absence of armed conflict or hostility. It is God's blessing for wholeness, for health, for holiness -- sort of a holistic blessing for body, mind, and spirit, too. God wants us to have it all.

God's blessing is given us by the Holy Spirit who takes up residence in our hearts, who prompts us to call out to our God with the intimate greeting, "Abba!" God's Spirit blesses us by helping us to know the depth of God's blessing, the blessing which takes away a spirit of slavery so that we are called God's own children -- what a blessing! For to be God's children then means that we are heirs to everything that God possesses, that we will inherit everything that belongs to God.

As a new mother Mary knew what she longed for when her child was born --how she wanted all the best for him, that she wanted to protect him from anything that could harm him. So God too wants the same for all of us who are God's own children by adoption. "Adoption" reminds us that we are wanted, that we are chosen. God chooses to bless us with *shalom*; God wants us to have it all, and to be at peace.