

January 1, 2008

We all have to learn something today, at least those of us who still write. We will begin to date something by writing 2007. Then we will remember that that is wrong. We are now in 2008. For some of us, of course, it was a major shock when we first wrote the letters 2000 on a piece of paper. Those of us who are a little long in the tooth then whispered to ourselves: What am I doing here? I belong in the 1900s, not in this new century. But here we are, and since we are here, we belong here, even though we might not feel so.

And how should we begin this eighth year of the twenty-first century? The Church calls today the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God. But there are also nods to the fact that it is the day on which the Lord received his name of Jesus. So it could be called the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus. And, third, it is also a day devoted to World Peace. But there is a line attributed to Mary in today's Gospel which seems very appropriate for a New Year's Day: "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart."

To reflect in one's heart. Is that not a good phrase with which to begin the new year? Mary does not come to word very often in the

Gospels. In her first appearance at what we call the annunciation given in Luke, she does ask the angel how this birth will come about, and her response to the answer is: "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to your word." In John's Gospel at the wedding in Cana she pleads for wine for the wedding guests from her son (they have no wine) and then tells the attendants, "Do whatever he tells you." She says nothing at the foot of the cross. And here in this manger scene of Luke we are simply told that "she kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." So a woman of few words, although decisive ones.

We could do worse than take this silent, reflective woman as our model as we begin our new year. It is a good time to take account of how things have gone, how things are going, and how we want them to go in the future. We cannot determine the future, that is clear, but we can determine how we want to prepare for it, not matter what it brings, and respond to it.

Are there any big changes we want to make? Are there some small changes we want to make? Usually, when we think and talk this way, we are thinking of actions. But maybe we should begin to think not simply about our actions but about our attitudes and values, or, to use the biblical phrase for these, about our hearts. Is

there a change of heart we want to entertain? If not a major one, then perhaps a small one.

Of course the fundamental attitude we all have to adopt is that expressed by Mary at the Annunciation: “I am your servant. Be it done to me according to your word.” In one way or another our lives have to conform to these words of Mary. Otherwise our hearts are in the wrong place.