



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 18 December 1996

Mary has role in Jesus' saving mission

1. After recognizing in Jesus “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Lk 2:32), Simeon announces to Mary the great trial to which the Messiah is called and reveals her participation in that sorrowful destiny.

His reference to the redeeming sacrifice, absent at the Annunciation, has shown in Simeon's prophecy almost a “second Annunciation” (*Redemptoris Mater*, n. 16), which will lead the Virgin to a deeper understanding of her Son's mystery.

Simeon, who up to that moment had addressed all those present, blessing Joseph and Mary in particular, now prophesies to the Virgin alone that she will share in her Son's destiny. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he announces to her: “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed” (Lk 2:34-35).

2. These words foretell a future of suffering for the Messiah. He is, in fact, “the sign of contradiction”, destined to meet harsh opposition on the part of his contemporaries. But alongside Christ's suffering Simeon sets the vision of Mary's heart pierced by the sword, thus uniting the Mother with the sorrowful destiny of her Son.

In this way, while the venerable old man foresees the growing hostility the Messiah will face, he stresses its repercussion on the Mother's heart. This maternal suffering will culminate in the Passion, when she will unite with her Son in his redemptive sacrifice.

Following an allusion to the first songs of the Servant of the Lord (cf. Is 42:6; 49:6), cited in Luke 2:32, Simeon's words remind us of the prophecy of the Suffering Servant (Is 52:13; 53:12), who, "wounded for our transgressions" (Is 53:5), "makes himself an offering for sin" (Is 53:10) through a personal and spiritual sacrifice which far exceeds the ancient ritual sacrifices. Here we can note how Simeon's prophecy allows us to glimpse in Mary's future suffering a unique likeness to the sorrowful future of the "Servant".

3. Mary and Joseph are astounded when Simeon proclaims Jesus as a "light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Lk 2:32). Mary, instead, with reference to the prophecy of the sword that would pierce her heart, says nothing. Together with Joseph, she accepts in silence those mysterious words which predict a deeply sorrowful trial and situate the Presentation of Jesus in the temple in its most authentic meaning.

Indeed, according to the divine plan the sacrifice offered then "according to what is said in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons'" (Lk 2:24), prefigured the sacrifice of Jesus, "for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Mt 11:29); in it the true "presentation" would be made (cf. Lk 2:22), which would see the Mother associated with her Son in the work of Redemption.

4. Simeon's prophecy is followed by the meeting with the prophetess Anna: "She gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Lk 2:38). The faith and prophetic wisdom of the old woman who nurtures the expectation of the Messiah by "worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day" (Lk 2:37), offer the Holy Family a further incentive to put their hope in the God of Israel. At this particular moment, Anna's behaviour would have appeared to Mary and Joseph as a sign from the Lord, a message of enlightened faith and persevering service.

Beginning with Simeon's prophecy, Mary intensely and mysteriously unites her life with Christ's sorrowful mission: she was to become her Son's faithful coworker for the salvation of the human race.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking visitors, especially the pilgrim groups from the United States. Upon all of you I cordially invoke the joy and peace of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

