



# The Holy See

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## *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II*

### **OPENING OF THE HOLY DOOR AT ST MARY MAJOR**

*Saturday 1 January 2000*

*Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God*

*World Day of Peace*

1. *"When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman"* (Gal 4: 4).

Yesterday evening we paused to meditate on the meaning of Paul's words, taken from the Letter to the Galatians, and asked ourselves about the meaning of the *"fullness of time"* of which he speaks, in relation to the progress that marks man's way through history. The moment we are living is full of significance: at midnight the year 1999 entered the past, giving way to a new year. Here we are just a few hours into the Year 2000!

What does this mean for us? We are beginning to write a new page of history. Yesterday evening we looked back at the past, at how the world was when the second millennium began. Today, beginning the Year 2000, we cannot but wonder about the future: what direction will the great human family take in this new phase of its history?

2. Taking into account the start of a new year, today's liturgy expresses good wishes to all people of good will with these words: *"The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace"* (Nm 6: 26).

May the Lord grant you peace! This is the Church's wish to all humanity on the first day of the new year, a day dedicated to the celebration of the *World Day of Peace*. In my [Message for this Day](#) I recalled some of the conditions and requirements for strengthening the peace process at the

international level. This process is unfortunately always threatened, as we are reminded by the painful events that have marked the history of the 20th century on various occasions. This is why, more than ever, we must wish each other peace in God's name: may the Lord give you peace!

I am thinking at this moment of the prayer meeting for peace which gathered representatives of the world's main religions in Assisi, in [October 1986](#). We were still in the period of the so-called "Cold War": together, we prayed to avert the great threat of a conflict which seemed to menace humanity. In a certain sense, we gave voice to everyone's prayer, and God heard his children's supplication. Even if we had to note the outbreak of dangerous local and regional conflicts, we were nonetheless spared the great world conflict which had loomed on the horizon. This is why, with greater awareness, we wish one another peace as we cross the threshold of the new century: *may the Lord lift up his countenance upon you.*

Year 2000 coming to meet us, may Christ grant you peace!

3. "*The fullness of time*"! St Paul says that this "fullness" was achieved when God "*sent forth his Son, born of woman*" (Gal 4: 4). Eight days after Christmas, today, the first day of the new year, we commemorate in a special way the "Woman" of whom the Apostle speaks, the Mother of God. In giving birth to the eternal Son of the Father, Mary contributed to achieving the fullness of time; she contributed uniquely to ensuring that human time would reach the measure of its fullness in the Incarnation of the Word.

On this most significant day, I have had the joy of opening the Holy Door in this venerable Liberian Basilica, the first one in the West to be dedicated to the Virgin Mother of Christ. A week after the solemn rite held in St Peter's Basilica, today it is as though the ecclesial communities of every nation and continent were gathering here in spirit, under the Mother's gaze, to cross the threshold of the Holy Door which is Christ.

It is, in fact, to her, the Mother of Christ and of the Church, that we wish to entrust the Holy Year just begun, to protect and encourage the journey of all who become pilgrims in this time of grace and mercy (cf. [Incarnationis mysterium](#), n. 14).

4. The liturgy of today's solemnity has a profoundly Marian character, although this is rather soberly expressed in the biblical texts. The passage from the Evangelist Luke summarizes, as it were, what we heard on Christmas night. It says that the shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph and the Child lying in the manger. After seeing him, they recounted what they had been told of him. And all were amazed at the shepherds' tale. "*But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart*" (2: 19).

It is worth reflecting on this sentence which expresses a wonderful aspect of Mary's motherhood.

In a certain sense, the whole liturgical year follows in the footsteps of this motherhood, beginning with the feast of the Annunciation on 25 March, exactly nine months before Christmas. On the day of the Annunciation, Mary heard the Angel's words: *"Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God"* (Lk 1: 31-33, 35). And she answered: *"Let it be to me according to your word"* (ibid., 1: 38).

Mary conceived through the Holy Spirit. Like every mother, in her womb she carried that Son, whom she alone knew to be the Only-begotten Son of God. She gave birth to him in the night of Bethlehem. Thus began the earthly life of the Son of God and his mission of salvation in the world's history.

5. *"Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart"*.

How can we marvel that the Mother of God should remember all this in a special and indeed unique way? Every mother has a similar knowledge of the beginning of a new life within her. Every person's history is written first of all in his own mother's heart. It is no wonder that the same was true for the earthly life of the Son of God.

*"Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart"*.

Today, the first day of the new year, on the threshold of a new year, of this new millennium, the Church returns to this inner experience of the Mother of God. She does so not only by thinking back to the events of Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem, to the various stages, that is, of the Redeemer's earthly life, but also by considering all that his Life, Death and Resurrection have brought about in human history.

Mary was present with the Apostles on the day of Pentecost; she participated directly in the birth of the Church. Since then her motherhood accompanies the history of redeemed humanity, the journey of the great human family, for whom the work of Redemption is intended.

At the beginning of the Year 2000, as we move into the Jubilee season, we trust in your motherly "memory", O Mary! We set out on this special path of salvation history, which is kept alive in your heart as Mother of God. To you we entrust the days of the new year, the future of the Church, the future of humanity, the future of the entire universe.

Mary, Mother of God, Queen of Peace, watch over us.

Mary, *Salus Populi Romani*, pray for us.

Amen!

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