

BY GOD'S DESIGN!

Though the name of this feast, Mary, the Mother of God, seems to deify Mary, it is in reality very much a celebration of her humanity, and in turn, a celebration of her Son's humanity. In a strict patriarchal culture God chose a woman to inaugurate the Reign of God into human history. Mary was a simple peasant girl, but she had to understand at least some of the cultural ramifications of her call. She was the primary human instrument—the partner, if you will—of the Divine becoming human and in the words of Sojourner Truth, “man had nothing to do with him.”

Our baptismal call, Paul's Letter to the Galatians reminds us, has won for us the same distinction in being called sons and daughters of God--heirs by God's design--brothers and sisters in Christ. We willingly embrace the idea of such a filial relationship with God and a fraternal relationship with Christ. They are the basis of our spirituality as Christians. What becomes problematic is the logical conclusion of these

relationships. If all are sons and daughters of God by God's design and therefore brothers and sisters in Christ, *then all are equal.*

This feast should not only draw us to honoring Mary, it should also reinforce our human connectedness. In this country, our Constitution, so sacredly treasured, sets forth that immutable principle of the equality of every human person. Sojourner Truth, once a slave, famously showed the 1851 convention for women's rights in Akron that it could not seek its own rights without seeking the rights of others. With the Second World War, we learned a painful lesson of what happens when that principle is denied as it was during the Nazi regime in Germany.

Some in our own country have been dangerously flirting with a similar nativism that could undermine the very reason we exist as a country. Lessons from human history should shed light on our present as we enter this New Year. As people of faith we cannot ignore the consistent message of the Sacred Scriptures as we gather each week to celebrate our oneness as children of God. When the Son of God was

vested in our humanity and accepted our human nature, we all became heirs of God, equal and precious in God's sight beyond our imagining.

The beautiful Eucharistic Preface of Christmas echoes this profound article of our faith:

*Christ came to lift all things to himself,
to restore unity to creation,
and to lead all people from exile
into [God's] loving presence.*

The inclusivity of that prayer should make it clear that the Christ born into our world is a call to unity rooted in God's unconditional love for all people. God's plan for us is that we also love one another without conditions. Sex, race, creed, lifestyle, political persuasion, education, economic status, nation of origin--these are all differences not criteria! Our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection which we celebrate in the Eucharist challenges us again and again to bear Christ to the world through lives of unconditional love for all.

This should be the only New Year's resolution any of us should have: to make Christ's presence felt in our world by what we do and say

out of love. Mary's willingness to accept the very radical invitation to be a partner in the divine plan flew in the face of all the religious and cultural mores of her day. No less is demanded of us: to stand up and challenge our church and our country with the words of St. Paul:

*You are no longer slaves, but sons and daughters.
and the fact that you are sons and daughters
makes you heirs by God's design!*

What more could we hope for in this New Year?