**Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God**

**December 31, 2014/January 1, 2015**

**St. Stephen’s Parish**

**Bentonville, Arkansas**

Humble and bold. Two words we don’t often associate in our minds. Humble and bold… we find them both in the person of Mary.

The humble virgin Mary, docile to God’s will, God’s word, yet the most bold of all the witnesses of the Word made Flesh, of her Son and Lord, Jesus, and Mother of God: ***Theotokos.***

No, it was not Peter. No, it was not James or John or Paul who was the boldest yet most humble of all the witnesses of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus….. No, it was Mary, the Mother of God, ***Theotokos,*** for from her heart came these words: *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord! My spirit finds joy in God my savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. The Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.*

It was Mary who bore the most humble but bold witness to her Son. It was Mary who bore the Word of God in her heart and then conceived that Word in her womb.

Only because of her faith in that Word that came to her, a Word she nurtured in her immaculate heart, was she then able to conceive and bear the Son of God, her creator and Savior, Jesus. Yes, she is the “God-bearer”, ***Theotokos,*** in Greek, as the Church Fathers in 431 professed at the Council of Ephesus.

Mary kept close to her heart the Word made Flesh. She said, “Yes.” She said, “Fiat.” She said, “Let it be done to me.” St. Augustine would later write that Mary was more blessed for hearing God’s word and keeping custody of it in her heart than because of the flesh she gave to her divine Son. Since this was true, Mary was able to stand by her Son as he died on the cross, stand by Him without staining her Immaculate Heart. She knew it was by virtue of her faith in God’s Word that she had been able to conceive that Word in her womb, and it was by faith in that Word that she was able to give bold witness to her Son when he gave up his life on the Cross.

She who surpasses all of us in her sanctity and her fidelity, Mary, the Mother of God himself remains like us, a member of the Church, and a member of the Body of Christ her Son, and a witness to her Son’s death and resurrection.

You too are members of the Body of Christ. You also carry God’s Word in your hearts and you are to be witnesses to that Word, to Jesus Christ. Just as St. Augustine spoke of Mary, St. Ambrose spoke of us when he wrote: *Blessed are you who have heard and believed; every soul that believes conceives and begets the Word of God. May Mary’s soul be in each of us to glorify the Lord. May the spirit of Mary be within each of us to exalt in God. (Commentary on Luke, CCL 14, 39-42)*

My dear people of St. Stephen’s parish, you will be more blessed and find greater dignity in the Word you nourish in your hearts and profess with your lips than in any office you may bear. You are first, and most importantly, members of the Body of Christ. *Never separate yourselves from this Body, from the Church!* *Never separate yourselves*!

You cannot become witnesses to Jesus unless you first have welcomed the Word in your hearts, treasured it, nurtured it, obeyed it, followed it, and trusted it. Mary would not have become the Mother of God had she not first accepted and kept the Word of God in her Immaculate Heart. You cannot become witnesses to Jesus if you do not first hold in purity of your heart the Word entrusted to you. Mary could not have endured the passion and death of her Son without cradling in her heart the Word that had come to her. You will not be able to endure the trials and difficulties of life without first knowing and nurturing and loving the Word entrusted to you.

Yes, our lives can be modeled after Mary. A Christian is to give humble yet bold witness to the Gospel. Ours is a vocation of humble service to God and to humanity. It is not about power, but rather bearing witness. May our lives magnify the Lord!