

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD– 1st January 2017

**THE SHEPHERDS FOUND MARY AND JOSEPH AND THE BABY... AT THE END OF EIGHT 8 DAYS.....
HE WAS CALLED JESUS - Biblical commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

Luke 2,16-21

And they (the shepherds) went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

On the first day of the new year, we open with good news. And what is this good news that the evangelist Luke brings us? That those that the religion considered distant from God, in reality, for Jesus, are those nearest to the Lord. Let's listen to what the evangelist Luke writes in chapter 2 of his gospel, verses 16-21. To understand what the evangelist tells us, we must go back, to the shepherds, the shepherds were considered impure persons for their work, they were outcasts, excluded like the religious sinners, because they lived in a way that was outside the law, they certainly could not participate at the functions of the temple or synagogue. It was believed that when the Messiah arrived, he would punish them. Well, when the Angel of the Lord, that is God himself when he enters into contact with mankind, presented himself to them, he did not burn them in his anger, but surrounds them in his light, that is, his love. The evangelist denies the traditional doctrine of a God that rewards the good and punishes the bad. When God encounters with the sinners, he does not scold or punish them, but surrounds them with his love, this is what came before.

So, *"And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger."* The son of God that has been announced to them, was not born in a palace, not even a temple, but in their lowly condition, that they recognised.

"And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child." What did the Angel of the Lord say to them? The Angel of the Lord had communicated to them with great joy for the birth of the Saviour, therefore the avenger had not arrived, he who rewarded the good and punished the bad, but a Saviour, and this good news would be for everyone. It is strange, that on the part of those that listened there is no reaction of joy for the news, only bewilderment. Luke writes; *" And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them."* They were bewildered, there is something strange, because, in the traditional doctrine, God punishes the sinners. How can they say this these people that are sinful, impure, that God has surrounded them, wrapped them of his love? So they are bewildered with what the shepherds say. What religion taught them of God collapses: it is the novelty, it is the scandal of mercy, which will be the theme of the whole of Luke's Gospel .

"But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. " so also Mary was worried, she does not understand this novelty., because it does not correspond to what religion has always taught, but she

does not refuse it, she begins to think, and reflect. The evangelist sets in motion the great growth of Mary, which will take her until at her son's cross. Mary is great not so much for having given birth to Jesus, for being the mother, but for having the courage to follow him and become the disciple.

"And the shepherds returned," to understand what the evangelist is now telling us, that is clamorous, extraordinary and sensational, we must refer to the culture of that time, where in a book, the first book of Enoch, God is presented in the heavens, separated from mankind, around him there are seven angels, called the service angels. What do these privileged angels that are by God's side do? They have the privilege to glorify and praise God in continuation. Well, the evangelist tells us that the shepherds *"..returned," glorifying and praising God...* "Those that the religion and the society considered the most distant, the most excluded from God, once they have experienced God's love, they are nearer to God, exactly like the service angels, *"..for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."*

But this divine plan, however, will meet the resistance of mankind : the novelty brought by Jesus will struggle to be accepted. So the evangelist writes that *"....at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised,"* They circumcise Jesus. They intend to make him Abraham's son he who had been heralded as the Son of the Almighty. So, there is still the attachment to the law and tradition and the Spirit, will find it hard to enter and to flourish, but he will make it in the end.

".. he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." And then we will see how Jesus put his parents in crisis, because they expect Jesus to follow in his father's footsteps, but Jesus will follow the Father.