

# Jan. 1 celebrates Mary as ‘Mother of God’

Catholics throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore will honor the Blessed Virgin Mary and pray for peace in a special way Jan. 1 when they celebrate the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

An ancient feast of the church and a holy day of obligation, the solemnity celebrates Mary under her title of “Theotokos” or “God-bearer.”

“It was a title that was declared to be an appropriate one for Our Lady at the Council of Ephesus in 431 since she was the mother of the entire Christ – human and divine,” said Monsignor Stuart W. Swetland, a theology professor at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg.

“We have evidence that there was a special celebration for Mary under this title very early on – dating from the earliest records from the fourth century for sure,” Monsignor Swetland said. “The title was disputed earlier in the church, but the council upheld it.”

The feast day, which had long been celebrated Jan. 1 in Rome, has been celebrated on other dates in other parts of the world throughout the centuries. It now falls universally on Jan. 1 – the octave of Christmas, which Monsignor Swetland said emphasizes Mary’s role in salvation history.

“In more recent times, there’s also been a focus on peace,” said Monsignor Swetland, noting that Pope Paul VI first proposed a World Day of Peace in 1967 – an event that is annually observed Jan. 1 throughout the world.

“In the octave of Christmas, we’re still focused on the Prince of Peace, but also Mary, the Queen of Peace,” Monsignor Swetland said. “We begin a new calendar year praying for peace in the world, in our homes and in our nation.”

Pope Benedict XVI has already issued his message for the upcoming 43rd World Day of Peace. Centered on peace and ecology, the message is entitled “If You Want to

Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation.”

Parishes throughout the archdiocese will offer special prayers for peace Jan. 1. St. Ignatius in downtown Baltimore will host the 17th annual New Year’s Eve Interfaith Service Dec. 31 at 8:30 p.m. State and local leaders are expected to attend the celebration, which is preceded by a musical program at 8 p.m.

*For free tickets to the St. Ignatius service, call 410-727-3848 or email [parish@st-ignatius.net](mailto:parish@st-ignatius.net).*