

# Pope calls on Christians to turn to Mary for building peace

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI called on Christians to turn to Mary, the mother of God, for help in being true friends of Jesus and courageous builders of peace.

In his first general audience of 2008, the pope greeted thousands of ecstatic pilgrims Jan. 2 in the Vatican's Paul VI hall, bestowing upon them his "prayerful good wishes" for the new year.

He said the new year had been ushered in "under the sign of the Virgin Mary" as the church celebrated the Jan. 1 feast of Mary, Mother of God.

He invited the faithful to "carefully consider the importance of the presence of Mary in the life of the church and in our own personal life" and prayed that Mary would help "make us more keenly aware of her maternal presence."

The scene of the Nativity represented in the Christmas creche highlights Mary offering up her child to "the contemplation of all those who go to adore him," he said.

The incarnation through Christ's birth is not a past event, the pope said; like the Magi and the poor shepherds of Bethlehem, today's men and women drawn to the Christ Child are "full of joy because God wanted to be the God who is with us and who has a mother who is our mother."

Mary's divine motherhood, her Immaculate Conception, and her assumption, body and soul, into heaven are privileges that do not remove Mary from her children, but rather bring her closer to the faithful, he said.

"In fact, being totally with God, this woman is very close to us and helps us like a mother and like a sister," he said.

Mary is also the mother of the church, the pope said, which makes her the mother of "every one of us who are members of the mystical body of Christ."

Pope Benedict asked audience participants to trust in Mary and pray to her to “guide our steps” during the new year and “help us be authentic friends of her son and that way also (be) courageous builders of his kingdom in the world, the kingdom of peace and truth.”

“Supported and comforted by the Virgin’s protection, we too can contemplate with renewed vision the face of her son, Jesus, and more energetically follow the path of the good,” he said.

Among the 7,000 pilgrims inside the Vatican audience hall were more than 1,000 members of the Legionaries of Christ and Regnum Christi, an apostolic Catholic movement associated with the Legionaries.

The pope offered special greetings to them, including their 48 newly ordained priests, 31 of whom were from Mexico and the United States.

The pope asked that the mystery of the incarnation light their journey of faith in Christ and that, like Mary, they may know how to “protect, reflect, and follow the word that became flesh in Bethlehem, and spread with enthusiasm his message of salvation.”

The Vatican text of Pope Benedict’s remarks in English is available online at: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/audiences/2008/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20080102\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20080102_en.html).

The Vatican text of his remarks in Spanish is available online at: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/audiences/2008/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20080102\\_sp.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20080102_sp.html).