

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God ushers in New Year

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.”

In a 2009 interview with the Catholic Review, Monsignor Stuart W. Swetland, a theology professor at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, explained that the title 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.

“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.”

In celebrating the arrival of 2019, Pope Francis said a new year is a chance for a new start, a time to remember that all people are brothers and sisters and a time to

nurture amazement that God became human to save all people.

The feast of Mary, Mother of God is also is a time to remember how strong maternal love and care are, and how they are the secret to making life more livable, the pope said during his homily at a feast day Mass in St. Peter's Basilica.

Pope Francis chose as the theme for this year's World Peace Day: "Good politics is at the service of peace."

"We must not think politics is reserved to those who govern," the pope said. "We are all responsible for the life of the community, of the common good, and politics is good to the degree that everyone does his or her part in the service of peace."

After greeting hundreds of people who participated in a march for peace, carrying signs with the names of countries suffering because of violence, Pope Francis prayed: "Through the intercession of the virgin Mary, may the Lord grant us to be artisans of peace — and this begins at home, in the family — every day of the new year."

Catholic News Service contributed to this article.