

Standard news fare as each old year ends and each new year begins are summaries of the lead stories and major events of the year ending, as well as predictions or expectations by experts of the year beginning.

One of the things we expect every year – at least for the last 84 years – is *TIME* magazine's selection of the "Person of the Year"; the major part of its final issue of the year focuses on that person, (or group, or idea, or object) and the impact – for good or for ill – that "person" has had on world events during the year coming to a close. You probably saw on the news a couple weeks ago, that this year, *TIME* has chose, not an individual specific person, but rather, the "**Protestor**" as its Person of the Year.

TIME editor Rick Stengel introduces the cover article with this sentence: "No one could have known that when a Tunisian fruit vendor set himself on fire in a public square in a town barely on a map, he would spark protests that would bring down dictators in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and rattle regimes in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain. Or that the spirit of dissent would spur Mexicans to rise up against the terror of drug cartels, Greeks to march against unaccountable leaders, Americans to occupy public spaces to protest income inequality, and Russians to marshal themselves against a corrupt autocracy."

The cover article, written by Kurt Andersen, with reporting by many others, and with stunning photography by Peter Hapak and Patrick Witty, is a 27 page reflection on all those events of 2011, and an attempt to make sense of something that nobody saw coming. This kind of reflection is something we humans are driven to do.

The events that we continue to celebrate today, as the Christmas Season continues, merit this same kind of reflection and careful consideration. Today's gospel says that "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." The things that she kept reflecting on in her heart include:

- Gabriel's annunciation that she was to be the Mother of God – something she never saw coming!
- the birth of a child to her elderly barren cousin Elizabeth – a dream she had long before given up!
- the virgin birth of her own son Jesus – how could that be possible?
- and the unexpected appearance of the shepherds at the Bethlehem stable – how could they have known the significance of this lowly birth?

Most scholars agree that Mary could not have known the meaning or significance of all these events, and that full comprehension came only much later. Mary's greatness lay in her willingness to go forward with a plan she did not understand, to a place she had not chosen, for the sake of a people, who, in the end, would reject and torture and kill her son. It is for this reason that we appropriately begin this new year with a celebration of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Her resolve – in the face of all the unknowns – was to accept, and to reflect, and to remain faithful to God.

[5:00 p.m.: A new year begins for us in just a few hours.]

[8:30 & 10:30 a.m.: A new year began for us just a few hours ago.]

God's Word to us today invites us not to do different things, but to do what Mary did:

- **(first of all) to accept:** to accept God's plan for us, even though we don't know all the details, or how it will all come out in the end;
- **(secondly) to reflect:** to reflect on all these things in our hearts, all the things that happen to us personally, and all the things we see happening in the world around us: trying to discern God's presence and activity there, trying to see them as so many opportunities of grace;
- **(and then) to remain faithful:** to remain faithful to God – as God *always* is to us: believing that God can and will bring some good out of everything – if only we let him.

Today, we stand at the beginning of a new year that is every bit as unpredictable as the old. Perhaps the best resolution would be to set aside some reflection time every day: to search for the meaning and the purpose and the grace God has placed there, just for us.