

*“From you rose the Sun of Justice, Christ our God.”
Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe – Lectionary: 690A*

There are a few places where nature offers an experience of darkness so absolute it can be terrifying. Assateague Island lies along the barrier coast of Virginia. On a winter night, darkness there feels complete, enveloping. As evening lengthens, night pulls its velvet canopy from the black ocean, covering the beach in silence. The whisper of rustling sea oats along the invisible dunes is the only link to a land left behind. But slowly, like sparks rolling through dry tinder, stars burn one by one through heaven’s blanket. By midnight, their incomparable brilliance convinces the soul that it has never been and can never be alone.

During this second week of Advent, which includes the feasts of both the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Guadalupe, we are continually assured that we are not alone. Mary, First Among the Redeemed, rises like an evening star in the long story of salvation history. She begins a motherhood for Jesus, and in so doing, becomes our Mother too.

Like all maternities, Mary’s was a gradual awakening to the Life she bore within her. In this week’s readings, we see her absorb the angel’s stunning announcement into the immensity of her faith. We see her begin to prepare, in the confines of her humble life, a dwelling for Infinity. We see her labor to introduce God’s extraordinary secret into the ordinary dimensions of her life. We see her carry Incarnate Grace into the disrupted world of her cousins Elizabeth and Zechariah, anointing them with the blessing of her faith-filled Magnificat.

As we pray with Mary this week, let us hold all mothers in our hearts. Certainly, we hold our own mothers, whether in presence or in memory. May our prayer embrace all single mothers, unwilling mothers, refugee mothers, mothers so overburdened by poverty that they cannot enjoy the blessing of their children. We include all mothers, sick with any form of illness in body, mind or spirit. May any darkness these mothers face be lifted by the gracious hand of Mary who intimately knows their hearts and circumstances.

Mary visits each of us with the same unbounded joy she brought Elizabeth in that ancient Advent. She teaches us the profound yet simple secret of her holiness: that she understood her life to be a sacred channel for God. As we prayerfully wait with our blessed Mother for Christ to be born, may we listen in the darkness for her maternal lessons.