

Romeo and Juliet was written early in William Shakespeare's career - probably in the early 1590s. It is a tragedy - meaning a play with an unhappy ending - and is most likely based on a couple of Italian stories that were popular at the time. Far from plagiarizing, however, Shakespeare expanded the plot and developed the supporting characters.

While much of the play is very quotable and recognizable - from "*But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?*" to "*O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?*" Later in this well-known dialogue in Act 2 Scene 2; the play's female protagonist - Juliet - says:

*What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.*

Yet names are important in many ways. Ask any *neimologist* - that is a person who studies how names affect the people who bear them. And, historically at least, names have meanings.

Sure, forty years ago people were naming their kids "Moonbeam" and "Starchild." But my own name, David, is Hebrew for "beloved." Other Hebrew names we may know are: John, which means "God is gracious;" or Joseph, which means "God will increase."

In today's Gospel, we are told that Our Lord,

*was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel
before he was conceived in the womb.*

And, in case you don't know, the name Jesus in Hebrew means "God is salvation."

In Saint Paul's letter to the Galatians, we hear that,

*When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son,
born of a woman,*

to ransom us - that is, buy us back from sin,

so that we might receive adoption as

the children of God. And "*as proof*" of this, our hearts cry out to God:

Abba, Father!

And we can call God our Father - which we will do just before we receive Holy Communion in this liturgy when we pray the prayer called the *Our Father* ... because we are His children, and heirs to the Kingdom of God.

Names are very powerful things. And how we use them can affect our relationship with someone. In the First Reading from the Book of Numbers,

God gives Aaron the priest instructions through his brother Moses on how the Hebrew priests are to “*invoke [God’s] name upon the Israelites, [so that God] will bless them.*”

And today, as well as being the “Octave Day of Christmas” - that is, the eighth day of Christmas (so you’d better corral those maid’s-a-milking if you’ve fallen behind) is the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

And far from being a trivial thing, in the year 431 in Ephesus - a council was held to determine if Mary should be called “Mother of Christ,” “Mother of Jesus,” or “Mother of God.” And the reasoning behind giving her so lofty a title is that she was indeed the one to give birth to Jesus Christ. Granted, He existed before her as the Eternal Word and Son of God the Father, yet “in time” (as opposed to eternity) she is indeed His mother.

By way of explanation - parents: do you ever find yourself talking to your spouse at certain times and saying “Guess what *your* son did today at school?” I guess you might say something like that if he got into trouble. Or maybe you might say, “Did you see *my* daughter at the dance recital?” And, you’d probably say that if she had a stellar performance.

But the reality is - you can’t give up your parental responsibilities when your kid does something wrong. And in the same way, you can’t claim one-sided credit for a child when they do something awesome. You are both - biologically speaking - the parents of the child.

In the same way, Jesus isn’t a fractured, jumbled, jigsaw puzzle of humanity and Divinity. Rather, He is God Incarnate - the “God-man,” if you will ... and not some sort of Frankenstein’s monster made out of spare parts ... but rather the ultimate culmination of God’s plan for our salvation.

And so, Mary is the Mother of the entire Person - both God and man ... the Mother of God ... outside of eternity.

And finally, as Saint Paul tells us in the Second Reading, we are God’s children by adoption ... then Mary is our Mother, too ... and Mother of the Church.

And so, on this the first day of the New Year, let us turn to Our Mother - the Mother of God - and relying on her powerful intercession - consecrate this New Year to her prayers ... and through her, consecrate our year and ourselves anew to her Son ... Our Savior ... Jesus Christ.