

## WHO IS IT IN THE CRADLE?

1. Probably most readers know who I mean by Britain's late 'Queen Mother'. It was a title which could only have been given to her *after* her eldest daughter had ascended the throne. Had the Queen Mother had a son, he would have become King and Princess Elizabeth (Britain's present Queen) would not have ascended the throne.

2. In a similar way, the Christians of the first four centuries had to be quite clear who Jesus Christ really was, before they could give his mother an appropriate title. The Church wrestled with the question of Jesus's humanity and his divinity, and the nature of the Trinity.

Arius, for instance, led the view that God was not Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Trinity, but one person, and that Jesus was just a human *adopted* by God. Mary, in his view, gave birth to a baby called Jesus who was no different from all the other Jewish babies named Jesus who were around at that period.

In the year 431, the General Council of the Church (convened at Ephesus) affirmed that Jesus was divine! (A remarkable truth to which we are so familiar!)

3. Up until this time Mary had been often called the 'Christ-bearer'. Now, with Jesus's divine status certain and proclaimed, the title was modified to 'God-bearer' (Greek: *theo-tokos*). This is always (but somewhat loosely) translated as '*Mother of God*'.

4. The title was to safeguard the truth of the Gospel against those who wanted to dilute it – who taught that Jesus was not God's ***Word become flesh***, but an ordinary man. (Such heresy demanded zero-tolerance, since it takes God to save us. If Jesus Christ was not God there is no Gospel – no salvation.)

5. Some Christians do not use the title, but at Christmastide it tells us – and more importantly tells others – who was in the cradle. GOD HIMSELF!

6. We have a Gospel to proclaim. Let's take every opportunity to do so in this dark world.

- If *Mother of God* is an unfamiliar term to us, let's use it if it will alert people to the fact of who is in the cradle.
- If it is a familiar term to us, let's remind ourselves that it is a statement about the Christ-child – a statement which unites Christians of all streams and traditions.

7. May we, this Christmastide, share Mary's vocation to bring Jesus into the world, so that through us Christians the non-Christian world will see with wonder the reality of *God with us*.