

MARIAN TEACHINGS REFLECTED IN THE TEXT OF THE CHRISTMAS CAROL

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Abstract

There is no such time as Christmas. We make presents, visit our relatives, cook special dishes, and sing carols. In this mood of merry, and happiness the carols are a way of transmitting to others this kind of feeling. The Christmas carols are both texts and songs that speak about the miraculous birth of Jesus. The Most Holy Virgin Mary has an important place in this time, mood, and texts. The carols speak to a great extent about both Jesus and Mary. What is more surprising is the fact that the information consisted in the carol is more personal than historical. The caroller speaks both in a personal and dogmatic manner about The Most Holy Virgin Mary.

Keywords: cult, Mariology, Theotokos, Christmas carols, Marian theology.

The Holy Virgin Mary is present today in each aspect of the orthodox faith, either together with her Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, or as Theotokos. But this has not always been the case; there is a continuous development of her worship in the history of the Church. We notice an increasing number of references to the Virgin Mary in the Christian literature along the first centuries, starting from just very few and vague allusions in the early century and ending with numerous and very explicit references in the late century.

In the first writings, the Pauline epistles, Mary is almost non-existing. Moreover, in the first gospel, the one according to Mark, we barely find her name (6:3); it is not until Matthew, that the references start increasing in number. To these we add the gospels according to Luke and John, the Acts and the Holy Fathers, which provide more and more details and information on her person¹. It was the

¹ Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Maria în evlavie și credința creștină primară*, transl. Lucian Filip, Doxologia, Iași, 2018, p. 23. The same idea is mentioned by Anca Manolache, „Nașterea din Fecioară”, in *Glasul Bisericii*, XLVIII (1989), no. 6, pp. 68-70. Cristian Bădiliță explains this fact on the backdrop of coldness and a distance between Christ and His biological family; His new family, the Christian one is the only one that matters; see *Teme, personaje, sărbători creștin și tradiționale românești*, Vremea, București, 2015, p. 240.

permanent awareness of Christians of her tearing motherly love and His special care for her that balanced this lack in the Church from the early century until today². This is why, in the case of Mary, the Christian literature filled and supplied the lacking biographical information and her worship gradually developed. Thus, 2000 years later, in comparison to the first centuries, we have a huge Christian literature that discusses the dogmas and the teaching about the Virgin Mary and a fully elaborated worship.

Moreover, due to the special veneration deserved by the one who gave birth to the Son of God and her large popularity, she was mentioned more often in the worship and the popular piety than in the Orthodox theology³. The Romanian Christian met her name in each aspect of his life, either happy or sad, in which he beseeched the help or the blessing of the Church. He heard her name in the Divine Liturgy (2nd Antiphon, the *Axion estin*, the little and great litany, etc.), in the Nicene Creed ('was incarnate by the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary, and was made man'), in the Nativity Kontakion ('Today, the Virgin') or everyday personal prayer. Then, in the Nativity worship and during the period between Nativity and Epiphany – the carol singing days – the Virgin is constantly present: on the Sunday before Christmas ('After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit' Matthew 1, 18); on the feast day ('And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him' Mathew 2: 11); on the second feast day ('Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word' Mathew 2: 13); and on the Sunday after Christmas ('Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel' Mathew 2:20). Nevertheless, since the prayers to the Virgin are part of the veneration that we bring to our Lord Jesus Christ, His worship remains connected to that of the Virgin Mary. This is why her presence in the Orthodox worship in general, and the Nativity one in special, is transferred to the text of the Christmas carol.

²Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului, ocrotitoarea”, in *Glasul Bisericii*, 1979, no. 9, p. 938.

³Dr. Antonie Plămădeală, „Maica Domnului în teologia și viața ortodoxă”, in *Ca toți să fie una*, EIBMBOR, București, 1979, p. 406.

Literature review

Among the theologians that have briefly dealt with the image of Theotokos in the texts of the Christmas carol are Fathers Ion Băjău, Dumitru Stăniloae, and Ilie Moldovan. The first one explains the Marian references in the text of the Christmas carols related to the Incarnation and states that they are an enhancement, a confirmation and an accomplishment of the Christological dogma, as well as an argument for the reality of the Incarnation⁴.

On the other hand, father Dumitru Stăniloae explains Theotokos' presence in the folk creations dedicated to her person, namely, in that she is 'the purest and the most opposite one of the "Impure" possessed by evil thoughts, [and] has in her – as the most united being with the Almighty God – the greatest power to free us from the power of the "Impure"⁵.

Father Ilie Moldovan has a textual approach and identifies three actions of the Marian echoes in the Christmas carols: 1) They emphasize the reasons why Theotokos is venerated in relation to the Nativity; 2) They highlight her presence in the redeeming work of her Son; and 3) They list the manner in which Theotokos intercedes for gaining the Kingdom gifts: the relief of torments, and a defender of the righteous people before the judgment throne⁶.

In addition to sporadic references such as the previous ones⁷, or the ones discussed in the study, two different authors have conducted specific studies to discuss the Theotokos' image reflected in the Christmas carols. Gheorghe Alexe concludes that the Marian information in the carols is in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Orthodox Tradition, and that behind the different hypostases in which she is illustrated lay beliefs and concepts that

⁴Pr. Ion Băjău, „Colindele de Crăciun – o predică vie a credinței noastre ortodoxe”, in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, L (1998), no. 1-6, p. 23.

⁵Dumitru Stăniloae, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român*, Elion, București, 2004, p. 180.

⁶Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Ilie Moldovan, Prof. Vasile Bebeșelea Sterp, *Ecouri liturgice din etnogeneza românilor*, Universității „Lucian Blaga”, Sibiu, 2006, pp. 77-78.

⁷Vezi și Aura Văceanu, *Elemente mitice precreștine și creștine în colinda românească*, Etnologică, București, 2016, pp. 172-174.

the Romanian Christian has about the created and the uncreated world. His working method consists in emphasizing the dogmatic teachings that emerge from the verses and organizing the references in four categories: the road to Bethlehem, the birth of Messiah, her role as an intercessor, and lastly, her role as a praying person before God. References to Theotokos remain so important that when he evaluates them, he states that, on their basis, her life could be re-written⁸. The second scholar, Ioana Gabriela Griga, concludes that in her cult, as it is reflected in the carols, you can see the inclination of the anonymous creator towards tenderness, that they bring to the fore the emblematic New Testament figure of the Mother of God and that she has a close and dynamic relationship with the nature which reacts to her presence, mood, and feelings. Her approach is to highlight the deep and primary perception of the simple and religious man towards the sacred⁹. Ioana's contribution consists in punctually reviewing various aspects common to the life of the Virgin Mary and the life of Christ.

The worship of the Most Holy Theotokos

Taking the example of veneration from the Church worship where we learn that: God honoured the Virgin Mary through prophets, the angel called her blessed at the Annunciation, Elizabeth worshiped her as the mother of her Lord, the people of the time blessed the breasts which fed Him, and, finally, Christ Himself honoured Her by being obedient to her as a child (Luke 2:51) and on the cross entrusting her to John, in turn, the Romanian Christian expresses his honour of Theotokos through the Marian cult and the verse of the carols. From the hymnographic richness of the troparions, kontakions, megalynarions, small paraklesis and songs, our ancestors extracted elements that deepened in the Christmas carols the Marian worship and made it a form of primary, simple and authentic living¹⁰. The carols present the attempt to provide

⁸Gheorghe Alexe, „Maica Domnului în colindele religioase românești”, in *Studii Teologice*, SN, V (1953), no. 9-10, p. 676.

⁹Ioana-Gabriela Griga, „Imaginea Fecioarei Maria în colinda românească”, in *Credința și credințele românilor*, Avram Cristea și Jan Nicolae (eds.), Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2011, p. 42.

¹⁰Gheorghe Alexe, „Maica Domnului în colindele religioase românești”, in *Studii Teologice*, SN, V (1953), no. 9-10, p. 667.

information related to the birth of Jesus such as the name of the host who receives Mary overnight (Father Christmas), the midwife who takes care of the Infant, the food, the clothes, and the first moments after the birth, etc. The popular conception has fully speculated the travel of the Virgin to Bethlehem weaving a series of adventures around it, according to its own perception of the difficulties and dangers that someone in her condition could have faced, in order to show us that none of us has ever suffered as much as she did¹¹. From the fact that they focus on a progressive gradation of adventures, it follows that the authors do not ask questions about how the conception took place because it is a secret locked under the lock of the deepest faith¹², but only about practical aspects of life, which they can analyse with their minds. By reason of this model of veneration, of her virtues, and her role in the Incarnation of the Son of God, carollers call her 'the most holy' or 'holy' and assign her appellations such as 'a helper', 'a praying person', and 'an intercessor'.

Precista – the most holy

The role played by the Virgin Mary in the incarnation of the Son of God, her intercession enjoyed by the faithful, and her help as the Mother of God, inseparable from her Son, led to a more special and greater veneration than that of the saints to be transferred into the texts of carols. It is the veneration or over-veneration that the Church attributes to her through the Orthodox worship as the first of the saints. The frequent use of the term *precista* (the most holy one), from the Slavonic *prčista*, has the value of an epithet dedicated especially to the Mother of God, with the meaning of immaculate, righteous and the purest. For example: 'Up there and down the way/ There is a white monastery, / *We carol, Lord, carols!* (chorus) / And who was inside it? / It was Mother *Precista* / With a little baby who kept crying'¹³. The carol offers her this attribute for her purity of the soul and body, stating: 'A Son was born / From a pure mother, /

¹¹ *Idem*, p. 662.

¹² *Idem*, p. 661.

¹³ Nicolae Băieșu și Leonid Răilean, *Colindatul de ceată bărbătească*, UNESCO Moscow Office, Tipografia Reclama, Chișinău, 2011, p. 117. See also 'It descended, it descended / The angel of the Holy Lord, / On the church tower, / At the icon of the *Precista*. / *Precista* asked him / What news do you bring us to the village? / I bring

From a sinless body'¹⁴. Here 'pure Mother' and 'sinless body' means both that the Virgin conceived without man and that after the angel's visit, she was filled with grace and given the opportunity not to sin. She had been cleansed from the ancestral sin¹⁵. Another example shows how Christ answers her questions, calling her 'the purest one': 'Good God said, / To the purest one He answered: / - Let them, mother, speak, / Let them, mother, carve me'¹⁶.

In some versions, the term 'the most holy one' is replaced by 'the most glorified one', for example: 'Late, in the evening / The most glorified one gives birth to a son / And when the Holy Mother gives birth / Flying angels come and sing'¹⁷, proving the intimacy and

you good news again: / That the Mother, Holy Virgin / The time has come for her to give birth / And walking from house to house, / ... / In the evening, late in night, / The most glorified one gives birth to a son ...' (Elisabeta Moldoveanu (ed.), *Colinde, Meridiane*, București, 1996, p. 9); 'But who guards the flock? / Who's guarding? / There is truly the *precista* Mother, / The *precista* Mother (chorus)' (Moldoveanu 1996, 48); „In the shade of the trees, / The sheep of the lord grazes, / Who is guarding them? / It is the *precista* Mother' (Gheorghe Breazul, *Colinde*, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, București, 1993, no. 53). 'Oh, most learned teacher, / The one who teaches the students, / Tell me, tell me what are six. / - Six, lilies of *precista*' (G. Breazul 1993, no. 221.)

¹⁴ Andreiu Bârseanu, *Cinci-deci de colinde*, Tipografia A. Mureșianu, Brașov, 1890, p. 8. See also "That the most eternal was born today, / The most powerful Messiah Christ. / From the Pure Virgin Mary' (G. Breazul 1993, no. 139); „It was born the much sanctified one, / The rising seed / From the dew of the Holy Spirit, / Very useful to us. / From the unworn furrow, / From the Most Pure Mary, / It is Jesus Christ, / The Lord useful to the world' (G. Breazul 1993, no. 223); but also the fragment of the star song 'That today she is clean, / The most innocent, / The Virgin Mary / She gives birth to Messiah' (Moldoveanu 1996, no. 69). 'Only *Precista*/ She did this: / She gave birth to Christ' (Alexiu Viciu, *Colinde din Ardeal, Datini de Crăciun și credințe populare*, Librăria Socec, București, 1914, no. 26). "That the Most Eternal One was born today, / The most powerful Messiah Christ. / By the Most Pure Virgin' (G. Breazul 1993, no. 139); „That He the sanctified was born, / The rising seed / From the dew of the Holy Spirit, / Very useful to us. / From the unworn furrow, / From the Most Pure Mary, / What is Jesus Christ, / Lord useful to the world' (G. Breazul 1993, no. 223); but also the fragment of the star song 'Today the pure one, / The most innocent one, / The Virgin Mary / She is giving birth to Messiah' (Moldoveanu 1996, no. 69).

¹⁵ *Învățătura de credință ortodoxă*, Doxologia, Iași, 2009, pp. 96-97.

¹⁶ Dan Octavian Cepraga, *Graiurile Domnului, Colinda creștină tradițională*, Clusium, Cluj, 1995, no. 46.

¹⁷ Sabin V. Drăgoi, *303 colinde cu text și melodie*, Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 1931, p. 148. See also „The most glorified and holy Mary, / Wanders tired” (Drăgoi 1931, pp. 147-148).

the veneration of the believers towards her, as she herself prophesied before Elizabeth: 'For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed' (Luke 1:48). This happiness of hers is one that she will enjoy in the whole future as it will permanently continue to be her special state, due to the permanent and special connection with Christ¹⁸. In carols, the attitude of exaltation leads to her resemblance to a beautiful star that comes from the heavens, from above: "Proudly a star is twinkling on heavens. / But that a star is not, / It is a beautiful mother, / Came, from heaven, from above, / To give birth to Jesus"¹⁹. She is considered to be coming from above because of the holy and chosen life she had and the preparation for her birth, both of which took place under God's providence. The carollers list her genealogy, saying: 'And today was born for us / The prophecy of long ago / That Christ will be born / The bright Messiah / From the Virgin Mary / And from the family of Abraham / From the fathers of David / And the Holy Spirit'²⁰. In the same theme of the light, she is called 'the most enlightened': 'A son was born, / A son without a father, / By a pure and the most enlightened mother'²¹. It is surrounded by an incomparable light because the Light of the world (John 8:12) dwelt in her, Whose voice, St. Gregory of Nazianzus wishes us – those who celebrate with him – to hear²².

¹⁸ Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului, ocrotitoarea”, in *Glasil Bisericii*, 1979, no. 9, pp. 942-943.

¹⁹ Pamfil Bilțiu și Gheorghe Pop, *Sculați, sculați, boieri mari!*, Editura Dacia, Cluj Napoca, 1996, no. 320.

²⁰ Timotei Popovici, *Colinde și cântece de stea*, 2nd ed., Andreiana, Sibiu, 2015, p. 75. See also 'From the Virgin Mary / From the tribe of Abraham / From the seed of David / From the Holy Spirit conceived' (Gheorghe Cucu, *200 colinde populare*, Societatea Compozitorilor Români, București, 1936, no. 10). 'Come you shepherds, / In Viflaim, / Let us shed Christ, / Who came on earth, / Incarnate by the Holy Spirit' (Bilțiu and Pop 1996, no. 330).

²¹ Cepraga 1995, no. 28.

²² Sfântul Grigorie de Nazianz, *Cuvântarea la Sfintele Lumini* apud Jan Nicolae, *Nașterea Domnului oglindită în predica patristică*, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2018, p. 221: 'Wherefore hearken unto the voice of God, which cryeth out to me, to him who is initiated into the mysteries of Christ, and who initiates others in such things, and may God make this voice to you also: I am the Light of the world (Jn 8:12). And therefore, come to Him and be enlightened and your faces will not be ashamed (Ps 34: 6), since they are marked with the true light.

The most elaborate proof of the cult of the Mother of God from carols to the Orthodox Romanians is found in a star song from Anton Pann's collection. He records a text used in the early 19th century in which she is praised as follows:

Oh, you the most praised / And most pure mother! / Unmarried lady / That the Saint One / God the Word, / And above the name / She gave birth in the world, / And you are our mistress, / Spring and fountain / Full of mercy, / Without diminution. / The living ones, / Sing to you with sweetness. / The Christian / And spiritual host, / Tire their thirst, / And escape them from evil, / With merciful love / And strengthen them. / And with your magnification, / The one in immortality, / Give them a crown, / With the Saints together (Pann 1892, 13).

The carollers glorify the Virgin Mary because she is the true Mother of God: 'You are the true Mother, / You gave birth to a son without a father'²³. She is called the Mother of God or Theotokos because she gives birth to the Son of God after the Holy Spirit descended upon her and enlightened her: 'A son was born, / A son without a father, / By a pure / And most enlightened mother'²⁴. Also, in this carol, she is quoted confessing Christ as her Son commanded and born by the work of God: 'I will give birth to the son of mine, / Commanded by God'.

However, her veneration does not surpass the veneration we bring to God, which is adoration or *latría*, nor is it like that of the saints which consist of *douλία* or simple veneration. Her veneration in the text of carols follows exactly the norms of the teaching of the faith and places her veneration on an intermediate level between the worship of saints and that of God – *hyperdulia*. These terms²⁵ 'the most glorified one', 'the most enlightened one', or 'the most venerated one', which gave '*precista*', define a special worship of

²³ Tit Bud, *Poezii populare din Maramureș*, Academia Română, București, 1908, pp. 68-69. See also: 'A Son was born / From a pure mother, / From a sinless body' (Birseanu 1890, 8); 'From a virgin, / Christ was born on earth' (Bella Bartok, *Rumanian Folk Music – Carols and Christmas Songs (Colinde)*, Martinus Nijhoff, Hague, 1975, no. 112m).

²⁴ G. Breazul 1938, no. 31.

²⁵ In addition to these terms, a collection of 72 names of the Mother of God entered religious folklore. This is an analogy of the apocryphal 'The 72 names of Christ, adequate canon of Christ' appeared in the 10th century and in our country in 1784. The work is called 'Seventy-two names of *Precista*. For prayer' and represents

the Mother of God. It should be noted that the text of the carol uses most of them, which gives it a fragrance of prayer.

The Holiness of Theotokos reflected in the Christmas carol

The carols do not omit to mention the holy characteristic of the Mother of God which is due to the fact that she gave birth to the Spring of holiness: 'It is the saint one, Jospheh, / And the saint one, Mary'²⁶. She was prepared from the Old Testament so that Christ be born of a sanctified virgin, robed for and directed only to God: 'From a sanctified virgin / Forever prepared for this mission / Gifted to God / For her great holiness. / With that holiness / She overwhelmed the hosts / The hosts of the powers above. / She was Jesus' mother / To the most enlightened one'²⁷.

An idea that we also find at Saint John Chrysostom, who states about the 'Ruler of holiness' that He could only be born from a pure and holy birth²⁸. According to Father Dumitru Stăniloae, in her "we have the mystery of culminating holiness"²⁹, holiness which is in a permanent state because Christ is her Son and she

a series of terms with which and through which the Christian can pray and address the Mother of God: 'Rod, Root, Holy Land, Noon, Stone, Olive, Ark, Chair, Door, Church, Mother, Bearer, Book, Bed, Pliers, Virgin, Mary, Confessor, Empress, Close Up, Wife, Whirlpool, Girl, Engaged, Illuminated Cloud, Sky, Sunrise, Sunset, Sunshine, City, Fulfilment, Place, Wool, Woman, Happy, All-In-One, Alas (?), Magi of God, Unquenchable light, Golden censer, Most pure, Without man, Close, Mother of God, Myrrh with good fragrance, Flower, unrotten, Holy of holies, Slab, Cover, Riai (!), Incense, Myrrh, Cherubim, the kingdom, the throne of the cherubim, Holy table, God-pleasing, True abode, Shadow, House of God, Holy Pasion, Hand, Horn in which is almsgiving, vestment, by God the king, with us God, is given to his servants God ... [names]". Moses Gaster, *Literatura Populară Română*, Minerva, București, 1983, p. 267. The collection added more names in time and was inspired by the tradition of the Church which adorned the cult with different terms that illustrate the attributes of the Mother of God.

²⁶ Cepraga 1995, no. 16.

²⁷ Popovici 2015, 270. See also 'That the Mother, the holy Virgin / The time has come for her to give birth' (Moldoveanu 1996, no. 9); but also, the fragment of the star song 'And the ancestors again, / Through the holy Virgin, / Again they renewed themselves' (Moldoveanu 1996, no. 80).

²⁸ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, „Cuvânt la Nașterea Mântuitorului nostru Iisus Hristos”, in *Izvoarele Ortodoxiei*, no. 5, București, 1941, p. 27.

²⁹ Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului în prologul evangheliei de la Luca”, in *Ortodoxia*, 1980, no. 3, p. 449.

remains inseparable from Him, starting with the first moments after birth: 'Mary, you are holy, / You are holy and you have been holy, / You fed Christ from your bosom, / Who brought us out of hell'³⁰.

Another carol text replaces the term 'holiness' with 'virginity' and makes them synonyms, being a reference to the virginity of the Mother of God before birth, during birth and after birth: 'You are a [virgin] girl and you were a [virgin] girl / And you gave birth to Christ'³¹. Thus, there is a direct parallel between the last two passages and the words spoken by the woman in the crowd from Luke 11, 27: 'Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!'. The Virgin gave birth, nursed, carried in her arms and showed Christ to the world, that is why she is the icon of the Holy Church who carries inside it and shows Christ to the world³².

Her state invokes the admiration of carollers: 'Glory to You, Holy Mother, / From the slaves who sing to you. / From Christ, the emperor, / Born into the world to give us profit'³³. They know that no one else has been so far away of being the slave of weaknesses as she was³⁴. She is the holiest of virgins and Theotokos: 'You did not know, you, Bethlehem, / With how much love she comes, / The holiest

³⁰ Bartok 1975, no. 128b.

³¹ George Breazul, *Colinde*, Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 1938, no. 67. See also 'O Mary, thou art holy, / Thou art holy, and holy thou have been, / Thou hast given breast to Christ, / Who brought us out of hell' (Bartok 1975, no. 128b); 'Up there in Jerusalem, / It's a resting chair. / But who sits on the chair? / Mother Precista sits in it / With a little son in her arms' (Bartok 1975, no. 84o); 'The Holy Mother breastfeeds him / The baby cries and sighs' (Pr. Nicolae Moșoiu, *Colinde din Țara Bârsei*, Tiparul Tipografiei Eparhiale, Sibiu, 1998, p. 68); 'The Holy Mother bent down / And breastfed the baby' (Moșoiu 1998, no. 188).

³² PF Daniel, *Comori ale ortodoxiei*, Trinitas, Iași, 2007, p. 396. Another direct parallel can be drawn this time between an excerpt from the Akathist of the Most Holy Mother of God – 'You received the Word in your womb and carried the One who bears all and fed with milk, which you are pure, the One who feeds all' –, the verse from Luke 11, 27, the previous fragment and the following one: 'Mother, Mother, you were holy / That you gave birth to Christ. / You are vested in the sun / And with the moon at your feet / You are vested in the fog / And you carry Christ in your arms' (Ilie Moldovan și Vasile Sterp Bebeșelea, *Ecouri liturgice din etnogeneza românilor*, Editura Universității „Lucian Blaga”, Sibiu, 2006, no. 25).

³³ Drăgoi 1931, no. 272.

³⁴ Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român*, Elion, București, 2004, p. 180.

of virgins, / And the Theotokos³⁵ – an equivalent for ‘blessed *are* you among women!’ (Luke 1:28).

In the following passage, besides she is called ‘holy’ she is also called ‘the most holy’ as we say in the liturgical litanies: ‘Dressed in a robe / The most holy Mary sleeps’³⁶. She is the most holy because she gave birth to the Holy One, being for Him a silver ladder on which to descend and incarnate: ‘On a silver ladder, / The Holy Lord descends’³⁷. Father Dumitru Stăniloae says that the Child in her womb lends to His Mother, through the Holy Spirit, from His characters, His face being reflected onto hers, as He is not passively inside of her³⁸.

This means that the holiness of the holy Lord was reflected onto her face and person thanks to the active way in which He was conceived in her. Thus, the Virgin Mary reached this culminating state of holiness through her life devoid of the enslaving temptations of the passions and by the grace of God, due to her direct union with God through unceasing prayer and the birth of the Son of God³⁹.

The Theotokos as a helper, praying person and intercessor

The carollers acknowledge her unceasing prayer power when they consider her helpful, a prayer person before and intercessor to her Son. The Mother of God is the sole refuge in this world of believers to reach and see Christ: ‘No one in the world hears us / Other Than the Mother of God / She hears us and answers: / - What is wrong with you, my children? / If you’re hungry, I will give you grapes. / If you are thirsty, I will give you wine. / - We are not thirsty, nor hungry / But we miss the green forest, / The green and beautiful forest. / Bend the branches down, / That we may see Christ’⁴⁰. The

³⁵ Ioana-Gabriela Griga, „Imaginea Fecioarei Maria în colinda românească”, in *Credința și credințele românilor*, Avram Cristea și Jan Nicolae (eds.), Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2011, p. 46.

³⁶ Moldovan and Sterp 2006, no. 28.

³⁷ Moldoveanu 1996, no. 87. See also ‘That Your Most Holy Son / Has risen from the grave’ (Gheorghe Breazul (ed.), *Colinde*, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, București, 1993, no. 210).

³⁸ Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului în prologul evangheliei de la Luca”, in *Ortodoxia*, 1980, no. 3, pp. 448-449.

³⁹ *Idem*, p. 446.

⁴⁰ Băieșu and Răilean 2011, no. 129.

greater is our love for Him, the greater is our knowledge of Him. From the fact that no one knows Him as well as His Mother, no one knows His goodness, no one understands Him, and no one loves Him as she does, believers take ground for His love for them. His work of salvation, which culminated in the sacrifice on the cross, is a proof of this love from which the Mother of God is not detached: ' - Let them carve me, mother, / Crucify me, / Let the world be saved / And give thanks to you!' ⁴¹. For all his deeds in the saving work of His Son, Christians are required to be grateful. This is especially because in Him, she 'loves with the feeling of Mother all those whom He unites with Himself as His brothers' ⁴². By helping us, praying, and interceding for us, she facilitates His love for us.

The Mother of God is the first and greatest praying person in the Kingdom of Heaven, in the heavenly Liturgy: 'Do you hear or not / The semantron in the skies and the service in the heaven / How she sang at semantron / And how she celebrated the service. / How God spoke / And how the Holy Mother prayed' ⁴³. Realizing the magnification of His divinity, she prays to Him more intensely than any other creature ⁴⁴. She is described praying to the sun, which is none other than the Sun-Christ, the Son of God: 'The Holy Mother came down on earth / She came down at a well / Having in her hands a bunch of flowers / Praying to the sun' ⁴⁵. She prays with words of praise to her Son as to God in every moment of His life, even in the moments of pilgrimage to Egypt and Nazareth after birth: 'The thirsty Virgin / Comes down to the spring, / She bends down to drink water / And prays to God / Ah, you, Jesus, Glory to You' ⁴⁶. She prays for people because of her close connection with Christ manifested in the most intense prayer of men.

The Theotokos is described in the carol as a quick helper in front of the hosts who receive the carollers: 'Boyar, you oh happy

⁴¹ Bârseanu 1890, no. 7.

⁴² Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului, ocrotitoarea”, in *Glusul Bisericii*, 1979, no. 9, p. 943.

⁴³ G. Breazul 1938, nr. 41.

⁴⁴ Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului, ocrotitoarea”, in *Glusul Bisericii*, 1979, no. 9, p. 944.

⁴⁵ Emanuel Cosma, *Colindele din Țara Lăpușului*, CD Press, București, 2010, no. 124.

⁴⁶ Băieșu and Răilean 2011, no. 120.

one, / May our Mother help you'⁴⁷. Her help is poured out on man but also the nature and has the power from the Son to help in the growth, development and flourishing of nature: 'Oh, the Holy Mary / Took the vestment / And ran at once / Over the white flourished fields. / On her foot prints / Flowers blossomed'⁴⁸. It is the same grace that the apostles inherited, who with their shadow or the touch of their garments could heal or even raise the dead. Thus, the very source from which the Source of grace is born could not have been not endowed with this grace. It helps people as well as nature due to its close union with the inexhaustible source of help, with the Son of God.

She is described as an intercessor, but not one whose intercession is added to that of Christ, but which is inserted into His. She intercedes for people because of her close union with the inexhaustible source of intercession, with the Son of God. In the carol, this quality emerges from the fact that she cries for the sins of the people: 'Mother *Precista* sits / With a yellow glass in her hand. / She keeps toasting and sighing, / The angels come and ask: / - «Why are you sighing dear Mother?» / - «But how can I not sigh, / That people when they get up, / They don't even wash their cheeks / And they go to the pub, / And curse God»'⁴⁹. The conception about Theotokos as an intercessor in the carol was vested and nourished by the tradition that at the Epiphany, in Moldova and Bukovina, women knot on the priest's cross a hemp stream from which it is said that, at the end of the ages, the Mother of God will make a net with which she will fish out of hell the souls of the sinners⁵⁰.

As an intercessor she also appears in iconography when in Voroneț monastery she is painted between the Infant and the magi, mediating between them and the Infant, between the world and God⁵¹.

⁴⁷ G. Breazul 1938, nr. 24. See also 'Be boyars, oh, you healthy, / May the peace of Christ be with you! / Joyful boyar, / May our Mother help you. / Cross in the house, cross in the house, / Stay, host, healthy!' (Băieșu and Răilean 2011, no. 113).

⁴⁸ Ioan Bocșa (ed.), *Colinde românești*, Media Musica, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, no. 1184.

⁴⁹ Drăgoi 1931, nos. 251, p. 258.

⁵⁰ See also Nicolae Cartojan, *Cărțile populare în literatura românească*, vol. I, Enciclopedică, București, 1974, p. 101.

⁵¹ Arhim. Pimen Zănea, „Icoana Nașterii Domnului Iisus Hristos și semnificația ei teologică redată în frescele bisericilor din nordul Moldovei”, in *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei*, LXV (1989), no. 4-6, p. 689.

As in the case of her quality of a helper, that of a mediator is exercised both on man and on nature. She is interceding for nature when the fauna and flora are 'asked' to help them: 'Only one sheep / Kneeled and prayed, / To mother *Precista*. / To get rid her of the hard winter'⁵². The caroller uses 'cute diminutives' like this one of 'măicuță [little mother]' as a sign of 'warm humanization' and because he feels that man is very close to God and Theotokos⁵³. Both humanly and naturally we notice that the Mother of God is a mediator in that she can offer a special help, greater than that of any saint, in obtaining salvation (subjective salvation) and it is by no means an intercession of reconciliation between God and man (objective salvation). Praying to Theotokos as an intercessor, Christians praise her, and by praising her, they pray to her as a mediator, who, with the power and will of God can help them and save them from sin or need.

'My mother' is one of the expressions that reveals the closeness of the Orthodox Romanians to the Mother of God in her capacity as a helper, praying person, and intercessor. For them, she is not only Theotokos but the mother of all human nature because, at the incarnation of the Lord, we became brothers of Christ and sons of God⁵⁴. She is the mother of all as God is the Father of us all: "God is their Father, / Mother is their *Precista*, / Who is for the entire world"⁵⁵.

Everything that is related to her or is inside of her is a mother feeling because she dedicated herself completely and without distraction only to her mission⁵⁶. That is why I consider that the series of marian terms that emerges from the carol worship dedicated to the Virgin Mary reflects the deep and special piety felt by the faithful towards her around this holiday. Terms such as 'Holy Virgin',

⁵² G. Breazul 1938, no. 127.

⁵³ Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român*, Elion, București, 2004, p. 150.

⁵⁴ Ioana-Gabriela Griga, „Imaginea Fecioarei Maria în colinda românească”, in *Credința și credințele românilor*, editat de Avram Cristea și Jan Nicolae, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2011, p. 45.

⁵⁵ Bilțiu and Pop 1996, nr. 305.

⁵⁶ Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului, ocrotitoarea”, in *Glasul Bisericii*, 1979, no. 9, p. 943.

'Măicuța Precistă', 'Dear Mother', 'Holy Mother', 'Holy Mary'⁵⁷, 'star', 'Beautiful Mother' are a proof in this sense. From all these terms it appears that the texts generally describe her state of holiness and the quality of mother of the Church. A similar thing happened in the 6th century when terms such as 'the one full of grace', 'the vine', 'the queen of the world', 'the staff of Jesse', 'the one not tempted by man', 'spring', 'new heaven', 'Merciful Mother', 'intercessor' reflected the level of popularity reached by the Marian piety in poetic homiletics⁵⁸.

The words with which she is praised, the arguments of her holiness, and her roles as a helper, a praying person, and an intercessor in relation to the members of the Church are the proof of a superhuman aspect meant to arouse the curiosity and full participation of the listener. Through these elements the hosts are captured to resonate with the events, to deepen in their hearts the mystery, and to praise God who made those miracles happen. The interweaving of the divine work with the human one is so masterful that the listener is not allowed to fall into any extremes. He is informed that God works with His power wonderful works and man with his goodwill and full openness becomes part of the first work with his work, like the Mother of God.

Inner and outer states describing the Theotokos Joy mixed with sadness

The Theotokos is described in joyful states, but not as often as in those of sadness. The only moment in which she is described as filled with joy is at the birth of her Son: 'Mary rejoiced / In her arms she embraced her Child, / She rejoiced greatly, / For He will

⁵⁷ In carol texts, most female names are 'Maria' or its derivatives (Marișca). With these names are mentioned the 'white girl', 'virgin girl', 'young woman', or 'virgin' who have as an example of virtue and purity the Virgin Mary and who is described by the caroler through the carol that quotes her name and qualities. Thus, we see that the girl worthy of the suitor is called by the name of Mary in honour of the Virgin who gave birth to the Saviour: 'But what do I wear on my horns? / Silver swing! But who sits in the swing? Mary sits, our sister, mother' (Băieșu and Răilean 2011, no. 88).

⁵⁸ Jan Nicolae, *Nașterea Domnului oglindită în predica patristică*, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2018, p. 191.

save the world. / Christ was born today, / Let him be useful for you⁵⁹. It is the same joy she feels at the Annunciation when she enters into communion and starts cooperating with God. This fragment seems an echo of the troparion of her birth.

For the creative poetic spirit, Nativity is not an event filed totally with joy, but one sprinkled also with sadness. The birth of the Saviour is celebrated along with the anticipation of His crucifixion, with the honouring of the first martyr on the third day of the feast, and with the remembrance of Herod's killing of infants the next day. That is why it does not surprise us to find in the carol states such as anger or mourning. At the birth of her Son, she weeps because: 'The child is put to sleep in a manger / And the most pure Virgin / Stays by Him upset / That in the city of Bethlehem / She was not welcomed. / She gave birth to her Son / In a manger, down, on ground'⁶⁰. Sadness to crying is just one step. She cries when the caroller considers that she sees herself among strangers and in an inappropriate place, not having the necessary things for the moments after the birth of a child: 'And His mother / Keeps complaining to the ox / That she gave birth in Bethlehem. / She has no linen diapers, / Nor water, nor swaddles, / Neither lamp, nor godmother'⁶¹.

But the most bitter tears are those shed during the Holy Passion of her Son. In these moments she felt the 'tremendously painful sharpness of the pain' and participated in the highest possible degree in His agony and experienced it as her end⁶².

The verses are expressive in this, saying: 'While she listens to the service / She is shedding heavy tears / That are as heavy as the stones / And as big as mites / And as hot as fires'⁶³. A specific carol describes Theotokos anticipating her Son's sufferings after the serpent, a symbol of the evil, brings with him a book in which she reads about them and about the fact that her Son will die because

⁵⁹ Anton Pann, *Versuri sau cântece de stea, vicleim și colinde ce se cântă la nașterea Domnului Nostru Iisus Hristos*, Steinberg, București, 1892, p. 53.

⁶⁰ Anca Manolache, „Statutul femeii în mesajul lui Hristos”, in *Altarul Banatului*, (1992), no. 7-9, p. 14. See also, „And the most pure Virgin / Stay by Him upset” (G. Breazul 1993, no. 159).

⁶¹ Moldoveanu 1996, no. 110.

⁶² Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului, ocrotitoarea”, in *Glasul Bisericii*, 1979, no. 9, p. 939.

⁶³ Popovici 2015, no. 229.

of the wickedness of this world: "A rather long serpent, / But on the head of the serpent / A book comes out. / Who reads the books? / Holy Mother reads it. / She read it all, / And tears start coming out"⁶⁴. The book she reads symbolizes the plan of man's salvation through the death of the Son of man about whom Simeon prophesies: 'a sword will pierce through your own soul also' (Luke 2:35), a prophecy that comes to fulfilment in carols. Her weeping continues when she learns that Judas has sold her Son: 'As soon as she caught news / That this is the case / She began to cry hard / Her heart started pounding in her blood'⁶⁵, when she saw how He suffered and, especially, when He dies crucified: 'Sighing and crying. / And the mother's tears / They are big, they are big like apples / And they are heavy like feathers'⁶⁶. Seen in this way, the lyrics prove a rising intensity with which she lives the sad moments of her life. Her sadness begins with the pain that she was not welcomed in the city, turns into crying for the lack of those needed at birth, the cry becomes one with heavy and hot tears at the time of crucifixion and culminates in a bloody heart of pain and tears as apples and heavy like feathers at the time of death on the cross. The result is the portrait of a true mother who lives the life of her Son as her own life.

We notice that the number of references is strongly inclined towards the moments of sadness in her life. The explanation for this so-called imbalance is that the Romanian people read, loved and remembered what 'overwhelmingly stirred or frightened them'⁶⁷. Here, the death of the Saviour and the way His Mother lived it was the thing that terribly frightened the caroller, making him go carolling with this kind of verses.

Outer states

Working on present information, the author of the carol describes Theotokos in three ways. An image is drawn of her in the Edenic context of the Kingdom of Heaven, another concerning her only-begotten Son and, lastly, the created world.

⁶⁴ Bartok 1975, no. 94b.

⁶⁵ Cepraga 1995, no. 49.

⁶⁶ Bartok 1975, nos. 96a, 112e, 113b.

⁶⁷ See also Moses Gaster, *Literatura Populară Română*, Minerva, București, 1983, p. 288.

In the heavenly liturgy described by carols, Theotokos is mentioned in two states: listening to the service in heaven and singing at the holy service surrounded by nine angelic hosts. These are symbolized in the following carol by nine young deacons: 'Up, alongside a sea, God / It is a great church, / Who sits in the church? / The Lord God sits / And nine young deacons. / But who sings the song? / The Holy Mother is singing it'⁶⁸. When she listens to the service, she is imagined by the caroller together with her Son: 'But who listens to the service? / The Holy Mother listens to them / With a little Son in her arms'⁶⁹.

The divine motherhood is transposed into a physical and affective setting, being described as an affectionate mother who embraces her baby: 'Mother, with rose-colored cheeks, / Embracing her Baby in her arms, / Caressing kisses / His sunlike cheeks'⁷⁰; and also kisses Him: 'She catches Him in her arms, / And kisses him, / On His holy cheek'⁷¹.

The texts that contain this motif are fewer, but very important from a dogmatic point of view because they represent a parallel of the patristic vision of Sts. Cyril of Jerusalem, Roman the Melodist and the following hymn verse: 'The Virgin kept Him in her arms, prostrated before Him, kissed Him like a mother and said: "Oh, my sweet Son"'⁷². Like all affectionate mothers, she rocks the Infant: 'The holy mother rocked the baby / And with her mouth she sang

⁶⁸ Moldovan and Sterp 2006, no. 8.

⁶⁹ Cepraga 1995, no. 45. See also „Good Mother *Precista* / Listens to what she was listening to. / To go forth she could not to, / Because her Son in her arms was crying” (Cepraga 1995, no. 46).

⁷⁰ Moldoveanu 1996, no. 9.

⁷¹ Bartok 1975, no. 86. Theotokos is an example for us to follow, not only by kissing His cheek as devotion, but also by kissing His hands, as in the following star song: „The Child stretches out His hands, / The Holy Mother kisses them / We kneel down on ground / And kiss them” (Moldoveanu 1996, no. 90).

⁷² Matins, 8th song, *December menologion*, Tipografia Sfintei Mănăstiri Cernica, 1927, p. 360. Roman Melodul, *Imne*, ed. rom. Sabin Preda și Cristina Rogobete, București, Bizantină, 2007, pp. 92-93: 'I live in the manger / for your people, / and from your breasts / now, of my own free will, I feed on milk; / In my arms you carry Me / for their sake. / On Me, Whom the Cherubim cannot look at Me, / behold, You see Me, You carry me in your arms / and as a son you caress me, / The one full of grace'.

to him". The rocking is not without the specific songs: 'When the little child slept / When the baby slept / The Holy Mother sang to him / The mother sang to him'⁷³. There are also touches full of affection: 'The son cries and sighs, / His mother caresses him: / - Hush, son, hush darling! / And your mother will give to you / Two apples, two pears'⁷⁴. When the child is tired, the Virgin Mary takes care of Him and carries Him in her arms when He can no longer walk: 'When the son got tired / His mother took him in her lap / And carried him further'⁷⁵. The affectivity in the carols is meant to illustrate the deep maternal relationship that the Virgin had with the Baby. She kisses and caresses the cheek of the One through whom the world was created, carries in her lap the One who will carry on his shoulders the lost sheep and rocks and sings to the One who will save the world.

For the carollers, the Mother of God was in a permanent dialogue with her Son, either by asking him questions: 'The mother started asking him: / - What did you see? / Oh, my mother, what I did see / Up there, mother, at sun rise ...'⁷⁶; or calming Him down: 'Hush, my Son, cry no more / 'cause I bathe you in sweet milk / And I wrap you in a coat / And in a lamb bun / The Holy Mother wraps you / Also with silk sticks / Braided in eight and six'⁷⁷. And in a star song she appears sewing at the window: 'Who is the sewing at the window / A shirt that beautiful. / *Cetinișă, cetioară dragă [chorus]*. / It is Christ' mother'⁷⁸. Another activity is that of Romanians to spin the thread from which they will weave the baby's swaddle. The virgin is described doing this for the Holy Child: 'With a white distaff on her waist, / Green silk flax / With six braids, / On a silver rifle / She pulls out a golden thread. / She makes swaddles for

⁷³ Moldoveanu 1996, no. 48. The Theotokos is also described singing at the communion table in the kingdom of heaven: 'In the middle of the field, / There is a silk table, / Made of three golden threads. / Who is sitting at the table? / The Holy Mother is and sings' (Bartok 1975, no. 347).

⁷⁴ Bartok 1975, no. 84r.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, no. 105t.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, no. 97a.

⁷⁷ Moșoiu 1998, no. 78.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, no. 49.

Christ'⁷⁹. They portray her as a perfect weaver. This feature of she is found described in icons and the apocrypha writings where the Virgin Mary weaves porphyry and purple for the iconostasis of the temple.

Except for the carols that use the motif of the loss and search for the Son, in all the others the Virgin Mary is described together with her Son. For example, in the following moments: after the birth: 'The black night, the endless hours, / The little mother sits next to the infant'⁸⁰; during the ran away: "The most glorified and holy Mother / Wanders tired / Through cloudy orchards / Under the trees with dry branches'⁸¹.

The clouded orchards anticipate here the resurrection of nature through the Nativity of the Infant Christ and the clouded wool of Gideon (Judges 6: 36-40). The Old Testament reference is strengthened by a number of carols in which, in parallel with the Nativity and as a result, dew descends over the oxen in that stable.

In most Marian carols one can identify a constant struggle between good and evil. Christians put on Theotokos' behalf their calculations about plants or animals, leaving to observe the sympathy or antipathy towards their qualities, respectively their defects. That dichotomy based on the goodwill and hostility of people, creatures and plants, on faith and unbelief or on whoever receives the coming of Christ into the world and whoever tries to prevent it leads to two consistent consequences: blessing or curse⁸². For example, infants who come to worship the Nativity of the Son of God receive the Theotokos' blessing and that of God: 'When Jesus is born, / Babies, come to see him. / The Holy Mother says: - Blessed be you little children, / By me, by My Son, / Even more by God, / By me, by the Holy Son / Who was on earth'⁸³. She can bless because she herself

⁷⁹ Gheorghe Dem Teodorescu (ed.), *Poesii populare române*, Tipografia Modernă, București, 1885, pp. 31-32. See also 'The Mother of God sits down. / What is she doing? / She is making a collar, / A collar for her son. / When she finishes it, / She vests her son' (Bartok 1975, no. 86).

⁸⁰ Moldoveanu 1996, no. 110.

⁸¹ Drăgoi 1931, pp. 147-148.

⁸² Dan Octavian Cepraga, *Graiurile Domnului: Colinda tradițională creștină*, Clusium, Cluj, 1995, p. 33.

⁸³ Bilțiu and Pop 1996, no. 320.

is blessed by God. The blessing she gives is in the light of the role she had in the incarnation of the Saviour.

In carol texts, the poplar, the horse and the sheep⁸⁴ (or the lamb because of the trot) are cursed by the Virgin Mary because, due to the rustling of the leaves and the chew, she cannot rest and give birth. The horse (in other variants mares or foals) is cursed because of his restlessness: 'You horses be cursed / By me, by God, / Stronger by my son! That, you horses, have no satiety / Only on the day of Ascension / And then only an hour'⁸⁵. In the case of the curse, a prerogative of Christ is transferred to it, because she is not described cursing in any writing, but only full of compassion. Christ cursed the barren fig tree (Mk 11: 14 and 21) and in the apocrypha 'Syriac Infancy Gospel' Christ curses a child who pushes Him. However, the oxen are blessed because in their manger one can rest and assist her, warming the place and creating an environment conducive to birth: 'Be blessed you oxen / And have your horns of golden colour'⁸⁶ or 'Be blessed you oxen / In an hour have your food'⁸⁷. Through such verses, Christians manifest all their cosmic conceptions of plants and animals⁸⁸. This proves to us a special connection that the Mother of God has with the whole created world and through her and the Christians in their turn.

The carols that express the benevolence and hostility of the animals are the variants that most faithfully reproduce the event of the Nativity as it is related in the Gospels and the apocryphal writings. We notice that when the Mother of God curses or blesses, she does not do so in her name but always with reference to God or His Son. This is because all the sacramental works in the Church are done

⁸⁴C. A. Rosetti states that the curse of the sheep is an apocryphal influence and not a popular one because in the popular conception, the sheep has a positive image. C. A. Rosetti, „Colindele religioase la Români”, in *Analele A.R., Memoriile Secțiunii Literare*, Tom XL, 1920, p. 34. However, we find some variants of this type of carol in which the ox and the sheep are cursed because they do not let the Baby be born and the horse is the one blessed for creating a favourable environment; see Bartok 1975, no. 105k.

⁸⁵Bartok 1975, no. 105 g-k.

⁸⁶Teodor Pamfile, *Sărbătorile la români, Crăciunul*, Academia română, București, 1914, p. 120.

⁸⁷Cepraga 1995, no. 22.

⁸⁸Gheorghe Alexe, „Maica Domnului în colindele religioase românești”, in *Studii Teologice*, SN, V (1953), no. 9-10, p. 663.

by invoking God. Thus, in all such carols the deep connection that exists between the Virgin Mary ready to give birth and the flora and fauna that surrounds her is emphasized. As in the case of the evergreen fir tree, the ox has a positive status. Probably, this could explain the reason why the ox does not need to eat continuously and this episode was invented to explain why it does not need to eat too much.

Conclusion

The lack of information about Theotokos existing in the primary literature is completed by carols. This Marian cult, as it is expressed in the carol texts, inscribes the carols in the Orthodox tradition, teaching, and spirituality inherited by the Church from the apostolic time.

In carols, Christians profess the belief that the One who was born of her saved them because he was and is, at the same time, God and perfect man. For them, she is the only one who has the unique quality of being the Mother of God. The Marian references of the carol concern the teaching about the Nativity of Christ from the perspective of the Mother of God. The Marian references in the carols prove that behind them there are three Marian foundations: the quality of the Virgin Mother of God, her everlasting virginity, and the power of depository of God's grace. They rearrange the dogmatic aspects in a completely new image, the same in essence but different in form. Marian texts focus on proving the human and divine nature of Christ.

Thus, there is a permanent intertwining and interdependence between the teaching of Christ and that of the Mother of God in the text of carols. This is the case especially on the salvation of man. If the carol texts make Eve the main culprit for the fall of man, they make Theotokos the most important character. She is the one through which Christ brought us salvation. Now, we can no longer expect to find the Virgin Mary described in the procession of pagan goddesses nor as a myth or extension of some pagan myth as some ethnographers have considered.

The carols interpret the agitation and the journey made by the Virgin Mary with Joseph to the place where the census took place. The carols speculate certain aspects related to his mental and physical states. Yet, sometimes the additions are apocryphal, which makes the doctrinal or historical authenticity relative. Aspects emphasized by the carol regarding the Mother of God: the paradox that is found in her, although she is a Virgin, she gives birth to a Son, the Son of God incarnate.