

August 15, 2021

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary

Luke 1:39-56

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever." Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Background:

The feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary has its own readings for both the vigil Mass (Chronicles 15:3-4, 15-16, 16:1-2, Corinthians 15:54b-57, Luke 11:27-28) and the Mass on the feast itself (Revelation 11:19a, 12:1-6a, 10ab, Corinthians 15:20-27, Luke 1:39-56). When the feast falls on a Sunday, like it does this year, the Ordinary Sunday readings are omitted. The focus here is the gospel text for the Mass during the day.

The gospel text for the feast has two parts, Mary's visit to Elizabeth, and Mary's prayer, often called the Magnificat. Luke does not describe Mary's greeting to Elizabeth, which suggests that it is an ordinary greeting of the day. But the response is very unusual. The yet-unborn child in Elizabeth's womb leaps with joy. Luke's community would remember King David who leapt for joy before the Ark of the Covenant. For both, it is being in the presence of God that is the source of their joy. Elizabeth, for her part, recognizes the holiness of Mary and the child in her womb, and she too praises God.

Mary's Magnificat has parallels in Hymns of Miriam (Exodus 15: 1-18), Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10), and Judith (Judith 16: 1-17). Included here is Hannah's Hymn.

"My heart exults in the LORD, my horn is exalted in my God. I have swallowed up my enemies; I rejoice in my victory. There is no Holy One like the LORD; there is no Rock like our God. Speak boastfully no longer, nor let arrogance issue from your mouths. For an all-knowing God is the LORD, a God who judges deeds. The bows of the mighty are broken, while the tottering gird on strength. The well-fed hire themselves out for bread, while the hungry no longer have to toil. The barren wife bears seven sons, while the mother of many languishes. The LORD puts to death and gives life; he casts down to the nether world; he raises up again. The LORD makes

poor and makes rich, he humbles, he also exalts. He raises the needy from the dust; from the ash heap he lifts up the poor, to seat them with nobles and make a glorious throne their heritage. He gives to the vower his vow, and blesses the sleep of the just. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he has set the world upon them. He will guard the footsteps of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall perish in the darkness. For not by strength does man prevail; the LORD'S foes shall be shattered. The Most High in heaven thunders; The LORD judges the ends of the earth, Now may he give strength to his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed!" (1 Samuel 2:1-10)

Mary's hymn acknowledges the wondrous the deeds of God, and that they are clearly acts of a great and powerful God. The fact that God has singled out the lowly makes it even more evident that it is God who is the source from which these things flow. Mary begins by focusing on the things that are being done within her, and then moves on to things God has done in the past. Mary understands God's actions in her life to be part of a consistent pattern of God reaching out in compassion to Israel.

Reflection Questions:

1. Is your image of Mary more often the young woman in the gospel today, the frantic mother looking for her lost son, the sorrowing mother at the cross, the old woman who is the faithful mother and first disciple of Jesus, or the queen of heaven?
2. Have you prayed with a different image of Mary at different moments in your life?
3. Mary's greeting to Elizabeth might have been ordinary for the day, but it had wonderful effect for Elizabeth and the child she was carrying. Do you find that ordinary events of the day can also have wonderful effects on you?
4. What in your relationship with God brings you a sense of profound joy? How does that joy find expression?
5. Luke says that Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit when she makes her profession of faith: "'Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.'" Do you sense that you too are filled with the Holy Spirit when you make your profession?
6. Can you take some time to talk to God about this feast of Mary and what it means for you and your personal relationship to God or Mary?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple.
A great sign appeared, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth.
Another sign appeared; a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth.
Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth.
She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod.
Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have salvation and power come, and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of his Anointed One."

The queen takes her place at your right hand, arrayed in gold of Ophir.
Hear, O daughter, and see; turn your ear, forget your people and your father's house.
So shall the king desire your beauty; for he is your lord.
They are borne in with gladness and joy; they enter the palace of the king.

Brothers and sisters: Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through man, the resurrection of the dead came also through man.
For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life,
but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ;
then comes the end, when he hands over the Kingdom to his God and Father,
when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power.
For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.
The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for "he subjected everything under his feet."

Mary traveled in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.
And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?
For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.
Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."
And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me
and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever."
Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Excerpts from Revelation 11:19; 12:1-6, 10; Psalm 45:10-16; 1 Corinthians 15:20-27; and Luke 1:39-56

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for August 15th, the feast of the Assumption of Mary, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel from Luke tells of another blessed event, Mary's visit to Elizabeth when both were with child. Elizabeth declares that Mary is "the mother of my Lord," and Mary tells Elizabeth, "God has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations shall call me blessed. The Almighty has done great things for me." The other readings also make reference to a woman of greatness, about to bear a son who will be king, the queen at the Lord's right hand, and to Christ reigning until death is put to an end. In the first reading from Revelation, the woman's child is caught up to God and his throne, and she herself goes to a place prepared by God. Psalm 45 declares, "The queen takes her place at your right hand, arrayed in gold." In the second reading, from the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "Christ will hand over the Kingdom to his God and Father when he has put all enemies under his feet. Christ, the firstfruits, has been raised. The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

Joe