

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Gospel: Luke 1:39-56

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

REFLECTION 1: MARY, MOTHER AND GUIDE

From his cross, Jesus entrusted his mother into the care of St. John. Legend has it that John left Jerusalem with Mary and took her to the city of Ephesus on the shores of the Aegean Sea. There he provided her with a modest dwelling and some believe that it was from this location that Mary was assumed into heaven.

On November 1st 1950, Pope Pius XII declared: 'The Immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever virgin, when the course of her earthly life had concluded, was taken up body and soul into heaven'. Mary's original home, destroyed by earthquakes, was rebuilt on its foundation and is now a shrine. I was privileged to celebrate mass there in 1974. The Church sees Mary's image in the Book of Revelations as 'The woman robed with the sun, the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of 12 stars.' (Rev 12:1)

Today we interrupt our readings from St. Luke's Gospel, about Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and the continuing instructions to his disciples along the way. This happy interlude allows us to pause and celebrate a woman who stands out as a model of service/discipleship for all of us. Luke in particular presents Mary in a way that encourages us to sidestep the sentimentality that has accrued to her through the ages. In Luke and the Acts of the Apostles we encounter a woman who is at once a mother and our

guide. Mary is mother not only in a sense that she agreed to give birth to Jesus, but she also allowed herself to be inspired and directed by the living word of God in all that she said and did. Mary agreed to 'mother the Word', to ponder it and to bring it to birth in her words and deeds.

For both of these mothering roles Mary is blessed, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you...blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.' (Luke 11: 27/28) Through the centuries Mary's role as mother and guide has grown among the people of God. Many Christian denominations are increasingly rediscovering the pivotal role of Mary in the work of our redemption, delighted to find a feminine figure in the Bible worthy of honour and admiration. Mary represents the bridge spanning the Old and New Testament in that she embodies the spirit of the Jewish 'anawin' (the remnant or God's least ones), whose strength and survival lay in their trust and dependence on God.

It is Mary's privilege to sing the Magnificat, a song composed of an amalgam of texts from the Hebrew Scriptures, all of which are shown as coming to fulfilment in Jesus. Mary's song also anticipates what Jesus will preach regarding wealth and power. Some may covet both but it has no lasting value in God's eyes. Rather it is those who are poor and lowly who are God's cherished ones.

Through Simeon in the Temple, Luke would announce that Mary would be the humble participant in that saving yet sorrowful act, 'your own soul a sword shall pierce' (Luke 2:35). Mary was inconspicuous but nevertheless present at every moment in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and she remained present to his disciples in the post-Easter era. In her capacity of mother and guide, Mary continues to be a living resource for all of us.