

twice tells as we reflect upon these strange events, that Mary “was keeping all these things to herself, giving careful thought to them in her mind”. This, I suggest, is Luke’s “rule for reading the Gospel”; he wants us to imitate Mary’s contemplative approach, so that these beautifully told stories (including the visit of the shepherds and the disappearance of Jesus in Jerusalem) take us deeper into the mystery of who Jesus is and of how we are to respond to him.



She is mentioned twice in John’s Gospel, though not by name, at the beginning (2:1-12) and the end (19:25-27) of his ministry. In the first of these, the marriage feast at Cana, she tells the servants (and us), “whatever he tells you, do”; and that is her function for Christians. In the second episode, at the foot of the cross, she is part of Jesus’ founding of a new dynasty, along with the Beloved Disciple. We watch with admiration as the disciple “took her to his own”. Finally we see her at the heavenly liturgy in the book of Revelation (11:19 – 12:18), in her birth agony and menaced by the dragon that waits to kill her child. But God is in the story, and so she and the child escape.

A POWERFUL VOICE

So where do Catholics get the doctrines of the immaculate conception and the assumption? The first is simply a matter of the necessary holiness of the Mother of God, of the all-important humanity of Jesus, and of the transfiguration of humanity back into the divine likeness. The second is a matter of the effect on all humanity of Jesus’ victory over death (and the very odd fact that no city ever claimed to possess Mary’s bones). And Mary still speaks powerfully to Christians today.

Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon beneath her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

FIRST READING Apocalypse 11:19; 12:1-6. 10

PSALM Psalm 44

RESPONSE **On your right stands the queen, in garments of gold.**

- The daughters of kings are among your loved ones.
On your right stands the queen in gold of Ophir.
Listen, O daughter, give ear to my words:
forget your own people and your father’s house. **R.**
- So will the king desire your beauty:
he is your lord, pay homage to him.
They are escorted amid gladness and joy;
they pass within the palace of the king. **R.**

SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 15:20-26

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Alleluia, alleluia!
Mary has been taken up into heaven;
all the choirs of angels are rejoicing.
Alleluia!**

GOSPEL Luke 1:39-56

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**All generations will call me blessed,
for he who is mighty has done great things
for me.**

Next Sunday’s Readings:

Isaiah 22:19-23
Romans 11:33-36
Matthew 16:13-20

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MARY IN THE BIBLE

At this time of the year Catholics celebrate the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and we may find ourselves nervously asking whether we have done something that is not really “scriptural” with the Mother of God, whom we call “Our Lady”. The key thing to remember is that everything we say about her always points in two directions: she teaches us the truth about God, and she teaches us the truth about humanity. Catholic teaching about Mary is never about Mary herself. What we say about Mary is always a matter of fighting for the true humanity of Jesus; and if you get Mary wrong, you will not get Jesus right.

Mary is a creature, otherwise her son could not be a human being; but being the Mother of God transfigured her human nature. She is not a “goddess”, but she is utterly obedient to God (otherwise how could she have been Mother of God?).

There is very little, when you come to look at it, about Mary in the New Testament; but equally there is not a great deal about the doctrines of the Trinity and of what in Greek is called the *homoousion* (literally “same in essence”, describing Jesus’ relationship to the Father), and yet Christians of every flavour hold these two doctrines. The main point, however, as noted above, is that all texts about Mary are all about Jesus and all about humanity. In Galatians 4:4 we read that Jesus is “born of a woman”; here the point is simply that Jesus shares our humanity. Then there is Mark 3:20-35, where Jesus redefines the idea of family; the focus is all on him, rather than his mother. Matthew has three references (1:16. 18; 2:11); the main point seems to be the shocking discovery that Mary is pregnant, when she and Joseph are only engaged. But her pregnancy, Matthew firmly assures us, is “by the Holy Spirit”.



In Luke we have a little more to go on; there is, first, the beautiful picture of the annunciation, followed immediately by the story of the encounter with Elizabeth, and Mary’s deeply subversive song of the Magnificat. Most important of all, though, is what Luke

How to read the Bible



As we celebrate the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Fr Nicholas King SJ considers what the Bible has to tell us about Mary.

16 AUGUST 2020

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

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DIVINE OFFICE WEEK IV