

Feast of Mary

Mother of our Lord

a sermon preached on the

Feast of Mary

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at

St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

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Lection: Revelation 11:19-12: 6,10; Luke 1: 46-55

To fully appreciate the wider picture of the Magnificat (Mary's Song of Praise) one has to go back to the scene setting of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, her cousin, who was also pregnant. Elizabeth would also give birth to a boy, to be named John, who would be the messenger, the forerunner, to Mary's child Jesus, the Messiah. Luke illustrates the mood of their meeting as a joyous celebration of God's work and timing. In this celebration of Elizabeth and Mary, the word "blessed", which tells of God's giving, is heard three times.

The first blessing: "Blessed are you among women", celebrates what God has done in the choosing of Mary. In the second blessing: "Blessed is the fruit of your womb", Elizabeth celebrates how the grace bestowed upon Mary will be a divine fruitfulness for all. The third blessing: "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her, will be accomplished", tells us of the free and total co-operation of Mary with God, and how great was the depth of her faith.

Mary was chosen by God to be the personal way of God's journey into our lives, to embrace us in healing and uplifting hands. St Francis of Assisi encouraged prayer to Mary because she was chosen to give birth to the Messiah and in so doing, the Son of God became our brother, our healer, our redeemer. Mary, in her free co-operation with God, is central to that story.

Elizabeth discerned the blessedness of that day when Mary came to visit her. Even the unborn child in her womb leapt for joy. This whole celebration prompted Mary to burst into song.

Mary and Elizabeth shared a dream that one day all that the prophets had said would come true. Like so many Jews of their time, Mary and Elizabeth studied the psalms and the scriptures which spoke of mercy, hope, fulfilment, revolution, and of God overcoming the evil of their world. Mary poured all of that into her song, like a rich, foaming drink that comes bubbling over the edge of the champagne bottle and spills out all over the place.

When Mary said "From now on all generations will call me blessed", she was not saying so out of pride. On the contrary. She was recognizing and accepting the gift God had given her. If Mary had denied her incredible position, she would have been throwing this blessing back at God.

Pride is refusing to accept God's gifts or taking credit for what God has done. Humility is accepting the gifts and using them to serve God.

What a responsibility for a young mother; bearing the Son of God, and having to bring the child up, with the knowledge that he was not only fully human, he was also fully divine.

There is something about the compassionate devotion of God, that can only be realised by the selfless and unique heart of a mother. The total unconditional love with which a mother holds her crying baby, strokes the child's hair, wakes up every night to comfort and soothe the troubled dreams and overlooks yet another tantrum. It is a mother's smile, her touch, her voice, that awakens love in the heart of a child. The small

baby is caressed and lured outside itself, by the playful fingers and words of a devoted mother.

We will never again be as close to anyone, as we were to our mother when we were children. We will never again be as dependent on anyone, as we were on her. She literally was our lifeline. Next to God, we owe practically everything we are to her.

Mary was all this, and more. Not only was she the mother of a son, she had the added responsibility, as the mother of God's son. She played a significant role at all the vital moments of Christ's earthly life and divine mission: at his birth; at his first miracle; and at his death. She was filled with grace, under the sacred shadow of the Holy Spirit. It was at her coming, that her cousin Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Mary's life is well summarised in the two devotions – "The Seven Sorrows of Mary" and "The Seven Joys of Mary" – also known as the Franciscan Rosary.

The sorrows -

1. Prophecy of Simeon – when she presented her divine child in the temple and heard from Simeon that a sword of grief would pierce her soul.
2. Flight into Egypt – when she was forced to flee into Egypt with Joseph and Jesus to escape the cruelty of King Herod.
3. Separation from Jesus – when in returning from Jerusalem she realised Jesus was not with them and she wept for three days until he was found in the temple.
4. Meeting Jesus on the Road to Calvary - seeing Jesus all bruised and beaten, carrying his cross, and watching him fall down.
5. Crucifixion and Death of Jesus – standing by as he was lifted up on the cross, and blood streaming from his wounds.
6. Our Lord is Taken Down from the Cross – her sorrow when Jesus was taken down from the cross, and she received him into her arms.
7. Jesus is Buried in the Tomb – following his body, as it was carried by Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus to the sepulchre, enclosed there, and hidden from her sight.

The joys -

1. The Annunciation - Mary's joy springs from her deep humility – "He looked down and kindly on his handmaid". Mary's reply – "Be it done to me, according to your word".
2. The Visitation – the joy of Mary's charity blossoms as she hastens to help Elizabeth. No sooner does she possess Christ than she begins to share him with others.
3. The Birth of Jesus – Mary's joy in the divine riches from heaven is now possessed by human beings on Earth. The joy of poverty lies in seeing where true riches lie.
4. The Adoration of the Magi – the joy of Mary extends to us, the Gentiles, who are the newly adopted children of God.
5. The Finding in the Temple – Mary experiences the joy of finding Jesus again, after three days searching for him, as he was listening to the teachers and asking questions of them.
6. The Appearance of Christ to Mary after the Resurrection – the joy of Mary's faith blooms when her strong faith on Calvary is rewarded.
7. The Assumption – the joy of her hope is fulfilled beyond her expectations.

Let us Pray:

Loving Mary, Mother of our Lord, you trusted God with your whole life, when you said – "Let it be done to me" – show us how to give birth to Jesus, in a world so in need of His love and forgiveness.
Amen.

References: Luke 1: 46-55
S. O'Flynn; D. O'Leary; Foley/Weigle/Normile

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