

Our Faith

In the first three verses of Mary's song, the Magnificat, Our Lady gives thanks for God's action in her life. When she says 'my soul doth magnify the Lord' she wants to glorify and make great the name of the Lord, who has chosen to work through a lowly virgin who will from now on be referred to as blessed, because of her willingness to embrace the divine plan. In verse four we are reminded of God's mercy to all those who reverence Him. The word fear doesn't mean that we are to be scared of God, but that we don't try and tame Him into something that suits us. The very thought of God ought to make us tremble with holy joy.

Then we hear how God turns upside down the values of the world. The humble and meek are lifted up and those who mighty are put down. The hungry are those who longed for the coming of the Messiah and those who hunger for Him today. The condemned rich are those who have worldly notions of power and wealth and think they have no need of God's Messiah.

The final line is a line of real joy. 'He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel: as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever'. All those centuries ago God made an agreement with Abraham that He would guard, bless and cherish His people, and through his descendants all the nations of the earth would bless themselves. This blessing is now fulfilled with the impending birth of the Messiah. Everything longed and hoped for in the Old Testament is now to be fulfilled.

The positioning of the Magnificat at Evensong is very deliberate. It comes straight after the Old Testament lesson where it celebrates that everything hoped for in the world of the Old Testament has now been fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah. Thus it is the perfect introduction to the New Testament lesson. Mary, as the first to say yes to Jesus Christ, is the first member of the church, and the Magnificat has always been understood as celebrating not only her own blessings but that of the whole Church in Jesus Christ. When we sing or say it we give thanks for the mystery of God becoming man, the Word of God taking our human flesh, and we give thanks for the blessings of the Gospel. Why not incorporate Mary's wonderful song of praise into your daily prayers?

Prayers to Remember

The Magnificat

My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For he hath regarded: the lowliness of his handmaiden.

For behold, from henceforth: all generations shall call me blessed.

For he that is mighty hath magnified me: and holy is his Name.

And his mercy is on them that fear him: throughout all generations.

He hath shewed strength with his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat: and hath exalted the humble and meek.

He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent empty away.

He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel: as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.

(Book of Common Prayer)



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The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Raised on High and Crowned with Grace



We find homilies on the Assumption going back to the sixth century. In following centuries, the Eastern Churches held steadily to the doctrine, but some authors in the West were hesitant. However by the 13th century there was universal agreement. The feast was celebrated under various names—Commemoration, Dormition, Passing, Assumption—from at least the fifth or sixth century. Scripture does not give an account of Mary's Assumption into heaven; nevertheless, Revelation 12 speaks of a woman who is caught up in the battle between good and evil. Many see this woman as God's people. Since Mary best embodies the people of both Old and New Testaments, her Assumption can be seen as an exemplification of the woman's victory. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 15:20, Paul speaks of Christ's resurrection as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Since Mary is closely associated with all the mysteries of Jesus' life, it is not surprising that the Holy Spirit has led the Church to believe in Mary's share in his glorification. So close was she to Jesus on earth, she must be with him body and soul in heaven. In the light of the Assumption of Mary, it is easy to pray her Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) with new meaning. In her glory she proclaims the greatness of the Lord and finds joy in God her Saviour. God has done marvels for her and she leads others to recognise God's holiness. She is the lowly handmaid who deeply revered her God and has been raised to the heights. From her position of strength she will help the lowly and the poor find justice on earth, and she will challenge the rich and powerful to distrust wealth and power as a source of happiness.

From the Fathers

"And with regard to ourselves, how deservedly do we keep the feast of the Assumption with all solemnity. What reasons for rejoicing, what motives for exultation have we on this most beautiful day! The presence of Mary illumines the entire world so that even the holy city above has now a more dazzling splendour from the light of this virginal Lamp. With good reason thanksgiving and the voice of praise resound today throughout the courts of Heaven...let us not complain for here we do not have a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come, the same which the blessed Mary entered today."

St. Bernard of Clairvaux on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.