



Aug. 15, 2021 Luke 1: 39-56. Rev. 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab  
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 Rolheiser, Fr. Ron: [Mary, as the Model of Faith](#)  
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#### ENTERING THE SCENE:

The bodily [Assumption](#) of Mary has been believed and taught down through history. On 1 November, 1950, Pope Pius XII declared [infallibly](#) that the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was a [dogma](#) of the [Catholic Faith](#). Likewise, the Second Vatican Council taught that "the [Immaculate Virgin](#), preserved free from all stain of [originalsin](#), was taken up body and [soul](#) into [heavenly glory](#), when her earthly [life](#) was over, and exalted by the [Lord](#) as Queen over all things. We return to Luke's account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth to probe more deeply into this long cherished belief. In doing this we, like Mary, will move towards our own eternity in the Kingdom of God.

#### Luke 1:39—55

39 At that time **Mary** got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered **Zechariah's** home and greeted **Elizabeth**. 41 When **Elizabeth** heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and **Elizabeth** was filled with the **Holy Spirit**. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my **Lord** should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the **Lord** has said to her will be accomplished!" 46 And **Mary** said: "My soul glorifies the **Lord** 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me **blessed**, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. 50 His **mercy** extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to **Abraham** and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers". 56 Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** In the Assumption we declare that our mother in faith, Mary, awaits us to welcome us into eternity. How do I imagine this welcome?

**PRAYER:** Lord, down through the centuries the body of Christ on earth has held the belief that the body of your mother was taken up into heaven shortly after her death. Her faith is our model, and we look forward to our own life in your eternal kingdom as well. Help me as I try to live into this promise. Amen.

#### WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTIONS:

**MARY:** When God chose to enter into human history in a personal way, God chose Mary, a very young woman from the tiny town of Nazareth.

*How do I welcome Jesus into my life today?*

**GOT READY / HURRIED:** Mary lost no time in checking out the truth of what the angel said to her.  
*When you are invited by God to go beyond the 'reasonable', do you respond quickly, or do you delay?*

**HILL COUNTRY:** In a time when women did not venture out alone anywhere, anytime, Mary travels a four day journey to get to Elizabeth and Zechariah's home.  
*What does this tell you about Mary's frame of mind? What is Luke telling you by giving you these details?*

**ZECHARIAH / ELIZABETH:** Zechariah and Elizabeth are living with their own mystery. Yet, they are within the biblical tradition of God doing such marvelous things. (Gn. 18:11; Judges 13: 2-5; 1 Sam. 1:5f)  
*Would this make it easier to understand for Zechariah and Elizabeth? How would Mary's situation differ, and what new questions about God are evoked by this unusual conception?*

**LEAPED:** Mother and child are intimately connected during pregnancy. The developing children felt the high state of excitement of their two mothers. Luke interprets this to mean something divine was happening.  
*With what we now know about fetal development, does this interpretation hinder, or enhance your understanding?*

**FILLED:** Both women are overflowing with joy and wonder at what is happening in and through them.  
*How does this fill you with joy and wonder, so as to participate in the mystery of the Incarnation in a deeper way?*



**HOLY SPIRIT:** these women experience The Spirit of God, who makes all things whole, as they encounter their respective wonders.  
*What wonders have you encountered in your faith life this past year that have given you a sense of wholeness/holiness?*

**BLESSED:** Once again we encounter the familiar formula (Judges 5:24; Judith 13:18 etc.) that proclaims that all blessings are gifts of God.  
*How does this preparation deepened your consciousness of God blessing you?*

**WOMEN:** In Jesus' day, women were certainly among the 'least' of humanity. Luke's gospel emphasizes the 'least' of the earth as being those God reaches most easily.  
*What is it about being one of the 'least' that makes this possible?*

**LORD:** The word Lord in Jesus' day meant someone who was in charge of people or property.  
*What is Elizabeth saying to Mary when she uses the word Lord?*

**BELIEVED:** To believe is to accept something as true.  
*What is Elizabeth saying to Mary here?*

**MINDFUL:** To be mindful, is to keep someone or something in mind.  
*What is God keeping in mind here?*

**HUMBLE / PROUD:** Luke searches the scriptures for understanding this very unusual event. He has Mary singing a song that gives us the clues to this mysterious birth that was to come.  
*In what way does the juxtaposition of humble and proud set you up to understand what God is about in the Incarnation?*

**SERVANT / RULERS:** The order of the world is about to be reversed with the coming of Jesus.  
*Have we been successful in forestalling this reversal? How?*

**GREAT THINGS / MIGHTY DEEDS:** Scriptural history is full of stories of God's mighty deeds and great things.  
*What great things or mighty deeds have been part of your life this past year? Did you see the hand of God in them?*

**MERCY / HELPED:** When you reach out to help, you enter into the need of another. By giving this help you show mercy to the plight of the other.  
*How has God shown mercy to you this past year? What help do you need now?*



**FILLED / EMPTY:** Yet another contrast. The people of God were empty of almost everything, especially hope. Now they are being filled in a most unusual way.

*Have you ever been empty of hope and found God filling you in a most unusual way?*

**ABRAHAM / FATHERS / GENERATION:** The genius of the Hebrew insight was that God was active in creation history and there was a plan for this history. *How does this insight of creation history having a goal make a difference? Do you experience your own creation history as having a goal? If so, what is it?*

**THREE MONTHS:** Mary remained with Elizabeth long enough to firmly establish her own pregnancy.

*Who has stood with you during a time of new growth in faith?*

**PARALLEL TEXTS:** Lk. 1:42 // Jgs. 5:24; Jdt. 13:18; Lk. 1:46 // Is. 61:10; Lk. 1:47 // Hab. 3:18; Lk. 1:48 // Lk. 11:27; Ps. 113:7; I Sam. 1:11; Gn. 30:13; Ps. 138:6; Job. 5:12; Lk. 1:52 // Ps. 75:8; Eccles. 10:14; Ezek. 21:31; Lk. 1:53 // Ps. 107:9; Lk. 1:54 // Ps. 98:3; Is. 41:8f; Lk. 1:55 // Mi. 7:20; 2 Sam. 22: 51; Gn. 13:15; 22:18; Lk. 1: 46-66 // 1 Sam. 2: 1-10;

**OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK:** Mi. 5:1-4; Ps. 80: 2-3, 15-19; Heb. 10:5-10; Lk. 1: 39-46; Revised Common Lectionary: Mi. 5:2-5; Lk. 1: 47-55; Heb. 10: 5-10; Lk. 1: 39-55;

#### **SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:**

'Have we ever thought of the meaning of the mystery of the Annunciation? When the time had come when God resolved to realize his incarnation before our eyes, he had first of all to raise up in the world a virtue capable of drawing him as far as ourselves. He needed a mother who would engender him in the human sphere. What did he do? He created the Virgin Mary, that is to say he called forth on earth a purity so great' that, within this transparency, could concentrate himself to the point of appearing as a child.' Pg. 114. Teilhard, Pierre de Chardin. [The Divine Milieu](#). N.Y. Harper Torchbooks. 1957.

Blessed are you if you contemplate the Lord until you are radiant; the Lord will make his face shine in yours for the glory of all 251 Olivera, Bernardo, O.C.S. O. [The Search for God: Conference, letters, and homilies](#). Kalamazoo, MI. Cistercian Pub. 2002.

"Every moment and every event of every man's life on earth plants something in his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of winged seeds, so each moment brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men. Most of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, because men are not prepared to receive them: for such seeds as these cannot spring up anywhere except in the good soil of freedom, spontaneity, and love...

We must learn to realize that the love of God seeks us in every situation, and seeks our good. His inscrutable love seeks our awakening..." Pages 14-17. Merton, Thomas. [New Seeds of Contemplation](#)

The episode about the shepherds – which takes up more space than the discussion of the birth itself – has a certain historical plausibility to it, since Bethlehem was one of the main areas near Jerusalem where sheep were raised for the sacrifices in the Temple. Due to their profession, shepherds were viewed as unclean peasants by some early Jews, but Luke sees them as exemplars of the marginalized, for whom the birth of a savior would be seen as good news indeed (Lk. 1: 52, 3: 18). Pg. 46. Witherington, Ben, III. *The Nativity According to Luke*. Bible Review. 12/04.

She also said, "Just as it is impossible to be at the same moment both a plant and a seed, so it is impossible for us to be surrounded by worldly honor and at the same time to bear heavenly fruit." AMMA SYNCLETICA

"What needs to be guarded is the life of the Spirit within us. Especially we who want to witness to the presence of God's Spirit in the world need to tend the fire within with utmost care. . . Our first and foremost task is faithfully to care for the inward fire so that when it is really needed it can offer warmth and light to lost travelers." - Henri Nouwen [20th C.], "The Way of the Heart"

"The real function of discipline is not to provide us with maps, but to sharpen our own sense of direction so that, when we really get going, we can travel without maps."

"Where God leads me in kindness I follow, follow lightly, and there are no footprints in the dust behind us."

The heart was made to admire. It admires attributes that another possesses and it lacks. This is how it affirms the good whether it possesses it or not. Its attention is always drawn to things greater than itself. When two or more hearts admire the same thing a bond develops. If one is arbitrarily excluded from that bond it can be confusing, not to mention painful. Everyone needs a community. Br. Jonah Wharff

"Either you look at the universe as a very poor creation out of which no one can make anything or you look at your own life and your own part in the universe as infinitely rich, full of inexhaustible interest, opening out into infinite further possibilities for study and contemplation and interest and praise. Beyond all and in all is God."

Originally published in *A Search for Solitude, The Journals of Thomas Merton, Volume Three 1952-1960* by Thomas Merton and edited by Lawrence S. Cunningham (HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), Page 45.

When we begin to wonder at, the door to the invisible begins to open and we sense a previously unperceived depth within ordinary reality. Pg. 67 Rolheiser, Ronald. [The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God](#). NY, Crossroad Pub. 2001.

When you touch one thing with deep awareness, you touch everything. Thich Nhat Hanh

The Eucharistic prayer is the great prayer of thanksgiving, around which lies the entire mystery of our salvation. It is much more than a tool to "bring God down onto the altar." Rather, it is more sublime, something akin to Mary's understanding of the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, but here coming on us all, bringing forth the mystery we call God: the sacred slipping into the profane and bearing God to humans. Plaiss, Mark. *This, Too Is My Body*. Commonweal. 5/19/06. Pg. 10

It's apparently God's wish that the truth unfold in us, and that's the great risk of the Incarnation. God has enough authority and power to wait for this to happen. 33 (113)

Richard Rohr. [Simplicity: the Art of Living](#). NY. Crossroad. 1992.

#### **SELECTED READINGS:**

Clough, Joy. [The Characters Within](#). Chicago, IL. ACTA Pub. 1997. SIMPLICITY: Pages 126-7.

Greeley, Andrew. [When Life Hurts](#). Chicago. Thomas More Press. 1988. SOMETIMES IT TAKES COURAGE: Pages 75ff.

Hays, Edward. [The Gospel of Gabriel](#). Easton, KS. Forest of Peace Books. 1996. INTO THE HILL COUNTRY: Pages 48-9.

#### **The fact of the Assumption**

Regarding the day, year, and manner of [Our Lady's](#) death, nothing [certain](#) is [known](#). The earliest [known](#) literary reference to the Assumption is found in the Greek work *De Obitu S. Dominae*. [Catholic faith](#), however, has always derived our [knowledge](#) of the [mystery](#) from [Apostolic Tradition](#). [Epiphanius](#) (d. 403) acknowledged that he [knew](#) nothing definite about it (Haer., lxxix, 11). The [dates](#) assigned for it vary between three and fifteen years after [Christ's Ascension](#). Two cities claim to be the place of her departure: [Jerusalem](#) and Ephesus. Common consent favours [Jerusalem](#), where her [tomb](#) is shown; but some argue in favour of Ephesus. The first six centuries did not [know](#) of the [tomb of Mary](#) at [Jerusalem](#).

The [belief](#) in the corporeal assumption of [Mary](#) is founded on the [apocryphal](#) treatise *De Obitu S. Dominae*, bearing the name of [St. John](#), which belongs however to the fourth or fifth century. It is also found in the book *De Transitu Virginis*, falsely ascribed to [St. Melito of Sardis](#), and in a spurious letter attributed to [St. Denis the Areopagite](#). If we consult [genuine](#) writings in the [East](#), it is mentioned in the [sermons](#) of [St. Andrew of Crete](#), [St. John Damascene](#), St. Modestus of Jerusalem and others. In the [West](#), [St. Gregory of Tours](#) (*De gloria mart.*, I, iv) mentions it first. The [sermons](#) of [St. Jerome](#) and [St. Augustine](#) for this [feast](#), however, are spurious. [St. John of Damascus](#) (P.G., I, 96) thus formulates the [tradition](#) of the [Church](#) of [Jerusalem](#):

St. Juvenal, [Bishop](#) of [Jerusalem](#), at the [Council of Chalcedon](#) (451), made known to the [Emperor Marcian](#) and [Pulcheria](#), who wished to possess the body of the [Mother of God](#), that [Mary](#) died in the presence of all the [Apostles](#), but that her [tomb](#), when opened, upon the request of [St. Thomas](#), was found empty; wherefrom the [Apostles](#) concluded that the body was taken up to [heaven](#). Today, the [belief](#) in the corporeal assumption of [Mary](#) is universal in the [East](#) and in the [West](#); according to [Benedict XIV](#) (*De Festis B.V.M.*, I, viii, 18) it is a probable opinion, which to deny were impious and [blasphemous](#).

## The feast of the Assumption

Regarding the origin of the [feast](#) we are also uncertain. It is more probably the anniversary of the [dedication](#) of some [church](#) than the actual anniversary of [Our Lady's](#) death. That it originated at the time of the [Council of Ephesus](#), or that [St. Damasus](#) introduced it in [Rome](#) is only a hypothesis.

According to the [life](#) of St. Theodosius (d. 529) it was celebrated in Palestine before the year 500, probably in August ([Baeumer](#), Brevier, 185). In [Egypt](#) and [Arabia](#), however, it was kept in January, and since the [monks](#) of [Gaul](#) adopted many usages from the [Egyptian monks](#) ([Baeumer](#), Brevier, 163), we find this [feast](#) in [Gaul](#) in the sixth century, in January [*mediante mense undecimo* (Greg. Turon., De gloria mart., I, ix)]. The [Gallican Liturgy](#) has it on the 18th of January, under the title: *Depositio, Assumptio, or Festivitas S. Mariae* (cf. the notes of [Mabillon](#) on the [Gallican Liturgy](#), P.L., LXXII, 180). This [custom](#) was kept up in the [Gallican Church](#) to the time of the introduction of the [Roman rite](#). In the [Greek Church](#), it seems, some kept this [feast](#) in January, with the [monks](#) of [Egypt](#); others in August, with those of Palestine; wherefore the [Emperor Maurice](#) (d. 602), if the account of the "[Liber Pontificalis](#)" (II, 508) be correct, set the [feast](#) for the [Greek Empire](#) on 15 August.

In [Rome](#) (Batiffol, Brev. Rom., 134) the oldest and only [feast](#) of [Our Lady](#) was 1 January, the [octave](#) of [Christ's birth](#). It was celebrated first at Santa Maria Maggiore, later at Santa Maria ad Martyres. The other [feasts](#) are of [Byzantine](#) origin. Duchesne thinks (Origines du culte chr., 262) that before the seventh century no other [feast](#) was kept at [Rome](#), and that consequently the [feast](#) of the Assumption, found in the [sacramentaries](#) of [Gelasius](#) and [Gregory](#), is a spurious addition made in the eighth or seventh century. Probst, however (Sacramentarien, 264 sqq.), brings forth good arguments to [prove](#) that the [Mass](#) of the [Blessed Virgin Mary](#), found on the 15th of August in the Gelasianum, is genuine, since it does not mention the corporeal assumption of [Mary](#); that, consequently, the [feast](#) was celebrated in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore at [Rome](#) at least in the sixth century. He [proves](#), furthermore, that the [Mass](#) of the Gregorian Sacramentary, such as we have it, is of [Gallican](#) origin (since the [belief](#) in the bodily assumption of [Mary](#), under the influence of the [apocryphal](#) writings, is older in [Gaul](#) than in [Rome](#)), and that it supplanted the old Gelasian Mass. At the time of [Sergius I](#) (700) this [feast](#) was one of the principal [festivities](#) in [Rome](#); the [procession](#) started from the church of St. Hadrian. It was always a double of the first class and a [Holy Day](#) of [obligation](#).

The [octave](#) was added in 847 by [Leo IV](#); in [Germany](#) this [octave](#) was not observed in several [dioceses](#) up to the time of the [Reformation](#). The [Church of Milan](#) has not accepted it up to this day (Ordo Ambros., 1906). The [octave](#) is [privileged](#) in the [dioceses](#) of the [provinces](#) of [Sienna](#), [Fermo](#), [Michoacan](#), etc. The [Greek Church](#) continues this [feast](#) to 23 August, inclusive, and in some [monasteries](#) of [Mount Athos](#) it is protracted to 29 August (Menaea Graeca, Venice, 1880), or was, at least, formerly. In the [dioceses](#) of [Bavaria](#) a thirtieth day (a [species](#) of month's [mind](#)) of the Assumption was celebrated during the [Middle Ages](#), 13 Sept., with the [Office](#) of the Assumption (double); today, only the [Diocese of Augsburg](#) has retained this old [custom](#). Some of the [Bavarian dioceses](#) and those of [Brandenburg](#), [Mainz](#), [Frankfort](#), etc., on 23 Sept. kept the [feast](#) of the "Second Assumption", or the "Fortieth Day of the Assumption" (double) [believing](#), according to the [revelations](#) of [St. Elizabeth of Schönau](#) (d. 1165) and of St. Bertrand, O.C. (d. 1170), that the [B.V. Mary](#) was taken up to [heaven](#) on the fortieth day after her death (Grotefend, Calendaria 2, 136). The [Brigittines](#) kept the [feast](#) of the "Glorification of Mary" (double) 30 Aug., since [St. Brigitta of Sweden](#) says (Revel., VI, 1) that [Mary](#) was taken into [heaven](#) fifteen days after her departure (Colvenerius, Cal. Mar., 30 Aug.). In Central America a special [feast](#) of the Coronation of [Mary](#) in [heaven](#) (double major) is celebrated 18 August. The city of [Gerace](#) in Calabria keeps three successive days with the [rite](#) of a double first class, commemorating: 15th of August, the death of [Mary](#); 16th of August, her Coronation.

At [Piazza](#), in [Sicily](#), there is a commemoration of the Assumption of Mary (double second class) the 20th of February, the anniversary of the earthquake of 1743. A similar [feast](#) (double major with [octave](#)) is kept at Martano, [Diocese of Otranto](#), in Apulia, 19th of November.