

**The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin
Mary**

Fr Jonathan Jong

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

+In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Of the two—the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Immaculate Conception—the Assumption is by far the more reasonable dogmatic assertion. This is not least because it would have been an egregious failure of filial piety for Jesus not to have brought his mother along with

him. I mean, *my* mother would never let me hear the end of it.

I confess—don't tell Fr Peter—that I struggle with the idea that Mary was born without original sin. This is because it makes it difficult for me to relate to her, and to see her as an example for my own life, or for the lives of others not similarly blessed. No doubt, evidence of my own lack of moral fibre, I find myself making excuses for my petulance and disobedience by thinking that faithfulness would come much easier if I too were unsullied by the "stain of original sin". This is, of course, absurd. There is, after all, nothing easy about the life of a Jewish peasant girl in the backwaters of Roman occupied Palestine, pregnant out of wedlock, who had to watch her son be tortured and publicly murdered. In contrast to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, the idea that Mary was, at

the end of her earthly life, "assumed body and soul into heavenly glory" resonates perfectly with everything I have come to know and love about this faith we share.

Here, we have the taking up of Mary's *whole* humanity to be with God: body and soul, past and present, her whole story, the immaculate bits and the not-so-immaculate bits. The messiness of being human is brought into the perfection of the divine life. Here, therefore, is the fundamentally Christian insistence that the entire created order is good, and not just a special, sanitised or spiritualised, corner of it; which is just to say that the entire created order is *loved*.

There can, for Christians, be no hatred of the body, no denigration of the physical, no retreating from the world, so common these days in convenient and commodified versions of spirituality, knock-offs of the

real thing. To begin with, our doctrines of Creation and Incarnation are unmistakably positive about the world; the doctrines of the Ascension of Jesus and the Assumption of Mary are yet other ways of saying that God loves the world, not only enough to make it and become a part of it, but enough even to embrace it, welcoming us with arms outstretched, to redeem us and make us whole.

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The Church's teaching on the Assumption gives us a clue about why we venerate Mary.

It is often said, quite rightly, that devotion to Mary is an expression of our belief in the Incarnation: Mariology is Christology. As the early Church argued, if Jesus is God Incarnate (which he is), and if Mary is Jesus's mother (which she

is), then it follows that Mary must be the mother of God Incarnate: the veneration of Mary thus begins with the simple recognition that she is *theotokos*, the bearer of God.

But this is only one side of the story, of course. Our veneration of Mary is also—and perhaps even primarily—a prayer to be like her. And this is only possible because she is like us. The logic of the Incarnation—for us to be like Jesus, he has to be like us—applies here too, perhaps even more so, because Mary is simply fully and wholly human, and not at all divine, except by adoption. Indeed, the most important fact about Mary—her most significant trait—is not the circumstances of her birth or even the circumstances of her pregnancy, but her *humanity*. It is precisely by being human that she brings God into the world as a human being. It is by being human that

she can be for us a sign: a sign of our salvation, body and soul.

The Assumption of Mary is therefore our assumption, our invitation and reception into the life of her Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, ever world without end.

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So, we celebrate the Assumption of Mary, and venerate her, because she is our sign that God loves the world, the *whole* world. Creation, Incarnation, Ascension, and Assumption, all point in the same direction. On this, Christianity refuses to be subtle.

And as if these were not reminders enough of this most central message of the Gospel, we are given also the Eucharist,

in which we participate in Creation,
Incarnation, Ascension, and Assumption.
We take into our bodies the Body of
Christ, which earth has given and human
hands have made; and the Blood of Christ,
fruit of the vine and work of human
hands; and in and through this bodily
ingestion of these earthy elements made
heavenly, we are ourselves received as
gifts—souls and bodies—to be sent out, to
live and work to the praise and glory of
God.

Even as we have a share in Mary's
Assumption, so also we have a share in
her work as bearer of God.

Our bellies full of Christ, our call—like
hers—is to brave the world and its
messiness, our own messiness, and to
bring what we see and hear to God in
prayer, and to bear witness, in word and
deed, to the good news that God loves the

whole glorious thing, and will bring it
home.

+In the name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**