

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY: DAY

A reading full of vivid depictions and visionary intensity. Avoid the temptation to exaggerate your tone; instead, proclaim this text directly and straightforwardly, allowing its inherent drama to ring out to your assembly. Proclaim at an even pace so that the extraordinary details can be clearly imagined.
Slight pause between woman and clothed.

Note the repeated use of the word birth in this reading. Themes and visualizations of birth dominate the details.

Slight pause between "woman" and "about."

Once again, the theme of birth.

Slight pause between herself and fled.

LECTIONARY #622

READING I Revelation 11:19a; 12:1–6a, 10ab

A reading from the Book of Revelation

God's **temple** in heaven was opened,
and the **ark** of his covenant could be seen in the **temple**.

A great **sign** appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun,
with the **moon** under her feet,
and on her **head** a crown of **twelve stars**.

She was with **child** and **wailed aloud** in pain as she **labored**
to give **birth**.

Then another **sign** appeared in the sky;
it was a **huge red dragon**, with seven **heads** and ten **horns**,
and on its **heads** were seven **diadems**.

Its tail swept away a **third** of the **stars** in the sky
and hurled them **down** to the **earth**.

Then the **dragon** stood before the **woman about** to give **birth**,
to **devour** her **child** when she gave **birth**.

She gave **birth** to a **son**, a **male child**,
destined to rule all the **nations** with an **iron rod**.

Her **child** was caught up to **God** and his **throne**.

The woman **herself fled** into the **desert**
where she had a **place prepared** by **God**.

READING I

A brief history of the origin of the feast of the Assumption of Mary and the doctrine associated with the feast is provided in the preface to the commentary on the readings for the vigil of this feast. In 1950, when Pope Pius XII defined the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary in the apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, he noted many Scripture passages that theologians have used to contribute to our understanding of this teaching of Mary's assumption. Two Scripture texts that are part of the liturgy for the vigil of this feast, namely,

1 Corinthians 15:54–57 and Psalm 132, are referenced in his writing. He also mentions the vision of the woman clothed with the sun from the Book of Revelation (chapter 12), which is our first reading for today's feast. The identity of this woman is not evident from the text, but some Christian theologians in the early Church understand her to be Mary. Over time, this became the traditional Catholic interpretation of our text, but other suggestions include the Church, the heavenly Jerusalem, the people of Israel, and personified wisdom.

In this vision, John, the author of the Book of Revelation, saw a pregnant woman, who was adorned as a goddess, hovering in the sky. Her labor pains are a reminder of the consequences of Adam and Eve's fall (see Genesis 3:16), suggesting to some that she is the new Eve. He also saw a great red dragon waiting to devour her child when it was born. The dragon is a reminder of the serpent in the Adam and Eve story (Genesis 3:1–7), who is later identified with Satan. The dragon's ten horns introduce a detail from Daniel's vision of the four great oppressive empires of the world (Daniel

The loud voice indicates the Anointed One. You don't need to raise your voice any more than you already have. Instead, you can slow your pace just slightly.

For meditation and context:

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhnz

A reading in which Paul makes a set of forceful claims he wants the members of the early Church in Corinth to understand.

Paul uses analogy here to contrast the original sin of Adam to the redemption from sin of Christ.

Note the repetition of the biblical word "firstfruits."

The conclusion of this reading is quite forceful; note the emphatic connection between "enemies" and "death."

7:7). In general, horns represented power, and ten was the number representing fullness in the Greco-Roman world. Also, the detail about the dragon throwing down stars from the sky recalls a myth about a rebellious chaos monster that went so far as to attack the stars (see Daniel 8:10).

Likewise, the detail about the dragon waiting to devour the woman's baby would have reminded the initial readers of this text of the Greco-Roman myth of the birth of Apollo, whose mother Leto was attacked by the mythical dragon Python in order to kill the child and preserve his power over

the oracle at Delphi. But Apollo's father, Zeus, intervened to secure protection for Leto, and after Apollo was born, the child killed Python. It appears that John used these cultural images to depict the birth of the messiah, who was destined to rule with "an iron rod." Finally, the detail about the woman escaping to the desert, there to be taken care of by God, is a reminder of the Exodus. The length of her stay—one thousand two hundred sixty days—is about three and a half years. Half of seven, a number of fullness, this number represents a limited time.

Our first reading ends with a heavenly voice declaring that God's salvation and his kingdom have arrived, and Christ's authority is made known. This saying makes a beautiful *inclusio* with the opening sentence of the reading (a literary device used to frame a portion of text). Also, because this reading is intended to honor Mary's heavenly reality, the lectionary leaves out the intercalated vision of how the archangel Michael defeated the dragon and its minions (Revelation 12:7–9). This, too, is cause for rejoicing.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:
**"Now have salvation and power come,
 and the Kingdom of our God
 and the authority of his Anointed One."**

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 45:10, 11, 12, 16 (10bc)

R. The queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gold.

The queen takes her place at your right hand in gold of Ophir. So shall the king desire your beauty; for he is your lord.

Hear, O daughter, and see; turn your ear, forget your people and your father's house. They are borne in with gladness and joy; they enter the palace of the king.

READING II 1 Corinthians 15:20–27

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

**Christ has been raised from the dead,
 the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**

For since **death** came through **man**,
 the **resurrection** of the **dead** came also through **man**.

For just as in **Adam** all **die**,
 so too in **Christ** shall all be **brought to life**,
 but each **one** in proper order:

Christ the **firstfruits**;
then, at his **coming**, those who **belong to Christ**;
then comes the **end**,
 when he hands **over the Kingdom** to his **God and Father**,
 when he has **destroyed every sovereignty**
 and every **authority and power**.

For he must **reign** until he has put all his **enemies** under
 his **feet**.

The last **enemy** to be **destroyed** is **death**,
 for "he subjected **everything** under his **feet**."

A reading from Luke's gospel included in the nativity story. Its familiarity to your assembly will not diminish its power. No need to overdramatize it; let the words of the reading convey its power.

Judah = JOO-duh
Zechariah = zek-uh-RĪ-uh

The focus of this reading is on sound, especially of Mary's voice. Let that voice ring out.

Words at the core of one of our most familiar prayers.

Once again, the emphasis is on the sound of Mary's voice and the joy it brings.

Here, Mary proclaims the words of the Magnificat, one of the most solemn hymns in the Church. We aren't necessarily accustomed to hearing these words nowadays. These are the words of a joyful affirmation the Gospels uniquely possess.

"He has shown," "He has cast down," "He has filled," "He has come": These phrases drive the rhythm of the Magnificat as it is proclaimed in this Gospel reading.

READING II

Our second reading comes from the same section of the First Letter to the Corinthians as did the second reading for the vigil of this feast. Paul has been making the argument that Christians who believe that Jesus was raised from the dead must also believe that they will be raised bodily from the dead—not with our present, physical bodies but with our new, transformed bodies. If we believe otherwise, then Jesus did not triumph over sin and death.

In this reading, Paul writes about Christ as the firstfruits the first and best of

GOSPEL Luke 1:39–56

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Mary set out

and **traveled** to the hill country in **haste**
to a town of **Judah**,
where she **entered** the house of **Zechariah**
and greeted **Elizabeth**.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's **greeting**,
the infant **leaped** in her **womb**,
and **Elizabeth**, filled with the **Holy Spirit**,
cried **out** in a **loud** voice and **said**,
"**Blessed** are **you** among **women**,
and **blessed** is the **fruit** of your **womb**."

And how does this **happen** to me,
that the **mother** of my **Lord** should **come** to me?

For at the **moment** the **sound** of your **greeting** reached my **ears**,
the **infant** in my **womb** leaped for **joy**.

Blessed are **you** who **believed**
that what was **spoken** to you by the **Lord**
would be **fulfilled**."

And Mary said:

"My **soul** proclaims the **greatness** of the **Lord**,
my **spirit** rejoices in **God** my **Savior**
for he has looked with **favor** on his lowly **servant**.

From **this day** all **generations** will call me **blessed**:
the **Almighty** has done great **things** for me
and **holy** is his **Name**.

He has **mercy** on those who **fear** him
in every **generation**.

He has shown the **strength** of his **arm**,
and has scattered the **proud** in their **conceit**.

the harvest offered to God as a symbol and consecration of all God's chosen ones who have fallen asleep. Paul also uses a method of interpretation called typology, an investigation of patterns of persons or events from the Old Testament that are fully realized in the New Testament. Here, Adam, who brought death into the world, is a type of Christ, who brings fullness of life. The "coming" of Christ is a reference to the parousia at the end time when Christ returns and God's reign is fully manifest to the world.

GOSPEL

Today's Gospel reading is the beautiful story of Mary's visitation to her cousin Elizabeth's home, after she learns that Elizabeth, who was old and barren, is six months pregnant and Mary herself is newly pregnant. This story is told only in Luke's Gospel.

On the surface of this story, it could appear that there is little to say beyond the fact that Mary is presented as a charitable, young Jewish girl who is concerned for the welfare of her aged relative. However, let's dig a little deeper. Why does the narrator say that Mary traveled in haste? Also, was

He has cast down the **mighty** from their **thrones**,
and has **lifted up** the **lowly**.

He has filled the **hungry** with **good things**,
and the **rich** he has sent away **empty**.

He has come to the **help** of his servant **Israel**
for he has **remembered** his promise of **mercy**,
the **promise** he made to our **fathers**,
to **Abraham** and his children for **ever**."

Mary **remained** with her about three **months**
and then **returned** to her **home**.

she travelling alone or with a caravan? Why would she have been allowed to make this approximately ninety-mile, four-day journey alone? The chances of being raped or killed along the way would have been extremely high. Though we don't have the details of her journey, the manner in which she undertook it is significant.

Perhaps Luke's intention in having Mary travel "in haste" was to maintain a close connection between the announcement of the conception of these women's children and the acclamation of their sons' relationship to one another. Both the narra-

tor and Elizabeth comment on her unborn baby leaping in her womb when she hears Mary's greeting, further suggesting that her child, John, recognized Jesus even before either was born. In all four Gospels, John is the one who precedes Jesus and paves the way for his ministry in the world. Elizabeth also acclaims Mary's blessedness and the blessedness of her unborn baby. She is the mother of their Lord! She is also the model of faith for all believers.

Mary responds with words that have come to be known as the Magnificat or the Canticum of Mary. It is patterned after the

Song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10), which Hannah prayed to God when she brought her son Samuel to the house of the Lord in Shiloh to dedicate him to God, after she had endured years of bullying and shame because of her barrenness. Here, in the Magnificat, Mary attributes her blessedness to God, who in his mercy has raised up the lowly and brought down the proud of heart. Luke highlights this reversal theology throughout his Gospel. C.C.