

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

GOSPEL

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Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

And Mary said:

'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my saviour; because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid. Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him. He has shown the power of his arm, he has routed the proud of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy—according to the promise he made to our ancestors—of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home.

(Luke 1:39–56)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The journey that Mary undertook would have been arduous and dangerous, travelling from Nazareth in Galilee in the north to the hills of Judea in the south. The route taken was a popular one for pilgrims travelling to the temple in Jerusalem. A young woman travelling alone would have found suitable company to assist in the journey.
- Elizabeth, a kinswoman of Mary according to Luke, had conceived a child in her old age by the grace of God. Read Luke 1:5–24; 57–80 for the full story.
- The song of praise from Mary in this scene is known as the Magnificat.
- Tradition has it that Mary lived her later years in the city of Ephesus in modern Turkey, and it was here that she died and was assumed into heaven.

EXPLORING THE WORD

God has already been active in the lives of the two women who meet in today's gospel. Both have conceived a child who is destined to play an important role in God's plan for the salvation of the world. But Elizabeth intuitively recognises the greater role that Mary plays and affirms her blessedness. The magnificent prayer of Mary, known as the *Magnificat*, points away from herself, towards God, for whom all things are possible. It is God who is responsible for the honour bestowed on this 'lowly handmaid'. Her blessedness is a proclamation of God's greatness, and for generations God has been active in the history of his people, raising up the lowly and feeding the hungry. The surprising reversal of the expected order is part of the mystery of God's action. In this young virgin, mother of God, the mystery of God is to become human. The blessedness of Mary rests in her unswerving faith and positive response to God's plans for her.

- What role do you think you play in God's plan for the world?
- How do you see God as active in the world today? How can you cooperate with God's activity?
- How far is God's activity in and for the world still a mystery for you? Is your journey through the catechumenate helping you make more sense of that mystery?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What is your answer to God's invitation at this point in time?
- In what ways do you consider yourself blessed in your journey? What mighty things has God done for you?
- What are some of the promises that have been made to you in your life? How have these been kept or broken? How good are you at keeping the promises you make? Share your reflections.
- This week, reflect on the great things that God has done for you. Imitate this action of God by doing 'great things' for others.
- Memorise and pray the 'Hail Mary' often this week:

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women,
And blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.*

