

“IT’S ALL ABOUT JESUS”

A REFLECTION ON THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY

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An emphasis on the role of Blessed Mary in salvation history is no doubt new to some of us. Having not grown up with Marian devotion in my parish or family life, it was something that I had to mature into over the years. For me, as I asked more questions and read more intently, I first had an intellectual conversion, and then slowly but surely – by God’s grace – devotion to the mother of our Lord converted my heart as well. It has come to be an important and fruitful part of my spiritual life. As my relationship with Christ and his Church has developed, I now see devotion to our Lady as a marvelous and unique part of our Anglican heritage, uniting us to the broader Christian world and to the millions of faithful believers who came before us.

Since the earliest times, Christians have reserved a certain reverence and honor for the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. With her response to the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation (Luke 1:38), she conceived of the second person of the Holy Trinity in her womb and became truly the Mother of God (see the *Decree of the Council of Chalcedon*, BCP pg. 864). She is the only person who was present throughout the entirety of our Lord’s earthly life. From the moment of his conception, through his nativity, childhood, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension, Mary is to be found offering the love of a mother to her Son. All generations shall call her blessed (Luke 1:48) because she is the first Christian and the prime example to all of us of what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus. In his final words as he lay dying on the Cross, Jesus provided for Mary, and gave her to the Church in order that she may be a mother to us as well (John 19:26-27).

When her life was at its end, universal Christian tradition has held that Jesus took Blessed Mary, body and soul, into heaven; there to enjoy the nearer presence of God forever (Collect for St. Mary the Virgin, BCP pg. 192). Like Enoch (Genesis 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) before her, God found it fitting that our Lady should not experience earthly decay, but rather be brought immediately into the divine life promised to those who love God. There she continues her ministry of prayer and intercession, ever offering up to God the cares of the Church and the needs of the world (Revelation 5:8, 8:4). From a historical view, it is worth noting that no Christian Church has ever claimed to possess relics of the body of Blessed Mary. Considering the ancient Christian practice of reverencing the bodies of the Apostles, early church martyrs, and great heroes of the past, it is shocking that the earthly remains of Jesus’ mother would not have been held with the utmost esteem. The earliest Christians recognized that the reason for this peculiarity was the fact that Blessed Mary had been taken into heaven by her Son, as was the tradition they had received.

While the Assumption is an extraordinary act of God’s love for his mother, what the Church claims about Mary is in fact nothing more than the great hope that every Christian has: that we too will be brought to live and reign forever with Jesus Christ in heaven. How fitting it is that the only person who was with Jesus through the entirety of his earthly ministry is taken by him to experience his heavenly glory! How fitting it is that the woman who was the first Christian participates in the fullness of new life with God! How fitting it is that she whose own heart was pierced with sorrow at the foot of the Cross (Luke 2:35) receives the joyful fruit of his sacrifice! How fitting it is that she who participated uniquely in his sufferings should also participate uniquely in his resurrection. Just as Mary cared for Jesus while on earth, Jesus now cares for Mary in heaven. We who have become members of Christ’s Body (1 Cor. 12:27) together rejoice with him in the glorification of his mother, who is the model and example for us of Christian life. Like Mary, our response to God’s will should always be: "Let it be done unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). And, like Mary, when we give ourselves to God in obedience, humility, and love, we too are brought "near to his throne." When we live after her example, we, like, Mary have our dwelling place with Christ.

What's the big deal with the Assumption of Mary? Ultimately, the 'Sunday school answer' is always right... the Assumption is ultimately about JESUS, and the hope we have in him. It is his utmost desire that each one of us, like Mary, would come to know him most intimately, to love him most fully, and to enjoy him forever in heaven. This, after all, is simply the good news of the Gospel.

“O God, who hast taken to thyself the blessed Virgin Mary, mother of thine incarnate Son: Grant that we, who have been redeemed by his blood, may share with her the glory of thine eternal kingdom; through the same Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*” (2019 Book of Common Prayer, pg. 636)