

15 August 2010
St Mary the Virgin

Sung Eucharist

Isaiah 7:10-15; Psalm 132:6-10, 13-14; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 1:46-55

Mary - what does Mary mean for us? In the Roman Catholic Church, she is very prominent; there are many stories, legends and myths. Mary is a significant part of Roman Catholic spirituality. Protestantism, on the other hand, is dubious of a lot of this; and is suspicious that much Mariology is Mariolatry. And so protestantism ignores Mary (except at Christmas). Outside of Christ, the silence in protestantism about the mother of J is positively deafening. Legends of Mary are dismissed (what they describe didn't happen - therefore we can ignore them.) Yet the importance of legends and myths isn't "Did they happen?", but "What do they mean?" Anglican tends towards the protestant perspective; though there are Anglican parishes dedicated to Mary.

Story of Mary begins with simplicities of Nazareth, and the fiancée of the carpenter - an ordinary young girl; And then the angel comes (the Annunciation), echoing the prophecy of Isaiah (first reading) a young woman shall bear a son; he will be called Immanuel - God is with us; and Mary continues with her involvement with Jesus: Mary was there when he was born, left home, died, (a lot of pain in all of those - "a sword will pierce your soul") Mary was there when Jesus rose from dead, she was there with the Church when Jesus incarnate life ended. This is noted in the reading from Galatians: "God sent his Son born of a woman (she was that woman) in order to redeem so that we might receive adoption as children. And ... God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, you are no longer a slave but a child, and ... an heir." The story of Mary is so closely intertwined with G's story of incarnation and salvation. And it's here that the significance of Mary lies.

Let me illustrate this with a couple of examples of Christian art.

The first is Michelangelo's sculpture *La Pietà* in St Peter's in Rome. It portrays the corpse of Jesus, taken down from the cross, in the arms of Mary.

The second is a mosaic, also in Rome, in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. In the lower part of the mosaic, it shows Mary has died; she is surrounded by various holy people. In the upper part, it shows Mary - the spirit of Mary, now clothed in white - being received into the arms of Jesus. It's almost the opposite of *La Pietà*; there Jesus is received into the arms of Mary; here the spirit of Mary is received into the arms of Jesus.

God came to Mary, to be received by Mary, so that Mary might be taken up to God. God came to humanity, to be received by humanity, so that humanity might be taken up into God. That is true of all of us; Mary is no different from any of us. Collect today: "O God, you have taken to yourself the Blessed Virgin Mary ..."; we pray that God will take each and every one of us to himself. It is our prayer that Mary's experience will be ours. She was the first; the first to receive God incarnate (in the early Church, Mary was called "the God-bearer"; but all of us are called upon to receive God into our lives,

and into our hearts; and so that we too may be taken to God.

Mary - she is the prototype of all this; Mary is the archetype of discipleship. That's what the story of Mary is getting at: here is the prototype of the Christian; here we have a description of the Christian destiny. And that's true, even if some of it is legend. Gospels don't tell us Jesus's body given to Mary; no description in the New Testament (not even Revelation) of Jesus receiving Mary in heaven. But that's not the point; the point is, what do these stories mean? what is their truth? The truth of Mary's story, be it factual or symbolic, is that it is her story, and it is my story, and it is your story, and it is the story of everyone who would call themselves Christian. You want to know what God has in store for you? You want to know God's destiny for you? Look at Mary.

There are many consequences of this. One briefly (Gospel today) is the Song of Mary - Magnificat. Mary expecting Jesus; visits cousin Elizabeth (expecting John the Baptist). One can only imagine the meeting of those two pregnant women, the joy and expectation they shared during those three months. Away from the inevitable tension of Nazareth, here was someone who understood, and who cared. Her feelings erupt. She sings. Where does she find the words? She goes to the songs she knows. Mary knew her Bible well, and her model is the song of another woman a thousand years before. Hannah, the mother of Samuel. (1 Samuel 2) Echoing the song of Hannah, Mary sings.

And Mary's song is both wonderful and terrible. We call it "Magnificat" "My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices he has looked with favour he's doing great things" But it's also a song of revolution: "he has scattered the proud He has brought down the powerful he has lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry he has sent the rich packing with nothing God is working liberation." To be sung in societies in social turmoil; places seething with a desire for change. So full of joy and praise; so uncompromisingly political. The one in Mary's womb would speak both to the human heart and to the disturbing of the world. One of the consequences of our identification with Mary is that her song embraces something of our vocation too.

Hymn: "Ye Watchers and ye holy ones" - a wonderful hymn of praise. It portrays the heavenly worship; then concludes by exhorting our earthly worship of G to echo this heavenly worship. Second verse - is about Mary. She is not named, but identified: "Bearer of the eternal word" Builds on the idea of Mary as the prototype Christian; becomes natural to conceive Mary leading the heavenly worship.

O higher than the cherubim,
More glorious than the seraphim,
lead their praises: Alleluia!
Thou bearer of the eternal word,
most gracious, magnify the Lord:
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

The Venerable Paul Blunt

