

# THE EMMAUS SERIES

## Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (ABC)

Apocalypse 11:19; 12:1-6, 10

1 Corinthians 15: 20-26

Luke 1; 39-56

### *The Almighty has done great things for me; Holy is his name*

Christian Europe's deep faith in the Mother of God came to see springtime May as Mary's month; and today's feast, a celebration of Mary's final greatness, occurs the highpoint of Europe's summer.

There is a magnificent unity in the designs of God. The intimations of Mary's incomparable blessings are unmistakable in the readings of today's liturgy. Luke's meditative masterpiece, describing the circumstances of the Saviour's birth, leaves us in no doubt concerning the greatness God has in store for Mary, and the personal sanctity that fit her for her role. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth cries out, 'Of all women you are most blessed ... blessed is she who believed'. And in the Magnificat – Mary's declaration of her faith in the fulfilment of God's promises to old Israel – Mary acknowledges her special place in this fulfilment, 'All generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me'. In the reading from the letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes the consummation of God's plan: 'Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep ... all will be brought to life in their proper order'. Though Paul has no thought of Mary as he writes these words, with the passing of time the Fathers of the Church – meditating on the unity with which God's designs have unfolded - were prompted by the Holy Spirit to see in texts like these what Mary's unique destiny implied. When the reading from the Apocalypse was written, however, today's scholarship assures us that the writer was influenced by the figure of Mary being recognised by Christian faith. The 'Woman', presented with such splendid solemnity, is the 'woman' of the Scriptures, the bride of God – at once old Israel, giving the world its Saviour, and the Church, the New Israel, receiving the Saviour in faith. But it is a growing awareness of the figure of Mary, the final embodiment of the 'Woman' of God's designs, that makes possible such a confident portrayal.

As we know, there is no explicit reference in the Scriptures to Mary's Assumption into the fullness of eternal life. The Church's belief in this truth is an outstanding example of the 'development of doctrine' – the gradual coming to light of the full implications of Christian faith. In the second half of the first millennium, great Christian writers in the East and the West were led to recognise that the converging lines of the Scriptural message point to this final triumph over the forces of evil on the part of the Mother of God. Their convictions were confirmed by the fact that faith in Mary's Assumption became universal in the East and the West, after the first millennium.

There is an unfortunate irony in the fact that for many people, this blessing of Mary sets her apart from the rest of us believers. In fact, Mary's Assumption is a sign of hope, a promise of what lies ahead for all of us, the final fullness of our risen life in Christ.

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