

## Our Faith

In the first three verses of Mary's song, the Magnificat, Our Lady gives thanks for God's action in her life. When she says 'my soul doth magnify the Lord' she wants to glorify and make great the name of the Lord, who has chosen to work through a lowly virgin who will from now on be referred to as 'Blessed', because of her willingness to embrace the divine plan. In verse 4 of the Magnificat we are reminded of God's mercy to all those who fear Him. The word fear doesn't mean that we are to be scared of God, but that we don't try and tame Him into something that suits us. The very thought of God ought to make us tremble with holy joy. Then we hear how God turns upside down the values of the world. The humble and meek are lifted high and those who mighty are put down. The hungry are those who longed for the coming of the Messiah and those who hunger for Him today. The condemned rich are those who have worldly notions of power and wealth and think they have no need of God's Messiah. The final line is a line of real joy. 'He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel: as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever'. All those centuries ago God made a covenant with Abraham that He would guard, bless and cherish His people, and through Abraham's descendants all the nations of the earth would bless themselves. This blessing is now fulfilled with the impending birth of the Messiah. Everything longed and hoped for in the Old Testament is now to be fulfilled. The positioning of the Magnificat at Evensong is very deliberate. It comes straight after the Old Testament lesson where it celebrates that everything hoped for in the world of the Old Testament has now been fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah. Thus it is the perfect introduction to the New Testament lesson. Mary, as the first to say yes to Jesus Christ, is the first disciple of the Lord, the first member of the Church, and the Magnificat has always been understood as celebrating not only her own blessings but that of the whole Church in Jesus Christ. When we sing or say it we give thanks for the mystery of God becoming man, the Word of God taking our human flesh, and we give thanks for the blessings of the Gospel.

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## The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary



The opening chapters of St Luke's Gospel tell the stories of the priest Zechariah, the patriarch Joseph, the old, barren woman Elizabeth, and the virgin whose name is Mary. Each one finds themselves at the heart of God's plan to save and heal his people, as the divine pattern is woven in human lives. Mary responds with faith to the message of the Angel, and journeys with haste to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth, to whom God has shown his favour, for she bears a child in her old age. Their meeting is one of joy and thanksgiving, as John the Baptist in his mother's womb leaps for joy, for the very Saviour of the World is at hand, carried in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

St Luke's chronology is precise, for he conveys God acting within human history. Mary responds with the song of praise that we know as the Magnificat. Recited by the Church every day at Evensong, it echoes the words of Hannah in 1 Samuel, who has also borne a child despite her barrenness. Mary invites us to magnify the Lord, to proclaim his greatness, for all that he has done, whilst remembering our own littleness. Mary's faith, which will take her to the depths of sorrowing despair at the foot of her Son's Cross, is rooted in obedience to God's will and his word. May we too, even, or especially in the face of life's sorrows, know the holy joy that Mary shares with Elizabeth and the yet-to-be-born John the Baptist, at God's coming near in Christ.

*Today's Gospel: St. Luke 1:39-56*