

## Reflection on the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 2024 by David Kennedy

August 15<sup>th</sup> is St Mary's Day when we give thanks for God's call on her life to be the mother of the Saviour.

*'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.'* St Luke 1.35.

This text is to me among the most mystical, holy and awe-inspiring words in the whole of the New Testament. These words evoke in me the sense of the hymn: *Let all mortal flesh keep silence and with fear and trembling stand.* For here is set forth the great mystery of the Incarnation, the uniting of the heavenly with the earthly, the human with the divine. And on this Feast of St Mary, we do well to recall that to her alone is given the extraordinary title *Theotokos*, the Mother of God.

We must always remember just how central St Mary is to the purposes of God for the salvation of the human race. In the narrative of the Annunciation, we see the action of the whole Godhead. God the Father in his love and grace sends the Holy Spirit upon a human being, Mary, so that she can receive in her own body the gift of the Son of God. And the work of the Spirit in coming upon her is not simply to enable this almost unthinkable, almost outrageous, deeply mysterious taking of Mary's humanity and so our humanity into the Godhead. It is also in the Spirit's work of enabling Mary to accept this gift of all gifts. When Mary responds, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word', she was not speaking somehow independently. The Incarnation was not two separate acts of will – the will of God and the will of Mary. But rather, one single action of the Holy Spirit, in her womb and in her mind and heart, inspiring Mary's response by a special gift of grace.

And here we have the prototype, the paradigm, for all Christian believing and the whole doctrine of salvation. In the mystery of divine providence, we too as Christians have been given the gift of Christ to abide within us through the Holy Spirit. And our capacity to receive that gift, comes not through some merit, right of claim of our own, or by own independent will or choice, but only through the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. As we say in the baptism service, 'Faith is the gift of God to his people' – and our reception of that gift is itself the work of God within us, by his Spirit.

It began with Mary. And what began in her, by the Spirit, is what inaugurates what we call the new age of redemption. Just as at creation, the Spirit hovered over the waters of chaos, now the Spirit broods once again over the womb of Mary. The Incarnation is the dawning of the new creation. Jesus comes to us full of the Spirit, and in the Spirit in his human life he fulfils the vocation of Israel to be perfectly obedient to the Father; by his death and resurrection he overcomes the long tyrannous reign of sin and death, and by his ascension enables the same Spirit to be poured out on all flesh.

And as a constant reminder of these remarkable truths, week by week, in a wonderful sacramental sign, we receive the gift of the Son of God into our bodies through created things transformed by the invocation of the Holy Spirit. As we pray in our Sunday Eucharist, 'Grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit, and according to your holy will, these gifts of bread and wine may be to us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ'. We *received* the gift of Christ when we first believed in him, and in every eucharist we *receive* the gift of Christ to confirm our abiding union with him. And the eucharist points us forward as the pledge of our future, the present pledge of a transformed creation and a transformed humanity.

This is why St Mary stands as the Mother of God but also the proto-Christian, the second Eve, the first recipient of the Spirit of salvation. That is why all generations call her blessed. That is why we honour her as foremost amongst the company of the redeemed in heaven. That is why we love her for the sake of her Son. That is why we keep this joyful Feast.

'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.'

These most holy and awesome words lead us to silence, to fear and trembling.