

AUGUST 15 — ASSUMPTION

READING I Rv 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10a
READING II 1 Cor 15:20-25
GOSPEL Lk 1:39-56

The book of Revelation owes its origin to a persecution of Christians in Asia Minor, probably in the last decade of the first Christian century. Ch. 11 closes with the announcement of God's kingdom (v. 15), a heavenly liturgy expressing salvation (vv. 17-18), and God's manifestation in the ark of the covenant in the heavenly temple (v. 19). Ch. 12 describes a cosmic combat. The dragon symbolizes the chaotic power which threatens to disrupt nature and to destroy humanity. The dragon, therefore, stands for Roman hostility and defiance of divine order. The dragon, identified as the devil or Satan (12:9 — see the serpent in Gn 3), attempts to revolt against the universal king by attacking his mother while she is pregnant with him (v. 5). God, however, provides for: (1) The newly born infant, by bringing him to heaven; and (2) The mother, by helping her escape to the desert (vv. 5-6 — the desert recalls God's care of his people during the wilderness wandering). Michael fights on behalf of the infant king and overpowers the dragon and his forces (vv. 7-9). In v. 10 a heavenly voice announces Satan's fall from heaven. Though defeated in heaven, the dragon exercises his rule on earth and therefore continues to persecute the mother of the child (v. 13).

Amid persecution, the author's audience derives hope from the cosmic combat and is encouraged to persevere, even to the point of death (12:11). The mother's destiny is their destiny. The mother, however, is not Mary. Against the background of Gn 3, Jn 2:1-11, and Jn 19:26-27, Mary probably serves as the model. These texts have to do with: (1) Satan (the serpent, dragon); (2) Childbirth (Eve, the crucifixion as the birth pangs of the Church, the pregnant woman in Rv 12); and (3) Concern for the family of Jesus. (At Cana, Mary provokes the sign which leads to the disciples' faith. At Calvary she looks after the new community symbolized by the Beloved Disciple. And in Revelation, she protects her offspring. [see 12:17])

In this section of First Corinthians 15, Paul develops the implications of Christ's resurrection. Because Christ returned from the dead, humans can also return. Consequently, Jesus is "the first fruits." Because of Christ's resurrection, humans are no longer condemned to live a false form of life ("death") which began with Adam, and to which they contributed by their own sins. Now, real existence is "life" in Christ. There is a period, however, between Christ's resurrection and the general resurrection. The latter can occur only after the exalted Christ has totally subjugated all those forces opposed to genuine existence. When this victory over "death" occurs, Christ will hand over the

kingdom to the Father, and give back the authority bestowed on him for his mission.

For Luke, the visitation is a command from God. In 1:36-37, the angel gave as a sign Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy. In 1:38, Mary expressed her obedience by identifying herself as the handmaid of the Lord. Her haste into the hill country reflects her obedience to God's plan. The visitation fulfills the sign given.

The Baptist begins his prophetic mission right from the womb (see 1:15). He causes his mother to recognize the Messiah in Mary's womb, just as he would later help others to recognize the one mightier than himself (3:15-16) and so prepare the way of the Lord (3:4). Elizabeth's canticle (1:42-45) is linked with the Old Testament. Deborah praises Jael as "blessed among women" (Jgs 5:24) for her part in God's salvific plan. "Blessed is the fruit of your womb" is a blessing promised by Moses for obedience to the covenant (Dt 28:4).

Mary's privilege is not purely personal. She has a decisive part to play in God's plan. Moreover, Elizabeth's canticle is also linked with the New Testament, namely, Lk 11:27-28. Elizabeth's praise, "Blessed be the fruit of your womb," matches the woman's praise, "Fortunate is the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked." However, Elizabeth's beatitude, "Blessed (= fortunate) is she who trusted," corresponds to Jesus' reaction, "Fortunate rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it." Therefore, Luke's comment is that Mary is the great believer. She brings to God's plan a deep faith which acknowledges that the Lord's plan will be fulfilled. Luke offers the faith response of Mary as a contrast to the unbelieving Zechariah (see 1:18, 20).

Quite likely v. 56 followed immediately after vv. 39-45. Luke apparently wanted to feature only the parents and the newborn child in his birth narratives of Jesus, and the Baptist. Hence, he has Mary leave Elizabeth, prior to the birth of the Baptist. At a later point, he probably inserted the *Magnificat* as Mary's response to Elizabeth's canticle (vv. 42-45).

The *Magnificat* is probably a non-Lucan composition of God's saving action in general, which Luke appropriated for his infancy narrative: The piety of the canticle (from the circles of the so-called *Anawim*) corresponds to the piety of Mary in the narrative. The setting is now the conception of Jesus, reflecting the hymn of Hannah in 1 Sm 2:1-10. The introduction expresses Mary's joy (vv. 46b-47). Vv. 48-50 offer motives for praising God. For example: The overcoming of her lowliness (Mary's virginity is tantamount to the barrenness of the Old Testament women), and the Exodus-like accomplishments ("great things" — see Dt 10:21). Vv. 51-52 anticipate the victory achieved through Jesus' passion and resurrection: The time when God's arm was made evident and Jesus was exalted to God's right hand (see Acts 2:33). V. 53 continues God's reversal strategy ("hungry . . .

rich"). Finally, God proves true to his covenantal promise by providing help (see the covenant with Abraham in v. 55).

Mary's assumption becomes the family's future. We are pleased to celebrate Mary's unique presence in heaven, yet we may not see her accomplishments as having an impact here on earth. We are delighted to confess that Mary was taken up body and soul into heaven, yet we may not see this privilege as having repercussions here on earth. We are honored to announce that Mary has a special claim to fame, yet we may not see that claim as having a real effect here on earth. We are tempted to regard Mary in splendid isolation. However, we must see her privileges against the background of her function in the Christ event. Mary's assumption becomes the family's future.

The author of Revelation does not identify Mary as the woman in Ch. 12. However, in Johannine theology (theology as given in John's gospel) Mary was no doubt one of the models for describing the woman. In that theology, Mary is concerned with the future of the family of Jesus. At Cana, though she does not function in Jesus' ministry, she is the catalyst for provoking the faith of the disciples. At Calvary, the place of the birth of the Christian community, Mary is invited to provide for the family's needs.÷ She becomes mother to the Beloved Disciple; The inspiration and model of the Johannine community. In Revelation, Mary, as model, gives birth to her Son at the time of persecution and then must continue to provide for the rest of her offspring (Rv 12:17). In the light of Johannine theology, Mary's assumption becomes the family's future.

Luke involves Mary in the history of the Christian community. The Magnificat reveals that she is worthy of praise because she has involved herself in the destiny of her Son. Her response to the angel (1:38) makes possible the exaltation of the resurrection (1:52). Luke associates the faith of Mary (1:45) with the faith expected of the true family of Jesus (8:21; 11:28). Luke shows that involvement in the family's future at Pentecost. There (Acts 1:14), he places Mary with the family awaiting the arrival of the Spirit. In the light of Lucan theology, Mary's assumption becomes the family's future.

Parents who involve themselves totally in the raising of their family know the meaning of Mary's assumption. Those in any ministry who give themselves completely to the common good understand the significance of Mary's assumption. Those who protect our of concern for the future of the human family and advocate the care of our Common home capture the sense of Mary's Assumption.

Those who promote social justice in whatever capacity see the impact of Mary's assumption. Such people identify in terms of the good of the family. For them, Mary's assumption becomes the family's future.

Eucharist takes place in a family setting. The recital of Jesus' involvement in humanity's history is intended to carry over into future action. To eat and drink with Jesus means to assume interest in the family of Jesus. In the light of Mary's interest in that family, Eucharist announces that Mary's assumption becomes the family's future.