

Marian Studies

Volume 43 *Proceedings of the Forty-Third
National Convention of the Mariological Society
of America held in Houston, Tex.*

Article 8

1992

Mary in Ordinary Time: Biblical References

James C. Turro

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Turro, James C. (1992) "Mary in Ordinary Time: Biblical References," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 43, Article 8.
Available at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol43/iss1/8

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlangen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

MARY IN ORDINARY TIME: BIBLICAL REFERENCES

A number of options for developing this topic present themselves. First, one could examine the readings assigned to Marian feasts which occur in ordinary time. Secondly, one may study the way the Marian passages from scripture are employed in those liturgies which have no specific Marian references and which occur in ordinary times. I am choosing to consider only the former, that is, I propose to deal only with those passages that occur in Marian solemnities or feasts. Marian commemorations occurring in ordinary time—Our Lady of Mount Carmel, for instance—cannot be considered, because the readings prescribed for those liturgies are the readings of the day, which obviously are not assigned with any thought to the Marian occasion commemorated that day. I will, however, give attention to the readings found in the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary outside the Easter Season. I will not treat any material that has already been discussed before this body [the Mariological Society of America]. For that reason, I shall not deal with the Feast of the Visitation, which occurs in ordinary time, but which was ably and amply studied at last year's convention. I am narrowing the focus of the study still further by examining chiefly the Gospel readings. I will lightly touch on the other scriptural readings of a particular feast, but will mainly discuss the Gospel. I do so in the hope of avoiding a diffuse or superficial study.

The Solemnity of Mary's Assumption (Aug. 15)

It has been tentatively suggested that this feast has as its remote precursor a celebration designated as the "Day of

Mary, Mother of God." This feast, which was attested to in a Jerusalem lectionary, was observed on August 15. Though originally of general reference to Mary, the observance gradually focused on the death of Mary. In the West a similar feast, celebrated as the Feast of Mary's Assumption, was observed annually on January 18 from at least the seventh century onward.

The first reading is taken from Revelations, 11:19a; 12:1,3-6a. In apocalyptic fashion, there is recounted the struggle between the People of God and the realm of the devil. This struggle is envisioned as a contest between the woman and her child, on the one hand, and the dragon, on the other. The liturgy, following a patristic tradition, sees Mary (with her child) in the woman of this pericope. This is consistent with Mary's close link with the Church and its destiny.

The reading from the epistles is I Corinthians 15:20-26, where Christ is seen as the first to rise from the dead—a forerunner of the Christian experience. The tie-in with the Assumption is to be seen in Mary's experience. She is the first to realize the Christian destiny, which is to rise from death as Christ did. Mary, in the words of the preface for the feast, "is the beginning and the pattern of the Church in its perfection, and a sign of hope and comfort for your people on their pilgrim way." The Gospel read on this day is the same selection from Luke that is employed on the feast of the Visitation (Lk. 1:39-56). The point of relevance of this passage to the feast seems specifically to be the Magnificat—Mary in her glorious Assumption sings this hymn of jubilation.

There is a pleasing structural balance to these verses. Mary's considerate visit to Elizabeth, on the one hand, is reciprocated by Elizabeth's gracious acknowledgement of Mary as "the mother of my Lord." Further, there is Mary's exultant response both to Elizabeth's acclaim of her and to God's goodness to her. Both women are caught up in praise, Elizabeth of Mary and Mary of God. The Baptist in the womb leaps for joy, suggesting the exultation of the heavenly court upon Mary's arrival there. Mary is hailed by Elizabeth basically for two reasons: 1) because she is the mother of the

Lord (In those times, in the Jewish world, a woman's worth was gauged by the children to whom she gave birth. As the mother of the Lord, needless to say, Mary would indeed stand out.) and 2) because she believed. Obviously, these two considerations lie deep in the background of the Assumption and, to a degree, explain it. The blessing (v.45), "Blessed, indeed is the woman who has believed," anticipates the blessing pronounced over Mary by the woman in the crowd (cited in Lk. 11:27-28), in which Mary's faith is implicit; here it is expressed. In that text, Jesus' response to the woman intimates that Mary hears the word of God and keeps it (Lk. 8:21). In Luke's account of things, Mary is portrayed as a disciple right from the very beginning of the Gospel (Lk. 8:19-21; Acts 1:14). Mary's faith, it may be noted, is in stark contrast to Zechariah's unbelief. In the words "all generations will count me blessed" we come very close to the rock-bottom basis of Marian devotion—the ultimate reason for the regard Christians have for the believing mother of the Lord: "He who is mighty has done great things for me." God, in his almighty power, has done great things for this person: given her a son who is Lord and Savior; granted her, as well, the favor of expressing her belief in him; and—within the context of our feast, we would add—taken her up to heaven.

In sum, one may say that the Magnificat is an expression of praise to God on Mary's part for what has befallen her. One must remark the appropriateness of this thought and sentiment on the occasion of the Assumption. This conclusion is bolstered by the tenor of this hymn. It has a broad generality about it. In spirit and form, it strongly resembles the "hymns-of-praise" type of psalms (e.g., Pss. 33, 47, 48, 113, 117, 135, and especially 136). In other words, this piece is not so closely tied to the Visitation (and to the Visitation alone) that it cannot cover other instances of Mary's experience.

By way of a postscript, one might add that someone has had the happy inspiration to reason that the phrase "the mother of my Lord," on Elizabeth's lips, may be projecting Mary as queen mother. This is argued on the basis of 2

Samuel 24:21, a text in which the phrase "my Lord" is followed by the phrase "the king." A comparison is suggested with 2 Kings 2:19, where mention is made of Bathsheba, "the king's mother." All this would testify to an early Christian conception of Mary as queen. Some have judged this to be an overly refined argument, as may be, but it makes it all the more inviting to see this reading as one suited to the feast of the Assumption.¹ Also interesting to note in this connection, the refrain in the Responsorial Psalm for this feast reads: "The queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gold" (Ps. 45:10-16).

Vigil of the Assumption (Aug. 14)

1st Reading: I Chron. 15:3-4, 15, 16; 16:1-2.

The choice of this account of the transfer of the Ark from Obededom's house to Jerusalem is surely meant to suggest the now widespread view that assimilates Mary to the Ark of the Covenant. As God was present over the Ark and carried about with the Ark, so God was present with and carried about by Mary. The holiness of the Ark in which God dwelt is intimated in several ways: 1) "David assembled *all* Israel in Jerusalem" (This was not an ordinary, quotidian happening; it was solemn and noteworthy.); 2) it is the Levites only who may presume to bear this sacred object; 3) the Ark is greeted with elaborate acclaim—chanters, musical instruments, harps, lyres and cymbals. In transfer, all this bespeaks the holiness of Mary, in whom God dwelt as on the Ark.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 132:6-7, 9-10, 13-14

"Lord, go up to the place of your rest, you and the Ark of your holiness." One must be struck by the literal way this has been realized in the Ascension of Our Lord and the Assumption of Our Lady—the Lord and the Ark of His holiness, Mary.

¹David Michael Stanley, S.J., "The Mother of My Lord," *Worship* 34 (1959-60): 330-332.

2nd Reading: I Cor. 15:54-57

This text describes the destiny of the Christians after the Resurrection of Christ. As noted earlier, Mary, in her Assumption, is the first to realize the Christian destiny (I Cor. 15:20-26).

Gospel: Lk. 11:28

This passage (woman in the crowd) will be commented on further on in this paper.

Feast of the Birth of Mary (Sept. 8)

This feast appears to derive its origins from the feast of the dedication of St. Anne's Church in Jerusalem, a church which was built in the fifth century. It is one of three feasts which commemorate an earthly birth; the other two are those of St. John the Baptist and of Christ. The conviction that governs the choice of readings for this liturgy seems to be: the birth of Mary is significant because of Mary's giving birth to Jesus. This note is sounded clearly in the entrance antiphon, the alleluia verse and the communion antiphon. The reading from Micah (5:1-4a) speaks of Bethlehem's soaring importance, because from it would come a ruler over Israel who would bring peace. An alternate first reading (Rom. 8:28-30) speaks appropriately of the call and the justification of the elect (among whom Mary, of course, is preeminent). The Gospel from Matthew (1:1-16,18-23) presents the genealogy of Jesus, bearing out the point made above that it is the birth of Jesus that ultimately is being thought of in this celebration.

The genealogy draws attention to the earthly origins of Jesus and implies its importance. The persons that are mentioned here stand out because they are the progenitors of Jesus. This one fact rescues them from oblivion. It is easy to see how Mary figures in all of this. To a higher degree than any of the persons in Jesus' earthly lineage, she draws her significance from Christ. Matthew's Gospel notably stresses the notion of Kingdom, specifically the Kingdom of Heaven—a Semitic turn of phrase for the Kingdom of God. By one count, there are fifty-five references to the Kingdom in this Gospel. The ruler over this kingdom is, of course, Jesus, the King of

Kings. As is only appropriate, Matthew introduces Jesus, the King, through a sketch of His lineage. This is a matter of some importance to a king; his claim to the throne must be legitimized by his genealogy. Herod the Great had the official registers destroyed precisely because his descent, tainted by Edomite ancestors, weakened his title to the throne. Though not every genealogy implies royalty or even nobility, it does so here in Matthew. Jesus is referred to as "Son of David," a reference to the royal Davidic line; again this may be seen to reflect on Mary. At the very outset, Matthew speaks of Jesus as "the Son of Abraham," a reference to the line of promise. Jesus is thereby viewed as squarely fixed in *Heilsgeschichte* (Salvation History). In this way, Mary too is seen to have a role to play in Salvation History.

*Common of the Blessed Virgin Outside the Easter Season
(Gospel readings)*

Mt. 2:13-15, 19-23

Traditionally, Egypt had served as a safe haven for Jews who were in difficult straits back home in Canaan. Persecution, feuds, economic pressure—all served to drive Jews to the security Egypt afforded (e.g., I Kings 11:40, also Josephus Ant XII, IX, 7). There are indications of scattered Jewish settlements in those days throughout Egypt. That inveterate foe of Christianity, Celsus, went so far as to maintain that Jesus, who had lived in Egypt, there became practiced in the Egyptian arts of sorcery and magic.² Matthew's account precludes such fantasy by affirming clearly that Jesus went down to Egypt as a small child and came back from there as a small child.

It is interesting to note that, in the earlier account of the arrival of the Magi, Matthew states that the wise men found Mary and the child in the house, but no reference is made to Joseph. Here, in this instance, word comes to Joseph as, so-to-say, the head of the house, suggesting the solidarity of the Holy Family. This must strike one as so very normal, that the

²Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Book 1, nos. 28 and 38.

father, who traditionally and culturally was viewed as the protector and bulwark of the family, should be apprized of the danger so that he could take action to ward it off. Here we are accorded a glimpse of Mary in the context of—if we may use the expression—a normal family life situation in which the child is threatened and the head of the family is primed to take action.

Lk 2:1-14

This account falls neatly into three segments: 1) the backdrop for the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem (2:1-5), 2) the birth itself (2:6-7), and 3) the manifestation of the child (2:8-14).³ By tying in the birth of Jesus to a worldwide census, Luke may be intimating the worldwide significance of Jesus' birth. Could this, in part, be the thinking of the Church in assigning this Gospel reading for a Marian liturgy? That is, could the Church be here suggesting the universal significance of Mary? Several of the features of the birth as recounted here imply lowliness, the humility surrounding the birth of Jesus. The use of this narrative for a Marian celebration may be intended to suffuse the person of Mary in our minds with the same aura of lowliness. The angels exhort all and sundry to rejoice. This includes even those of us who subsequently read the angel's words, encountered now in the Gospel. Mary's part in occasioning that joy must not be overlooked. Mary wraps the child Jesus in cloth bands. This is not to be read as an index of poverty. It was, rather, the custom of Palestinian mothers, rich or poor, to "swaddle" their babies in this fashion. Thus, we are allowed to see Mary here as the competent, devoted mother. She cares for her child in the fashion that all conscientious mothers of that time and place cared for their children. Luke and the Church are making us see a real flesh and blood woman, not a plaster-of-Paris statue.

In this passage, as elsewhere, Luke is projecting Mary as a believer, a woman of faith. We are given to know that she re-

³Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (The Anchor Bible, 28; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 392.

ceived and believed the word of God, conveyed, first of all, by the angel Gabriel, then by Elizabeth, here in our text by the shepherds and subsequently by Simeon. There is, according to the Gospel, a progression to this faith. At the Annunciation she is told, and believes, that the child to be born of her will be the Son of the Most High God. Subsequently, at the Presentation, she learns that her son will bring salvation to all nations and will be a light of revelation for the Gentiles.

Lk. 2:15-19

"They [the shepherds] made known the message which had been given to them about the child." This is a preferred translation, and indicates that they made known to Mary and Joseph what they [the shepherds] had been told. Mary already knew the child to be the Davidic Messiah (1:32-35) and that He was Lord (1:43); now there is a further escalation in her understanding, springing from the shepherds' message: He is now the Savior. Mary treasured all of these things, which is to say she preserved in her mind the coming of the shepherds to the manger, and she preserved as well the words they spoke to her. The language used here implies a person who is nonplussed at hearing what is said and who is mulling over the words in order to probe their meaning. The picture is of someone making a conscious effort to fathom what is happening and what is said. A fascinating suggestion has been put forward by van Unnik to the effect that the expression "'pondered over them'—(*syballousa*)—literally throwing them together in her heart," really means Mary figured out the meaning of all this, that she had a clear understanding of the shepherds' words. This is a view that has not met with universal acceptance in the scholarly community.⁴

Lk. 2:27-35

The main thrust that Luke gives to these verses is fidelity to the Mosaic Law. He is at pains to show Mary and Joseph as

⁴W. C. van Unnik, *Sparsa Collecta: The Collected Essays of W. C. van Unnik*, Part One (Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, 29; Leiden: Brill, 1973), 72-91.

observant and devout Jews. They do for Jesus all that Luke understood was required by the Law on the occasion of a child's birth. The Law is referred to no less than four times in this passage (vv. 22a, 23a, 24a, and 27, as well as at the conclusion of the account in v. 39). Faithfulness to the Law is emphasized, to suggest that salvation follows upon obedience to the Law. This accent on Mary's faithfulness is yet another way of involving Mary in the salvation that is from God. Simeon has waited avidly for the Messiah and now He has arrived in his life, brought there by Mary. Could the liturgy be making this point about Mary's role in the Christian experience—that she is the one who brings Christ? In the course of this narrative, we are made aware of the poverty in which Mary lived. She and Joseph can afford only to bring birds as an offering to the Temple. Ironically, the mother of the Lamb of God cannot afford to bring a lamb for sacrifice. Simeon's words must at once cause wonderment to and occasion sorrow in Mary. Life will be a bittersweet experience for her, as it is in a more muted way for most people. She was blessed among women, yet she would know poverty and pain.

Lk. 11:27-28

These verses present a saying of Jesus about the true blessedness of those who have accepted Him. The passage has, on occasion, been construed as a put-down of Mary. It is now seen, quite the contrary, as having been said in praise of her. This understanding of the episode centers on the force of the Greek particle *menoun*. It can be used variously as: 1) an adversative, meaning "on the contrary" or "no, rather" (in this sense, the word would indicate that Jesus was dismissing the woman's praise of His mother); 2) an affirmative, meaning "indeed" (i.e., consenting with what has been said); or 3) as a corrective, meaning "yes, but rather" (implying that what was said was right as far as it goes, but more was to be said). In this place, the first two uses must be ruled out for the very good reason that, when Luke contradicts, he uses another Greek phrase, and when he wants to affirm

what has been said, he uses a different word—*nai*. So, by the process of elimination, we are left with the corrective sense of the word.⁵

All this concurs nicely with what has gone before in Luke's Gospel. It recalls, among other earlier scenes, Elizabeth's beatitude pronounced over Mary and the preceding Annunciation narrative where Mary is heard to say "Be it done unto me, according to your word." She is, par excellence, the listener of God's word. In Luke's account of things, Mary is found several times among those who have listened to God's word (1:45; 8:21; also Acts 1:14). The text shows fulfillment starting to come to the words of the Magnificat—"from now on, all generations will count me blessed" (1:48). In sum, these verses project Mary as an object of beatitude, not only because she was the mother of Jesus, but also—and as much so—because she believed. All this reflects Elizabeth's words in 1:45.

Jn. 19:25-27

There must be no doubt that the account here centers on Mary and not, as some suggest, on the Beloved Disciple. First off, it should be noted that Mary is the first of the two whom Jesus addresses. Also, at the conclusion of the episode, it is her future, not that of the Disciple, which is considered: "From that hour onward, the Disciple took her into his care." Luke and John are particularly at pains to relate Mary to the achievement of salvation effected by Christ. Here is a supreme instance of this theologizing. There is here a so-called revelatory formula. This is a formula in which the speaker discloses a particular salvific work that the person referred to is to take in hand (Cf. "Behold God's Lamb," Jn. 1:29). The sonship and motherhood spoken of here are significant in God's scheme of salvation. They connect with what is transpiring on the Cross. The magnitude of this moment is further suggested by the words that shortly follow, "It is finished."

⁵Margaret Eleanor Thrall, *Greek Particles in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 34-35.

Of special interest is the verse that immediately follows: "After this, Jesus knew that everything had now been completed so that the Scripture should be completely fulfilled . . ." (v.28). Some scholars—in fact most—relate this remark to what follows, i.e., Jesus saying "I thirst"; that is, in order that the Scriptures should be fulfilled, Jesus says "I thirst." However, another quite respectable scholarly judgment links the assertion about the fulfillment of the Scripture with what has gone before, that is, with Jesus giving John to Mary and Mary to John. Therefore, in so doing, Jesus has brought to completion that which the Father has given Him to do; He, in this way, fulfills the Scriptures. One can see from all this that this incident goes well beyond the devoted care of a son for His mother. This episode has suggested to some various O.T. themes: Lady Zion, for instance, who, in Messianic times, gives birth to a new people (Is. 49:20-22; 54:1); Eve and her offspring are also evoked here. All this serves as backdrop and support for the imagery of the Church as begetting children fashioned after Jesus. This relationship suggests further the loving concern that should exist in children for their mother. This symbolism makes one see that Jesus has provided for the future of those who embrace Him in faith and, in this sense as well, has completed the work assigned to Him by the Father. Here, at the very end of His earthly life, He exhibits a love for His own (Jn. 13:1). He is setting up a context of reciprocal love within which His disciples will live. The revelatory formula adverted to above is affirming that a new relationship established between Mary and the Beloved Disciple reflects the relationship that exists between the Church and the Faithful.

Conclusion

An insight provided by Jean Galot⁶ serves as the springboard for the conclusion I want to fix on this study. In the Gospels, and in the Liturgy which is a vibrant reexperiencing

⁶Jean Galot, *Mary in the Gospel* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1965 [c1964]), 214.

of Christ in the Gospels, Mary is encountered at the beginning of the story of Jesus, at the beginning of His hidden life, at the beginning and end of His public life. In attempting to live out the Mystery of Christ, the believer must be prepared to meet up with Mary and profit from that meeting at every important turn in the Christ story.

JAMES C. TURRO
Immaculate Conception Seminary
South Orange, NJ