

Feast of the Assumption

15-8-2026

There is a host of references to the Hebrew scriptures in this magnificent hymn we recite each day at Vespers: essentially, it is reminiscent of Hannah's hymn at the birth of her son in the first book of Samuel but referencing also words from the prophets Isaiah and Habakkuk, from Genesis and Job, from several psalms, and echoed in the letter of Paul to Timothy and the first letter of Peter. These are words then carefully put together and placed on the lips of Mary by Luke to express his wonder at what God has done through Mary for the salvation of us all. It's a hymn of reversal, of good news to the poor, to those undergoing trial and tribulation today. Your suffering has meaning, just as the suffering of a woman in childbirth and in the raising of that child, for suffering doesn't end at childbirth. This is the nature of love, a forever mixture of pain and joy. It's the one constant in history, or as Karl Rahner put it, *"what is permanent in history is the concrete work of love"*.

The Magnificat celebrates this constancy as a feature of God and of God's plan for us, made visible in Christ. Luke and Mary rejoice because God has given meaning to all of creation in visiting Jesus on the world. In saying 'yes' to God, 'yes' to love, Mary is saying 'yes' to God's presence in all of creation, and its beginning and end in God. We may couch this end in apocalyptic terms - to heighten the drama and so on, and revel in this as a way of getting revenge on our 'supposed' enemies, but this is more a weakness and a need on our part than of God. The reversal that matters is that love and not hatred is triumphant - worth remembering in our own lives when we put words on God's lips to justify our hatred of others, which is so often simply a hatred of ourselves. So Mary, like Jesus, is important to us as a reminder that, for us, to love without hatred requires a saviour. In this sense, Mary is saved by her son. As children of God, we too can perform that service for one another - relying on Christ to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

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