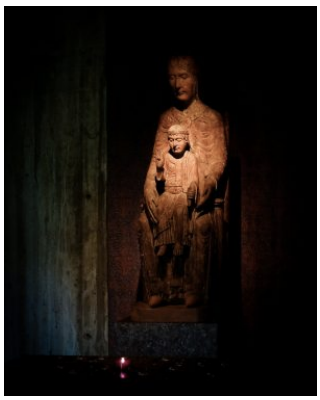
Mary in Benedictine and Anglican Spirituality
Samuel Torvend



Mary in the New Testament
Mary is the Anglicized form of Latin *Maria* derived from Hebrew *Maryam* or *Miryam*, the name of Moses' sister. The name has two possible origins: from the Egyptian root *mr* or "beloved," and from Hebrew root *mar* or "bitter," a reference to the bitterness of Hebrew life as slaves in imperial Egypt. The name *Miryam* can thus be seen as a protest against any form of dehumanization.

Prior to the writing of the gospels, we know little of Mary. Biblical scholars assume that she was a young peasant woman from the Roman-occupied Galilee who gave birth to a son. As an adult, he became a public figure whose preaching and actions caused controversy: some people became his followers and others his critics. Roman imperial guards executed him, crucifixion being reserved for non-citizens of the empire. The only mention of Mary in the writings of the historical Paul, author of the earliest texts in the New Testament, is this: "God sent his Son, born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4). For Paul, Mary is mentioned solely as mother.

Mark, the earliest gospel, mentions the mother of Jesus without naming her when he reports that she came to hear her son speak (3:31-32). He mentions her by name when Jesus taught in the synagogue and listeners asked, "Is not this the carpenter, the son Mary and the brother of James?" (6:3). Some scholars suggest that there may have been estrangement between Jesus and his siblings: "His family went out to restrain him for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind'" (3:21).

Image: An early image of mother and child, 200s, Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome: note the figure pointing to the star

Writing in the 80s, **Matthew** mentions her by name five times, four of them in the infancy narrative (1:16, 18, 20; 2:11) where she is referred to as the pregnant mother of Jesus, "found to be with child by the Holy Spirit" (1:18). Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 7:14 – "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son" – relies on the Greek translation of the Hebrew "young woman." It was his use of the term "virgin" that would have significant implications in ascetic and monastic spirituality.

What this suggests is that some 50 years after the death of Jesus, Christians in Matthew's community believed Mary was a virgin, her virginity a way of highlighting the divine paternity of Jesus.

Let us note that virginity also possessed a social value. For most of human history, marriage was a contractual arrangement between two sets of parents: an arrangement intended to increase economic or social status. Neither groom nor bride chose their spouse. One could escape such arrangements by remaining a virgin through sexual abstinence, difficult as it was. This was practiced among the Jewish Theraputae in Egypt and frequently among early Christian women and men, giving rise to the urban ascetic movement. In this regard, virginity was viewed as a protest against an enforced cultural practice, one marked at times by abuse.

Image: The earliest known scene of the magi worshipping the child Jesus, early 200s, Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome; Mary is seated, holding the infant

When the magi come to the house where Jesus was born, Matthew notes that "they saw the child with Mary his mother and they knelt down and paid him homage" (2:11). In his gospel, Matthew includes a flight story in which Joseph, Mary, and Jesus flee the murderous threats of Herod (2:13-23). Following Mark, Matthew narrates with revisions the astonishment of those who heard Jesus speak: "Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?" (13:54-55).

Image: The angel greets Mary as she spins thread, 300s, Pignatta sarcophagus, Ravenna

More than any other book, **Luke** mentions Mary twelve times: in his infancy narrative (1:27, 20, 34, 38, 39, 41, 56; 2:5, 16, 19, 34) and when his mother and brothers came to hear him (8:19-21); in his Acts of the Apostles (1:14) on the Day of Pentecost. It is Luke who narrates the angelic announcement (annunciation) to the Mary: "Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you"(1:28). Luke also narrates Mary's journey to visit Elizabeth, pregnant with the child who will be called John, the Baptizer (1:39-56): the prophetic and ascetic figure who lived in the Judean wilderness. Upon seeing Mary, Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (1:42).

These two greetings would be joined to create one of the earliest acclamations of Mary: "Hail, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus." To this acclamation would be added much later the petition, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

Luke includes four canticles in his gospel, perhaps the best known being the Song of Mary or Magnificat (1:46-55), inspired by the canticle of Hannah at the birth of Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10). Mary announces that the Mighty One has scattered the proud, brought down the powerful, and sent the rich away empty – and has lifted up the lowly and filled the hungry with good things. Scholars suggest that Mary's canticle, read within the context of Roman imperial occupation, highlights the harsh existence of peasants who worked the land, suffered under punishing taxes, and lived with subsistence – thus the petition, "give us this day our daily bread."

In Matthew's gospel, magi come to worship the newborn Jesus while in Luke, it is poor shepherds who "went with haste" to see the child and his mother (2:15). Luke then narrates the presentation of Jesus in the Jerusalem Temple for his circumcision and conflates this with the purification of his parents though the rite purification after childbirth was reserved only for mothers (see Leviticus 12).

Image: The presentation of Jesus in the Temple, 430s, St. Mary Major, Rome; note: the Jewish peasant woman has become a highborn Roman matron as seen in her clothing and hairstyle

Luke's gospel is the first text in a two volume series, the Acts of the Apostles, his second. In that second book – Luke's *theology* of the growth of the Jesus movement from Jerusalem to Rome and beyond – Mary and the brothers of Jesus are present with eleven disciples (1:14). Is this Luke's suggestion that Mary and Jesus' brothers participated in his mission? In the second chapter, Luke writes, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place" (2:1). Luke then describes a rush of wind and fiery flames inspiring the gathered group. He mentions no names and thus we are left to conclude that "certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus," who had devoted themselves to prayer in preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit (1:8), were present on the Day of Pentecost. Mary, too, receives power to proclaim the gospel.

The author of the Gospel of **John** mentions the mother of Jesus without naming her: at the Cana wedding feast (2:1-12), and at the crucifixion (19:25-26). At the wedding feast, Jesus' unnamed mother points out that the host has run out of wine – a source of public shame – with the implication that Jesus should do something to rectify this potential embarrassment. Jesus employs a term of endearment – "Woman" – when he notes that his "hour" has not yet come. Nonetheless, he transforms water into wine, a sign that her intercession on behalf of the bridegroom was effective. It was the fruitful power of her request that was remembered by Christians in the centuries to come.

Cultural anthropologists of the classical world suggest that the strongest relationship in ancient Mediterranean life was between a mother and her first-born son; the weakest between wife and husband, given that parents contracted such marriages as an economic one: love had nothing to do with such marital arrangements. Mothers, who supervised domestic private space, raised their children, while fathers, working in public space, were infrequently at home. With the father's death, the mother would rely on her eldest son for care in old age (or with no son, a close male relative). A mother's intercession with her son was *expected*; and such intercession would be heard and *acted upon*. In this patriarchal system, it is not difficult to see why Christians in this culture would view Mary, a mother, as an intercessor with her son, Jesus, not only in her earthly life but also in her union with him after death.

Image: Cana wedding feast, early 330s, Sarcophagus of Marcus Claudianus, Rome: Jesus to the left with wand; Mary to the right with arms upraised in prayer – the *orans* position of early Christian intercession

New Testament scholars, including Elisabeth Fiorenza, suggest that Mary's presence during the public ministry and death of her son indicate her role as a leader in the Jesus movement that continued after his death. Similar claims for leadership have been made for the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42), Peter's mother (Mark 1:29-31), and Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18). Indeed, after the Cana feast, John notes that Mary joined the disciples in Jesus' mission now centered in the lakeside town of Capernaum (2:12).

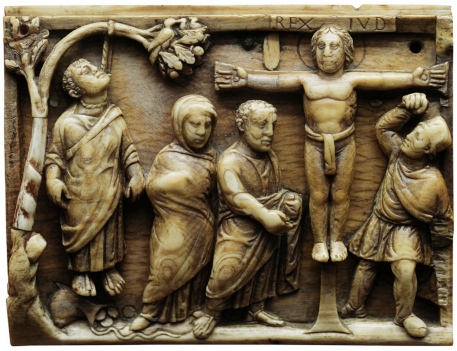


Image: the crucifixion of Jesus with Mary and the beloved disciple to the left, and with the suicide of Judas (see Matthew 27:3-5), 420, Rome

At the crucifixion, John writes that "standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" (19:25).

This scene inspired the well-known medieval hymn, "Stabat Mater Dolorosa," written in the 13th c. by the Benedictine-trained pope, Innocent III (or the Franciscan Jacopone da Todi?). As he is dying, Jesus offers his beloved disciple to his mother and his mother to the disciple. For John, this scene highlights the elevated status of the beloved disciple in John's community of Christ followers, a status higher than Peter (who received elevated status in Matthew's gospel). At the same time, Jesus' care for Mary's welfare did not go unnoticed by subsequent generations who recognized "his attentiveness to her concerns and his willingness to heed her pleas with him" (Shoemaker, *Mary in Early Christian Faith*, 35).

Various images of Mary appear in the New Testament: the one who listens, questions, and ponders; a virgin singularly blessed by God; a protester of human degradation; a mother and protector of her child; an effective intercessor with her son; a disciple endowed with the Spirit; and a participant in his mission. Paul and Mark said little about Mary, perhaps because of a 1st c. conflict over who would lead the nascent Christian movement: Paul and his mission to God-fearers and Gentiles *or* the Jewish family of Jesus and his Galilean disciples. Within that first century, we also see development in Mary's portrait: from a young Galilean woman, to a mother who "all generations will call blessed" (Luke 1:48), to a virgin pregnant with God's son, to a leader in her son's mission.

Mary in the early Christian movement

For 21st c. Americans socialized from childhood into a high degree of *individualism* (what anthropologists call a "weak group society"), Christian faith and life are usually conceived in terms of the individual's relationship with God the Father or with God the Son. What "matters" is the evangelical decision to give one's life to Christ or the sacramental action of being individually named and washed in the waters of Holy Baptism. In a "weak group society," one is expected to leave one's family and go forth into the world on one's own. This kind of society had its origins in the late Renaissance and Protestant Reformation, and was subsequently secularized in the Enlightenment origins of the United States where individual liberties continue to reign supreme.

This aggressively individualized society was not present for the first 1,500 years of Christian history. Rather, Jesus, Mary, the first Christians, and monastic communities lived in a "strong group society," one in which *relationship with others* was of primary importance. In this society, one was socialized into a communal identity and discovered one's purpose within community, not apart from it. Stability at home was prized. In this regard, Christian faith and life were experienced as larger than the self: one's identity and purpose was inextricably bound up with members of the "body," a body that included the creation, the living, the dead who were alive in God, and the Holy Three – not a divine monad but a community of persons.

It was within this strong group society that early Christians considered prayer addressed to the Triune God, to the biblical saints, and to the martyrs perfectly normal – those who had been grafted into Christ's body were one with him, now and forever. It is for this reason that the date of one's death was considered the day of one's birth into the fullness of God's presence and the "glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, and the noble army of Martyrs" (*Te Deum Laudamus*). In this social context, so different than contemporary American life, we find the first prayer addressed to Mary:

"Beneath your compassion, we take refuge, O God-bearer: do not fail to hear our petitions in times of trouble, rescue us from danger, you the pure and blessed one." This prayer, dating from the 200s, was found in a Coptic (Egyptian) liturgical manuscript and continues to be used in the Coptic liturgy as well as the Ambrosian, Armenian, Greek, and Roman rites. What scholars find significant in the prayer is that the term "God-bearer" (Greek *Theotokos*) – a title of Mary inscribed in Christian history at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 – was in use *before* the 200s. Let us keep in mind that early Christians remembered Mary's protection of her child in the flight to Egypt and her frantic search for him in Jerusalem while he was conversing in the Temple.

Image: "Salus Populi Romani" ("Protector of the Roman People"), 590, St. Mary Major: inspired by the Eastern Orthodox icon tradition of the *Hodegetria*

In addition to prayer addressed to Mary, we find an array of writings concerning her life and her growing significance among Christians. Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202) spoke of Mary as a second Eve, drawing a parallel between the primal parent who was manipulated by the Tempter into saying "Yes" to forbidden fruit and thus being ejected from Paradise, and Mary who said "Yes" to the announcement that she would bear the Savior of the World who will restore Paradise:

"Coming into his own creation in visible form, the Lord was sustained by his own creation which he himself sustains in being. His obedience on the tree of the cross reversed the disobedience at the tree in Eden; the good news announced by an angel to Mary, a virgin, undid the evil lie that seduced Eve, the first virgin" (*Against Heresies*, Book 5, 19). Irenaeus does not blame Eve for being manipulated; in fact, he considers Eve and Adam gullible youths in the Edenic Paradise, easily duped by a clever tempter. For Irenaeus, Mary's "Yes" is the first saving act. Thus, the Incarnation – "the Lord coming into his own creation" – is one of *many* saving actions as is clear in Luke who, with Irenaeus, does not reduce "salvation" to the death of Jesus.

The earliest baptismal creed, the Roman Symbol, dating from the 2nd c., includes mention of Mary: "Credo in … Christum Iesum … qui natus est de Spiritu sancto ex Maria virgine" – "I believe in Christ Jesus who is born of the holy Spirit from the virgin Mary." What we witness in the creed is Mary's role in the Incarnation of the Word of God (see John 1:1-14), a role of considerable significance: her assent and her body become the means through which Christ is born in this world. She is not a passive spectator in the Mystery of the Incarnation but rather an active participant. Two thousand years later, the Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, reflecting on Luke's gospel – "*Today* a Savior *is born* for you" – wrote that the question asked of every Christian is this: "Will Christ take flesh in your flesh?" Here we encounter a paradox: the *virginity* of Mary was thought to ensure the divine paternity of Jesus – his divinity – and her very *earthy body* was a witness to his humanity. As the Nicene Creed, building on the Roman Symbol, confesses: "God from God … became truly human." For the literal-minded, it is a challenge to hold the two together but such is the metaphorical language of faith.

Image: The Dormition of the Virgin Mary, 10th c. ivory, Constantinople: Christ receives the soul of Mary as one angel (from the upper left), holding a humeral veil (used for carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession), comes to receive her soul in the form of a small child and then escorts her to heaven (in the upper right).

The *Ascension of Isaiah*, written in the 2nd c., discusses Mary's birth and virginity in terms similar to Matthew – though contemporary scholars suggest that both Matthew and the *Ascension*'s author drew on earlier traditions dating from the mid-1st c. The letters of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (35-107), demonstrate particular interest in Mary as do the *Odes of Solomon* (mid-2nd c.) with its collection of hymns in her honor. The *Gospel of James* (i.e., the *Protevangelium of James*), from 145 CE, narrates Mary's birth and life: it became a primary text in the shaping of devotion to the birth of Christ and to Mary in the churches of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Indeed, it was in the East that devotion to Mary began, in the city of Jerusalem where she is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as receiving the Spirit's power for her son's mission. The 3rd c. text, *The Book of Mary's Repose*, is the first to mention her dormition or "falling asleep." A feast of Mary developed in the late 4th c. at the Jerusalem church dedicated to her Dormition. Of particular interest is the date of the feast – August 15 – the beginning of the grape harvest.

What would not be lost in an agricultural economy in which wine was daily drink is the juxtaposition of the grape harvest and the "harvest" of Mary into the great winery of heaven, there to feast with her Son, the martyrs, and the saints. Early Christians remembered Isaiah's promise: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And God will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; God will swallow up death forever" (Isaiah 25:6-8). For early Christians, this was the promise of Jesus' resurrection extended to all those who were grafted into the Vine of his life, Mary pre-eminent among them (John 15:1-11).

It was reflection on the feast and its importance in the life of the Christian community that led the bishops gathered at the Council of Ephesus in 431 to proclaim Mary *Theotokos*, God-Bearer. The debate at Ephesus, however, centered on Christ and his divine and human nature. In part this was a revisiting of an earlier concern debated at Nicaea: if Christ is not *fully one with God*, he cannot save humanity – he cannot effect the transformation of human beings through grace; if Christ is not *fully one with humanity*, his birth, life, death, and resurrection are simply a fraud. As Athanasius remarked at Nicaea, Christ became one with us so that we might become one with him or, as the priest says at the commingling of water with wine in the chalice: "By the mixing of this water and wine, may we come to share in your divinity as you came to share in our humanity." To confess that Christ Jesus is fully one with God and fully one with humanity would thus reflect on the means through which the divine was joined to the human: the flesh, the body of Mary, and her assent to participate in this Mystery. Thus, the council affirmed the term already used widely among Christians: Mary is the God-Bearer.

In the West, the feast of Mary's Dormition came to be called the Assumption, her entrance into the fullness of life with her risen Son (though the term "Assumption" does not appear until the 8th c.). It is worth remembering that the first church dedicated to Mary in Rome was built in the 330s after Constantine made Christianity a licit religion in the empire. In time, another and much larger Christian basilica was built on the site and named St. Mary Major. It was consecrated in 434, three years after Ephesus, and some 60 years before Benedict would come to Rome for his studies.

Within the 5th c., four major feasts were established: the *Purification of Mary* (February 2, now the Presentation of Jesus), the *Annunciation* (March 25), the *Assumption* (August 15), and the *Nativity of Mary* (September 8). No other feasts in honor of Mary would be added until the 15th c. – 1,000 years. All four of the feasts are found in the current Anglican, Episcopal, Roman, and Orthodox calendars.

Mary in Benedictine and Anglican spirituality

Gregory of Rome (540-604), in his life of St. Benedict, does not mention Mary (*The Dialogues*, Book II). In reading the *Rule* composed by Benedict between 530 and 560, one will find no reference to the mother of Jesus. There is no discussion of Christmas or Epiphany in the *Rule,* two feasts in which the young Galilean woman plays a central role. The liturgical guidance given in the *Rule* focuses largely on the communal celebration of the Divine Office, the eight times of daily prayer structured around the Psalms and reading from Scripture. Benedict *does* note that canticles are to be sung. Concerning Vespers, he appoints the Gospel Canticle: would this be the Magnificat? The Benedictine St. Bede (673-735) preached, "It is an excellent custom of holy Church that we sing Mary's hymn at evening prayer."

Image: Mary holding the Christ Child before the Magi, 3rd c., sarcophagus stone, Rome; the text reads: SEVERA IN DEO VIVAS ("Severa lives in God"), a reference to the deceased woman pictured

Benedict also notes that an *Ambrosian hymn* should be sung at some of the offices, a reference to the hymns of Ambrose of Milan (340-397), bishop, theologian, and hymn writer. Of the four hymns universally attributed to Ambrose, two speak of the Virgin Mary: the well-known Advent hymn, "Intende, Qui Regis Israel," (commonly referred to as "Veni, redemptor gentium," "Savior of the nations, come"), and the office hymn, "Iam surgit tertia hora" ("Now comes the third hour"). A third hymn, considered by some to be of Ambrosian design, "Illuminans Altissimus" ("Most High, enlightening"), includes verses concerning the Virgin Mary and the worship of the Magi. And a fourth hymn, "Agnes, beatae virginis" ("Agnes, blessed virgin"), written in honor of St. Agnes, a virgin martyr of Rome, praises Mary as the model of virginal life, a form of "white" martyrdom (suffering due to one's refusal of dominant cultural values in a life of ascetic simplicity; in the case of Agnes, her refusal to be married to an abusive Roman aristocrat and her spiritual marriage to Christ). Benedict gives no indication of which Ambrosian hymns should be used.

In his exploration of the Benedictine tradition, Columba Stewart, OSB, notes that Benedict's Rule contains a *Christocentric* emphasis, and a "high Christology," at that (*Prayer and Community,* 28). The Rule begins with the call to "follow Christ the Lord" (Prologue) and ends with the exhortation to "prefer nothing whatsoever to Christ" (RB 72).

Within this Christological framework, Benedictine practice has avoided two extremes: the Protestant diminution of Mary as someone only to be admired – and – the post-Reformation Roman exaltation of Mary to the denigration of her Son. As Mary Vincent, OSB, notes in her study of monastic spirituality, "Mary is always *there*, a totality, yet inseparable from Christ" ("Mary and Monasticism," 81).

Image: "Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary," 1190, Benedictine Monastery of St. John of the Rock, Huesca, Aragon, Spain: this carved relief was created by a monastic artist known only as The Master of San Juan de la Peña.

LISTENING

What we discover in reading the Rule and the Gospels are correspondences between the life of Mary and monastic practices. Consider, for instance, the opening words of the Rule: "Listen carefully, my son, my daughter, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart" (RB Prologue). "The angel Gabriel came to Mary and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be" (Luke 1:28-29). In both instances, there is attentive listening. And that attentive listening presumes a measure of silence and stillness that enables the *ear of the heart* to listen well. Benedict left the cacophony of Rome for the silence and stillness of a wilderness cave. Rather than rushing through the liturgy with a patter of unnecessary chatter, the monastic liturgy is marked by measured silence. This stands in contrast to the noisiness of our age – multiplied by the capacity to be "plugged in" every hour of the day, every day of the year. Perhaps this is why those who look to the Rule as a guide for Christian formation take seriously the need to let silence become one's friend. For without silence, how can one hear the voice of another? Indeed, it is good to remember that obedience – one of the cardinal virtues of monastic spirituality – derives from the Latin *oboedire*, "to listen well."

QUESTIONING

Yet notice that Mary does not accept the angelic announcement at face value; she questions the messenger: "Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'" (Luke 1:34) Four times Benedict raises questions in the Prologue and then their number increases throughout the Rule. And frequently such questions *call into question* these common cultural assumptions of his day and ours: "Do whatever you want" (RB 4). "Personal gratification is a virtue" (RB 5). "Avoid suffering at any cost" (RB 7). "Take what you can get – you have a right to as much as you can hoard" (RB 33). "How can this be?" asks Mary.

For those who read the Rule within its historical context, Benedict wonders how the taken-for-granted assumptions of his cultural milieu actually disorient the Christian and promote disordered desires. Is it any different today?

PONDERING

The German theologian, Hans Urs van Balthasar, was quick to claim Mary as a contemplative in light of this Lucan description: "When the shepherds saw [Mary, Joseph, and the child lying in the manger], they made known what had been told them about this child … But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2: 17-19). Pondering them in her heart.

Image: "Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary," *The Benedictional* of St. Æthelwold, Abbot of Abingdon in England, 960s: note that Mary holds a Bible in her left hand and has been interrupted in her pondering of a passage by the angel Gabriel

Benedict writes, "the brothers should have specified periods for manual labor as well as for spiritual reading" (RB 48). One of the monastic practices shared by Anglicans is *lectio divina*, allowing a word or phrase of Scripture from the Daily Office lectionary or the Daily Eucharistic lectionary to be pondered. While we rightly employ the work of biblical scholars in preparing to preach and teach (for they continue to construct what the biblical text simply assumes: the cultural and historical context in which the Scriptures were created), *lectio divina* invites one to slow down, to read a short passage more than once, to ponder it carefully, and to savor it. Thomas Cranmer, architect of *The Book of Common Prayer*, following medieval monastic practice, invited English Christians to "ruminate, and, as it were, chew the cud of Scripture, that we may have its sweet juice, spiritual effect, marrow, honey, kernel, taste, comfort, and consolation" ("Homily on Scripture"). In this practice of pondering a word or passage, one may well hear the voice of the living God, its own kind of annunciation.

INTERCEDING

Whenever Holy Baptism is celebrated, the assembly confesses its belief in and commitment to the communion of saints as articulated in the Apostles' Creed, a confession of faith that dates to the 4th c. The Catechism of *The Book of Common Prayer* teaches that, "the communion of saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise" (BCP 862). The fourth Eucharistic Prayer asks that, "we may find our inheritance with the Blessed Virgin Mary, with prophets, apostles, martyrs, and all the saints who have found favor with you in ages past. We praise you in union with them."

It is within the communion of the living and the dead, with whom we are bound together in prayer and with whom we praise God, that the practice of intercession – care for the wellbeing of others – is grounded. Aghast at the late medieval misuse of the invocation of the saints and the magical thinking that accompanied such misuse, the English reformers of the 16th c. sought to purify the practice of intercession within the communion of saints by directing prayer to the Triune God.

At the same time, they retained the intercession of the saints as they studied it in patristic or early Christian writings. As articulated by William Forbes, 16th c. bishop of Edinburgh, a reformed practice invited Anglicans to ask the saints, in particular St. Mary and St. John the Baptist, *to pray with them and on their behalf*. This was distinguished from the Roman practice of petitioning an individual saint with a particular favor. "As we celebrate with our festive gathering the nativity the Lord's forerunner, blessed John, *let us ask for his prayers*," preached Augustine of Hippo on June 24. "He is the friend of the Bridegroom and can thus obtain for us what belongs to the Bridegroom" ("On the Nativity of the Baptist," Sermon 293).

In the Rule, Benedict encourages the community "to lay our petitions before the Lord God of all things with the utmost humility and sincere devotion" (RB 20). At the same time, early Christians asked the Blessed Virgin Mary to pray with them and on their behalf: "Beneath your compassion, we take refuge, O God-bearer: do not fail to hear our petitions in times of trouble." Indeed, it was Hermann of Reichenau, an 11th c. Benedictine, who is credited with composing the hymn to Mary sung at the end of Evening Prayer or Compline in Benedictine monasteries:

Hail, holy Queen, mother of mercy,
Hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope.
To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve;
To you do we send up our sighs,
Mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.
Turn, then, most gracious advocate,
Your eyes of mercy toward us;
And after this, our exile,
Show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

One might quibble with designation of baptized and vowed Christians as "banished children of Eve" and life on earth as a "vale of tears" (though it may well feel that way in the midst of pandemic). Nonetheless, the prayer – sung to one of the most beautiful and haunting chant melodies – underscores the mercy of the one who desires to protect and intercede with her son.

Listen to the Benedictine monks of Santo Domingo de Silas chant the Salve:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAmydVsNMqM

PRESENTING CHRIST

One of the earliest images of Mary finds her seated on a chair, holding her son facing forward to the worshipper. This posture, first found in the Byzantine tradition, was imported to Italy during that tumultuous age in which Benedict lived. The Roman Empire was disintegrating in the peninsula under Lombard and Ostrogothic invasions. When Benedict moved to Montecassino, Byzantine rule had been asserted in Sicily and parts of central and northern Italy. And, with Byzantine rule came Byzantine worship and devotion to the Theotokos. While we find early artistic evidence of Mary holding the Christ Child as the Magi come to worship him (see image on page 9), the image of Mary as the *sedes sapientiae*, the Seat or Throne of Wisdom grew in the western imagination in the early middle ages, the "monastic centuries."

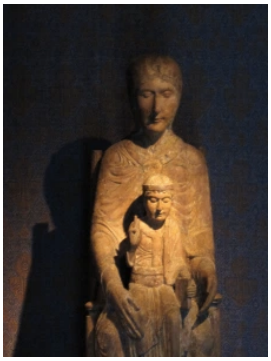


Image: "Virgin Mary and Child," the "Mabon Madonna," wood statue, Burgundy, France, 12th c., Mary Shrine, Saint John's Abbey Church in Collegeville, Minnesota: Mary becomes the throne on which Christ sits, his hand raised in the ancient Roman gesture requesting silence before he, the Word of God, speaks, a gesture that is also interpreted as one of blessing for the worshipper

In the penultimate chapter of the Rule, Benedict writes, "To their fellow monks they show the pure love of brothers … let them prefer nothing whatsoever to Christ" (RB 72). Showing love and preferring nothing to Christ capture the image of the Throne of Wisdom: Mary presents Christ, not herself, as the incarnate wisdom of God, as the embodiment of God's love for the creation. Indeed, one can read the Rule and come to recognize that the Rule itself is a form of "wisdom literature" offering guidance for the Christian life (Michael Peterson, OSB, "Oblate Retreat," 2020). But, as Benedict points out, "The Lord waits for us daily to translate into action his holy teachings" (Prologue). Contemplation of the Wisdom of God must lead to actions, to behavior shaped by that Wisdom. This is clearly seen in Benedict's observations regarding the abbot: "He must point out to [the monks] all that is good and holy more by example than by words … demonstrating God's instruction by a living example" (RB 2). As a primary representative of Christ in the community, the abbot presents Christ through his actions, encouraging others in this same vocation.

EPILOGUE

The early 19th c. movement of reform in the Church of England – variously called the Oxford Movement or Tractarian Movement – blossomed into the Anglo-Catholic form of Anglican faith and life (paralleled with the renewal of Benedictine life and Catholic worship in Solesmes, France, and the renewal of Lutheran worship and vowed life at Neuendettelsau, Germany). Weary of the verbose and rationalistic worship that emanated from the 16th c. Reformation and 18th c. Enlightenment, Anglo-Catholics led in the restoration of the early, monastic, and high medieval inheritance of English spirituality.

Image: Anglican novices in South Africa

This included the flowering of Anglican Benedictine communities and many other religious orders (with twelve orders taking one of the titles of Mary), the recovery of the medieval Sarum Rite (the form of worship throughout England prior to the 16th c.), the public celebration of the feasts of the Lord and of the saints, the regular celebration of the Divine Office in cathedrals and many parishes, and a renewed devotion to Our Lady, as Anglicans have affectionately called St. Mary the Virgin (consider the many Lady Chapels that survived Protestant purges in the United Kingdom and newer ones that have been established in the 20th c.).

Let the last word, then, be that of the Anglo-Catholic preacher and Archbishop of Canterbury emeritus, Rowan Williams, from a sermon preached at York Cathedral on August 15, 2019, the Assumption of Mary:

Image: "Hail, Mary: Terror of Demonic Forces in Daily Life," Ben Wildflower Art, 2020

"Christians can not afford to believe in romantic visions of the past. Rather, faith can lead us in the struggle between good and evil in our world today. And Mary, the mother of Jesus whom we celebrate today, helps us to root that struggle and our faith in the real world.

Her song, the Magnificat – today's gospel reading and the canticle sung here every day at Evensong – is nothing less than a cry for the transformation of the world. A young woman, whose whole place in society is already marginal because of her gender and made even more vulnerable by unexpected pregnancy, sings with absolute confidence of a God who confounds expectation. Mary names the deathly forces of her day and of ours: poverty, power imbalance, injustice, hunger – and speaks of God's utter commitment to their destruction. So Mary's song is not a wistful "if only the Kingdom were like this." It is a profound and radical call to put our faith into action, to *build* the Kingdom."

What did Benedict teach?
"The Lord waits for us daily to translate into action his holy teachings."

Sources

Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (The Seattle Statement 2004) at http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/arcic/doc/e_arcic_mary.html

Benedict of Norcia, *The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, Timothy Fry, OSB, ed. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1981)

Shawn Carruth, OSB, "Monastic Witness III: Distinctiveness: Mary in the Temple," in *The American Benedictine Review* 62:2 (June 2011): 143-160

Caroline Ebertshause, Herbert Haag, Joseph Kirchberger, and Dorothee Sölle *Mary: Art, Culture, and Religion Through the Ages* (New York: Crossroads, 1998)

Sally E. R. Harper, "The Salve Regina," in *Medieval English Benedictine Liturgy: Studies in the Formation, Structure, and Content of the Monastic Votive Office, c. 950-1540*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2020)

Pierre Jounel, "The Veneration of Mary," in *The Liturgy and Time*, Vol. IV in *The Church at Prayer*, A.G. Martimort, ed., Matthew O'Connell, trans. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1986), 130-150

"Marian Devotion" at St. Paul's Episcopal Church Seattle can be accessed at http://www.stpaulseattle.org/formation-practice/marian-devotion/

Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998)

Stephen Shoemaker, *Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016)

Columba Stewart, OSB, *Prayer and Community: The Benedictine Tradition* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998)

Richard Stracke, *A Guide to Christian Iconography: Images, Symbols, and Texts* at https://www.christianiconography.info/index.html

Mary Clare Vincent, OSB, "Mary and Monasticism," in *Mary and Monasticism: Our Lady's Place in Monastic Life*, Vol. 10 of *Word & Spirit: A Monastic Review* (Petersham, MA: 1988): 52-56

Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Our Lady in Monasticism," in *Mary and Monasticism: Our Lady's Place in Monastic Life*, Vol. 10 of *Word & Spirit: A Monastic Review* (Petersham, MA: 1988): 78-93

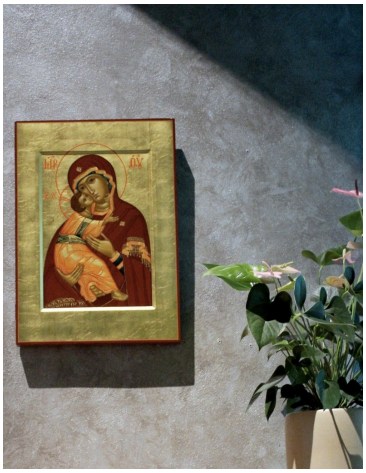


Image: Icon of St. Mary the Virgin and Christ Child, Russian, 21st c.
St. Paul's Episcopal Church Seattle

Collect for the Feast of St. Mary the Virgin, August 15
O God, you have taken to yourself the blessed Virgin Mary, mother of your incarnate Son: Grant that we, who have been redeemed by his blood, may share with her the glory of your eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Readings
Isaiah 61:10–11
Psalm 34
Galatians 4:4–7
Luke 1:46–55