

**New Life Episcopal Church
Uniontown, Ohio**



**St Mary the Virgin
A Sermon for the 12th Sunday after Pentecost
August 16, 2026**

Preacher – Troy Dunn

[Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

Sermon – The Blessed Virgin Mary

Like Barbara, I'm a bit of a history buff. And among all the branches of history religious history is a favorite, especially miracle stories! Today we celebrate the Blessed Virgin Mary in a special way, also known as the Feast of the Assumption in Roman Catholic and in some Anglo-Catholic circles. So, let me start with a historical event written and supposedly witnessed by many. On August 15, 1920 the Polish people witnessed the Miracle on the Vistula during the battle of Warsaw. Outnumbered and facing a massive Bolshevik invasion that aimed to sweep communism across Europe, Poland turned to heaven with intense nationwide prayer. Entire villages went to Mass, prayed the Rosary, and recited prayers for hours before an image of Our Lady of Czestochowa. That very day as the battle raged near Warsaw, captured Red Army soldiers gave astonishing testimony – Our Lady herself appeared in the sky – a majestic figure resembling the Black Madonna, holding a shield that deflected bullets back at the attackers. Surrounded by light and accompanied by heavenly forces, she terrified the Bolshevik troops. They fled in panic, abandoned their positions, and hid from sheer fear – despite the death penalty for desertion. The Polish soldiers did not see the apparition themselves, but they saw the enemy break and retreat chaotically. Witnesses described hundreds of atheists beholding

the apparition and calling out “Matier Bozhya” or Mother of God! They admitted they could not fight against her. The Red Army was defeated and Poland was saved from communist domination. An 1873 prophecy by Venerable Wanda Malczewska had foretold one day that on the Feast of the Assumption it would become a day of national triumph over a deadly enemy. However, perhaps Mary was busy during WWII?

This is just one interesting story among many throughout Christian history. Some of the big ones – Lourdes, Fatima, Garabandal, Zeitun, Medjugorje – all tell stories of Marian apparitions at important turning points in history. Episcopalians affirm that Mary is central to the incarnation. Tradition and evidence suggests that the early church held Mary in high esteem as the Mother of Jesus and as intercessor. She is “Theotokos”, the Mother of God as defined at the Council of Ephesus in AD 431. One of the earliest known prayers for her intercession, the Subtuum Praesidium, dates back to around AD 250.

We fly to thy protection, O holy Mother of God;
Despise not our petitions in our necessities,
but deliver us always from all dangers,
O glorious and blessed Virgin. Amen.

However, among all the controversial debates about who and what Mary really was – first and foremost she was a human woman and

mother. So, I want to invite you on a little historical walk through Mary's life from Nazareth to the cross. There are several key highlights in Mary's life that I want to point out which truly exemplify who this woman and mother is in relation to her son Jesus, to us, and as the first disciple of the Messianic Christ.

Let me start by saying Mary had a humble existence. She was a young woman (probably teens) betrothed to a man from the House of David. She lived with her parents in the small insignificant village of Nazareth in Galilee. However, scripture provides more insight about Mary that, despite a seemingly simple average life, God had been doing something extraordinary to prepare her for a most important mission.

Her journey starts with a light in a dark, dusty room when an angel, Gabriel, arrives and greets Mary with, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you." Here, "Hail" is not a simple hello. It means rejoice! Gabriel is declaring the most important announcement in human history! The call to rejoice recalls the way Daughter Zion was addressed in the Old Testament by the prophets Zephaniah and Zechariah. Daughter Zion was a poetic personification of the city of Jerusalem and became a symbol of the faithful remnant to rejoice over the coming messianic age. Gabriel's rejoice greeting to Mary signals that the messianic era is dawning. She is "full of grace"

showing the deepest dimension of Mary's personality fashioned by grace and the object of divine favor. "The Lord is with you" is indicative of being called to a great mission that will be difficult and demanding as seen in O.T. examples with Jacob, Moses, or Jeremiah.

Mary is also seen as servant. How many times have we perhaps prayed, "Lord, may your will be done," or "Please show me what I am supposed to do." This represents a true openness to God's plan for our life – as we see here in Mary's life, "Be it done to me according to your word." This is the great surrender!

Mary as servant and handmaid completely surrenders her freedom.

Handmaid in the Greek word *doule* indicates a servant or slave, that is, to accept God's authority in one's life and serve His purpose.

Mary surrenders all control. Her "fiat", or "yes", is unique in scripture. In O.T. examples it is the messenger angel who speaks last before departing as the angel did with Abraham, Sarah, Zechariah, and Samson's parents. In these cases, there was no consent on their part. In Mary's case she gets the last word; she gives her consent!

When it comes time for Mary to embark on her journey to visit her cousin Elizabeth she *arises* or *gets up* to go. In the Greek these words indicate the beginning of a new action. Mary embarks on a

new spiritual journey with the Lord as she assumes her new mission as the mother of the Messiah. Like Jael and Judith who struck down their enemies, Mary is also instrumental in God's plan for rescuing Israel. When Elizabeth addresses Mary as the "Mother of my Lord" she is confirming that Mary is the mother of the Davidic king.

Interestingly, in ancient Israel, as in many historic monarchies, the queenship was bestowed not on the king's wife, but rather on the king's mother. Therefore, Elizabeth is honoring Mary as the Queen Mother. And as many of us may be aware that over the centuries this has been an ever-developing title and theology of Mary as Queen of Heaven.

We then arrive with Mary at the manger – despite traveling while pregnant, having to participate in the Roman census, giving birth in a manger (or inn or cave) reveals to us that even in the face of hardship and humiliation, poverty and rejection Mary is never shown to complain. This should serve as a model of how we should handle the little and the big crosses we carry each day. We could ask God to show us what he is teaching us in those trials and, like Mary, we can keep them and ponder them in our hearts.

Mary shares in the piercing pain of the sword through her participation in her son's sufferings. When she presents her son to the priest Simeon in the temple he prophesies that a sword will

pierce her own soul too. The word for sword indicates a large broad sword illustrating the intense emotional pain and suffering she will endure over her son's rejection, and proves just how difficult her mission will become. Mary sees more clearly where her mission will lead her. Later, when the boy Jesus goes missing she gets a foretaste of the loss of Jesus as she frantically searches for him for three days. I find it interesting that he is missing for three days, for after his passion, death and crucifixion it is three days to his joyous resurrection and those closest to him "find" him again! With each and every experience of Mary as a mother with a son she loves, she is brought deeper into the mystery of her son's work of redemption. Over those three days she experiences the mystery of suffering turned to joy in a way that anticipates Christ's death and resurrection.

And one of my favorites – the Mary who cares enough to make her first "intercession", if you will. At the Wedding at Cana, the wine ran out. This could have been a disaster for the host family, but Mary was moved with pity and sought to ask her son to intervene. This is epic in my opinion because it was not quite Jesus's time yet (that is to inaugurate his ministry by performing a public miracle). His mother approached him, interceded on behalf of the host couple for their immediate need. There is no more wine, and Mary sees the

host's needs before anyone else, but she has faith in not only what Jesus could do, but trusts that he will take care of things in his own way and time. Jesus initially appears non-committal, yet Mary says to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." These are Mary's last recorded words in Scripture. Jesus subsequent actions indicate that he looks favorably on Mary's petition.

Finally, Mary's total surrender and total trust at the foot of the cross. Jesus's mission reaches its climax. Mary is present at both pivotal moments – at the inauguration and conclusion of his earthly mission. Mary now weeps and laments, the sword has pierced her soul. She has been there throughout Jesus's life, from beginning to end, silently present in the background, attending, praying, serving, believing, surrendering, trusting, interceding.

Mary's example of Good Friday offers us much hope in our own affliction. Imagine though, Mary's possible thoughts – "I thought my son was to have an everlasting kingdom and save Israel, but here he is dying on cross killed by his enemies." This act is total rejection of her son, the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus looks more like a tragic failure being mocked and killed by his enemies. This seems to mark the end of the Kingdom of God He was claiming to build. Mary can only cling to faith, faith that this is truly the Son of God, that she is the "Mother of my Lord", that the sword is truly part of God's plan

and that her son is once again doing the Father's business. She never questioned! She is a faithful disciple with great faith to the very end as she stands at the foot of the cross in deep sorrow. Mary's presence at the cross also reveals a new mission entrusted to her – given as mother to John and thereby to all of us. “Behold, your mother.” Mary's role in spiritual motherhood over all Christians is just as John's role in representing all faithful disciples. Her queenly position serves as an important reminder that all Christ's followers are called to share in his reign over sin and death. She is the first and model disciple, faithful from beginning to end.

Just as Mary cared for the couple in Cana, and cared about the people in Poland, she cares for you and me; she is the “Mother of my Lord.” Whether we believe that she appeared to all those people in all those places or not, or whether she is in heaven with her son interceding as the Queen Mother or not; whatever your belief, whatever you feel towards her she is the supreme example of true discipleship for all Christians that we are called to emulate to the best of our human ability. Whether she is exalted in heaven or by us here on earth she is still our mother and example. So, as she reminds us, as she always always points us to Jesus – Do whatever He tells you. Trust without hesitation. And persevere in faith.

Hail Mary!

Rejoice!

Amen.