

## Magnificat

In recent years the Church of England has come to accept the 15<sup>th</sup> of August as the main feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in line with the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, though without subscribing to the particular doctrines of the assumption or dormition held by those churches.

Mary the mother of our Lord is an important figure for all Christians, though in different ways in different traditions. Celebrating diversity has to begin within the Church itself. For Mary should unite Christians, not divide them.

There is of course a danger in sentimentalizing Mary, but seeing how she appears in the New Testament should help us to avoid that. For there she comes across as a very human person, one with whom we can identify.

When she is called to be the mother of Jesus Mary is clearly quite young. And yet in her acceptance of this great calling she shows a courage and maturity beyond her years. Though humble and unassuming she displays an inner strength and devotion that keeps her going through all the different challenges of her life – not least witnessing the painful and humiliating death of her son on the cross.

We heard as our Bible reading just now her great song of praise to God, the Magnificat (Luke 1.46-55). The words are so familiar that it is easily to become immune to their revolutionary power. They echo in many ways the song of an earlier mother, that of Hannah the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 2.1-10).

Mary looks forward to nothing less than an overturning of the current world order, in which the proud and the powerful will give way to the lowly. The hungry will be fed and the rich dispossessed. Strong words indeed, and words that retain a powerful resonance in our world today – a world in which there is still much injustice and inequality.

Mary reminds us that God's ways are not the same as our ways. So often we see power as a strength, wealth as something to aspire to and to be attained. Mary reminds us that for God humility and generosity are the qualities of true humanity – qualities she embodied in her own life.

Mary continues to challenge us to lead lives that God wants us to lead, that our praise of God may be not hollow but, like Mary's, real and rooted in our commitment to loving and serving both God and others.

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