



THE MAGAZINE OF THE
Society of Mary



American Edition

April 2023

www.somamerica.org

From the Superior

Notice of 2023 Annual Mass and Meeting

March 2023


Dear Members and Friends,

With great joy I commend to you this this Annunciation-Visitation 2023 issue of the American edition of AVE, the magazine of the Society of Mary in the United States. Without any editorial planning on our part, this issue's articles echo and re-echo one another in sometimes subtle ways. Recurring emphases include Mary as the New Eve and the salutary influence of Marian devotion on the position of women in medieval society.

The 2023 Annual Mass and Meeting will take place at the Cathedral of All Saints, Albany, New York, at 11am on Saturday, May 20th. The celebrant and preacher will be the Very Rev'd Dr. Leander Harding, Dean of the Cathedral. Luncheon and the Annual Meeting will follow directly.

One item of Annual Meeting business will be approval of an amended Constitution incorporating changes made necessary by last year's revision of the Constitution of the Society of Mary in the United Kingdom. The text of the proposed amended Constitution is available at <https://somamerica.org/2023.pdf>.

Albany is remarkably easy to reach, being well served by an international airport, an Amtrak station, and the intersection of several interstate highways. The Albany area features numerous reasonably priced hotels and other accommodations.

The Society of Mary Council joins me in hoping for a good turnout of our members and friends at this year's Annual Mass and Meeting. 

With all blessings in Christ and Our Lady,

The Rev'd John D. Alexander, Ph.D.
Superior
Society of Mary in the United States



BORN OF A WOMAN

Sermon at the Society of Mary May Devotion
 Saturday, May 14, 2022
 Church of Saint Silas the Martyr, Kentish Town, London

By
 Peter Anthony

When was the first time in human history that Mary the Mother of Jesus is mentioned in writing? What is the first occasion that someone actually writes down a reference to the Virgin Mary?

It's an intriguing question. I suppose our first thought might be to think of the Gospels. They tell the story of Mary's life, so surely the answer would be there. We heard in our gospel reading at Mass Luke tell us, "And the Virgin's name was Mary." Is that the earliest written mention of Mary? I'm afraid not, because Matthew's Gospel is possibly slightly earlier.

So what about Matthew's gospel? Matthew begins his narrative with that long genealogy if you remember. His first mention of Mary is there when he talks about "Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born." Is that the earliest mention of Mary?

I'm afraid not. For the problem is that the Gospels are not in fact the earliest texts in the New Testament. The earliest written mention of Mary in the whole of human literary history has just been read out in this liturgy, and it comes from St Paul writing in the late 40s AD in the Epistle to the Galatians:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law... (Galatians 4:4-5)

Born of a woman." That is the earliest written mention of Mary in the whole history of human writing – and Paul doesn't even mention her name. Mary is simply "a woman."

We learn a lot about Mary from that mention of her simply as "*a woman.*" For we live in a society where personal identity, individual choice, and self-obsession are rife. Your name and identity are important. The more people know your name on Facebook and Twitter, the more powerful people imagine you are.

Indeed there are many alarmingly self-obsessed behaviours which 20 or 30 years ago would have been diagnosed as signs of certifiable narcissism but which nowadays are viewed as completely normal behaviour for our politicians.

And yet there is something about Mary's life which is the opposite of narcissism. For she never draws attention to herself in the New Testament. She always points to her son. Her name on one level is not what's significant. The important thing is her role, when God "*sent his Son, born of a woman*" - a giving of her life to God that was so complete that Christ could be born as one of us.

You may have heard that at All Saints' Margaret Street we have just had Rowan Williams preaching for us over Holy Week. There are one or two videos of it on the internet I'm told that you might like to hunt out.

It was a really extraordinary week of preaching. He was amazing as you can imagine, but I was very struck by a conversation I had with Bishop Rowan over lunch on Holy Thursday. In it, he started reminiscing about about the Society of Mary Pilgrimage to Lourdes that he led nearly 15 years ago. You may remember he was afforded the honour of preaching at the International Mass whilst we were there.

Bishop Rowan said this of that Mass: "I have never on any other occasion in my entire life preached to more people about Jesus than on that day. And just think – it was Our Lady that made that possible."

It's so often Mary that opens up or creates the occasions that allow us to talk about Jesus and point to him.

It's she who appears in a location that becomes a focus of pilgrimage, but it's her Son Jesus who uses that place to heal and renew us.

It's she whose image accompanied us in our procession just now, but it's Jesus whose disciples we are and whose church people will have noticed today.

It's she whose rosary we recite, but it's the saving mysteries of her son that we enter ever more deeply into as we pray those decades.

For if ever our modern world needed a model that is the opposite of the self-obsession and narcissism of our day, it is Mary: constantly pointing away from herself and to Jesus; constantly drawing our attention to that saving mystery that, "*when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children...*" **AVE**

The Rev'd Peter Anthony is Vicar of All Saints' Church, Margaret Street, London. This sermon appeared in the October (Rosary) 2022 issue of the English edition of AVE and is reprinted here by kind permission of the author.

HILDEGARD OF BINGEN AND THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

By
Phoebe Pettingell

The twelfth century in Western Europe produced many remarkable figures, including Bernard of Clairvaux, Adam and Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Abelard and Heloise—the list continues—and amid its outstanding characters, Hildegard of Bingen (c.1098-1179) is one of the most original. A Benedictine nun, theologian, composer, poet, healer, and perhaps artist, she founded two monasteries, wrote significant theological works and plays as well as several tracts on medicine, left more surviving musical compositions than any other medieval musician, and even constructed a language, the *lingua ignota*.

In early childhood, Hildegard began to experience visions, both visual and auditory, which she called the Voice of the Living Light. Except for discussing them with her mentor, Jutta von Sponheim, and her confessor, Volmar, she did not tell anyone about ongoing visions until, at 42, the Living Light commanded her to record them. After some hesitation she did so in a three-part work she called *Scivias* (from *sci vias Domini*, or Know the works of the Lord). Here she recounts the way her visions reveal God's plan for Salvation, the battle between Good and Evil, the fall of the rebel angels leading to the fall of man, and then the new dawn when the Virgin Mary's "yes" to God reverses the clouding caused by Eve's temptation and Christ becomes Incarnate. In Hildegard's scheme



Illumination from Scivias (1151) showing Hildegard receiving a vision and dictating to her confessor Volmar.

(not totally unique to her time), humans were created to replace the fallen angels, so when a certain Golden Number of the Justified is reached, Time will end, the Church will be perfected, and Christ will come to rule Eternity. The final vision includes fourteen songs, and part of a musical drama, which she later expanded as the *Ordo Virtutum*, in which the Virtues, heavenly handmaidens, help defeat personified sins and assist souls in their ascent.

Scivias became an important work, helped by the promotional efforts of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Despite Hildegard's health struggles, she went on to write a number of other works on a variety of subjects, inspired by her visions. In later life, she corresponded with the Pope, who admired her advice, and high-ranking clergy, as well as other abbesses and mystics. She also began to preach in public—highly unusual for a woman at that time. She spoke against Church corruption in this tumultuous period. Her writings show familiarity with an array of ancient and contemporary theologians—the *scriptoria* of Benedictine monasteries serving both as libraries and vehicles for education. Women's convents of the time were usually adjacent to the men's monasteries, and upper-class women like Hildegard and Heloise helped turn their convents into centers of formidable learning.

The growth of Marian devotion altered the understanding of women's place in the culture. Rather than daughters of the fallen Eve, they could be seen as followers of the Virgin—the new Eve ...

During and after the Second Crusade (1145-1149), the twelfth century saw a rise in Western Mariology, which flourished earlier in the Eastern Church. Marian feasts were only included in the Roman calendar at the end of the seventh century. But by the high middle ages, Mary was increasingly seen not only as the Mother of God, but as mediatrix for sinners with her Son, when He comes to judge the world. This growth of Marian devotion altered the understanding of women's place in the culture. Rather than daughters of the fallen Eve, they could be seen as followers of the Virgin—the new Eve who could crush the head of that old serpent, Satan. This not only explains Hildegard's own understanding of Mary, but also how women like her assumed new roles of leadership at this time.

In Hildegard's cosmology, as in the cosmology of her era, the Annunciation and Mary's yes to the angel, makes Mary the gate of the new dawn where Christ's birth foretells the conquering of death and sin. As the new, unfallen Eve, Mary crushes the old Serpent's

head, mortally wounding him. In one of the marvelous illustrations of the *Scivias*, Satan is portrayed as a chained dragon. If Eve blurred the clear light of Creation by succumbing to his blandishments, Mary births the clear light as God intended it. This image is common to the twelfth century. Hildegard also refers to Christ as “the music born in Mary’s womb.” In one of her poems, the Virgin sings of how the Godhead “laid in my womb all manner of music.” Thus, Mary, the Queen of heaven and Lady of all Angels, is always surrounded by celestial harmonies recorded by Hildegard’s distinctive monophony. Significantly, in her *Ordo Virtutum*, the Devil never sings and is portrayed by a man against the female Virtues. Music belongs ultimately to the Divine.

Mary is also associated with the female representation of the Church, which, in twelfth century cosmology, is also associated with the Moon, as the Sun is with Christ. Hildegard’s art portrays fascinating drawings of “the Cosmic Egg” that contains the universe in a womblike structure, as well as the Edifice of the Church, which, when finished at the end of Time, will be the heavenly Jerusalem described in Revelation. Hildegard’s visions align her with the prophets, and many in her own era considered her a prophet, despite some conflicts with local authorities from time to time.

In the *Scivias*, the singing of the sevenfold daily office is both an imitation of the work of angels, and a participation in their work of redemption. Hildegard associates consecrated virgins with the saints in white robes who follow the Lamb in Revelation. One of her battles with local authorities concerned her practice in dressing her nuns for Feast Days in silk veils over their flowing hair, and gold rings, symbolizing that they were brides of Christ. Some of the pictures in *Scivias* show the Church as a vested woman standing before the altar. At the same time, the author was always careful to describe herself as “a meek rib,” since woman was formed out of the body of Adam. Still, she tartly pointed out that while women could live without men, no man could be born without a woman.

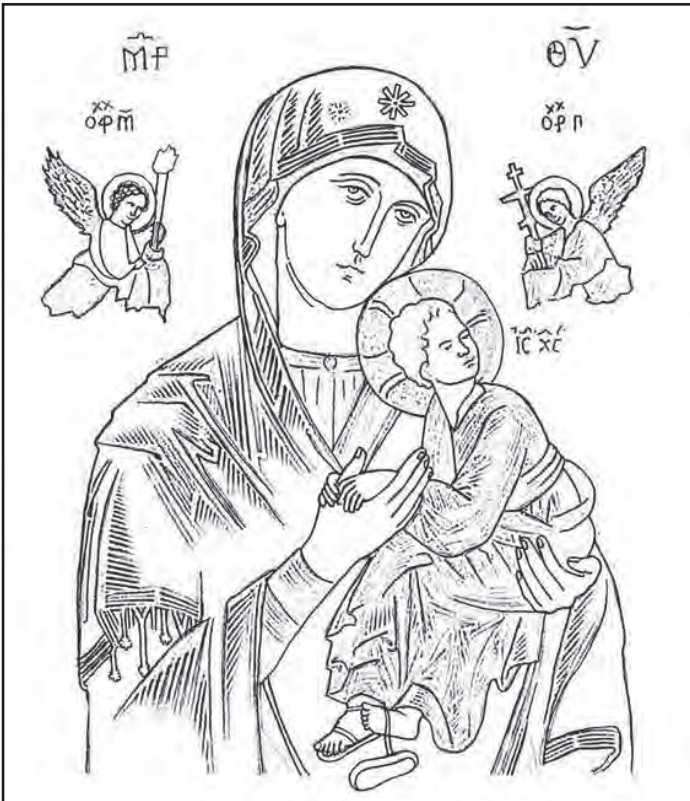
This is not to suggest Hildegard was a modern feminist. Rather, she represented a shift in the perspective of a woman’s role in her own time. She predates the humanism of the *pietà* and suffering Man of Sorrows that would emerge in the thirteenth century. Rather, she exemplifies the devotion to the Mother of God, Mary most merciful, who pleads with her Son, sitting over the rainbow in judgment of a world infected with sin and death. Yet Christ too is waiting for the redeemed to replace the fallen angels

so that Creation can become what His Father intended, and everything becomes celestial harmony. As one of Hildegard's poems puts it:

*Today a closed portal
 Opens to us that the serpent once strangled in a woman,
 But now the bloom from the Virgin Mary
 Shines clearly in the dawn.*

Hildegard's work contains a synchronicity where all our senses, when properly aligned, lead us deeper and deeper into the mysteries of the Living Light that is God. **AVE**

Phoebe Pettingell is Editor of AVE and lives in Northern Wisconsin.



Our Lady of Perpetual Help

PRAYING THE ROSARY IN THE HOLY LAND:

THE JOYFUL MYSTERIES

By
John D. Alexander

In April 2022, my wife and I joined in a pilgrimage to the Holy Land organized jointly by the Living Church Foundation and St. Thomas' Church, Fifth Avenue, New York. Owing to the Pandemic, the pilgrimage had been postponed twice since March 2020 when it was first scheduled. As a convivial group of new friends and old gathered in the departure lounge at Newark International Airport, we could not believe that we were finally on our way.

Arriving in Tel Aviv, we met our capable and knowledgeable guide, Mike, a Palestinian Catholic from East Jerusalem. Father Carl Turner of Saint Thomas' and Bishop John Bauerschmidt of Tennessee served as our chaplains, celebrating Mass daily and providing astute theological commentary in homilies and impromptu talks at some of the stops along the way.

The itinerary was highly structured, full, and exhausting. We packed in visits to as many Holy Places and archeological sites we could fit into each day. It was a wonderful pilgrimage: spiritually uplifting and marked by good fellowship, delicious Middle Eastern food, abundant shopping, and much fun.

My one regret was that we did not have more free time to wander around on our own, especially in Jerusalem—a city to which I now definitely want to return. As an officer of the Society of Mary, moreover, I wanted to see two Holy Places in particular: the Abbey of the Dormition on Mount Zion (closed, we were told, for renovations), and the Tomb of the Virgin in the Kidron Valley, venerated as the site of Our Lady's Assumption (not permitted by our schedule).

These two omissions got me thinking that it would be fun to organize a Holy Land pilgrimage intentionally around the Mysteries of the Rosary. As it happened, of course, we did see many of the associated sites. In what follows, then, I offer a mini travelogue of our visits to those connected with the Five Joyful Mysteries.

1. The Annunciation—Nazareth

Known as “the Arab capital of Israel,” the city of Nazareth today boasts almost 80,000 residents, of whom approximately 70 percent are Muslim and 30 percent Christian. In Roman times, however, it was a small Jewish village, identified in St. Luke’s Gospel as the place where the Archangel Gabriel brought the news to the Blessed Virgin Mary that she would conceive and bear the Son of God. All four Gospels name Nazareth as Jesus’ childhood home.

Nazareth has been a Christian pilgrimage destination since the earliest centuries. The Roman Catholic Basilica of the Annunciation is a large modernist structure, completed in 1969, enclosing ancient foundations and walls—still visible—of earlier Byzantine and Crusader churches. Dominating the city’s skyline, the towering conical cupola shelters a wide octagonal opening in the church’s upper level, affording a bird’s eye view of the Grotto below, believed to be the dwelling where Mary received the Annunciation. The Grotto’s Altar bears the Latin inscription, *Verbum caro hic factum est*, “Here the Word was made flesh.”

Our pilgrimage stopped in Nazareth mid-afternoon *en route* from the Mediterranean coast to the Sea of Galilee. Our tour bus’s uphill approach to the city afforded spectacular views of the Mount of Precipice,



Grotto of the Annunciation from Above, Nazareth

traditionally identified as “*the brow of the hill on which their city was built*” from which the villagers attempted to throw Jesus down headlong after his sermon in the synagogue (Luke 4:29). After visiting the Basilica and praying at the Grotto, we walked to nearby Anglican Christ Church for Mass, celebrated in English by our chaplain. The Prayer Books in the pews and the inscriptions on the reredos were all in Arabic, however, bringing home the reality that we were there as the guests of a truly local congregation.

Half a kilometer away, Mary’s Well—believed to be the village’s only source of water in New Testament times—stands outside Saint Gabriel’s Greek Orthodox Church. The apocryphal *Protevangelium of James* (second century) relates that Mary was outside filling a pitcher with water when Gabriel first spoke the words “*Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you.*” The Archangel then appeared and finished delivering the message after she had returned to her house. Eastern Christians in particular identify Mary’s Well as the first site of the Annunciation. Unfortunately, our schedule did not allow time to visit St. Gabriel’s Church or Mary’s Well.

2. The Visitation—Ein Karem

Mary went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth (Luke 1:39). While St. Luke does not name the city where Elizabeth and Zechariah resided, since at least Crusader times it has been identified as Ein Karem, a hillside town five miles west of Jerusalem’s Old City. Depopulated of its Palestinian residents during the 1948 Arab Israeli War, Ein Karem is now a fashionable suburb known for its art galleries, music venues, restaurants, and nightlife.

The Franciscans constructed the present Church of the Visitation between 1938 and 1955 over the ruins of a Crusader church and an earlier Byzantine chapel. Also located in Ein Karem is the Church of Saint John the Baptist, built over the cave believed to be his birthplace. Unfortunately, our pilgrimage group did not stop in Ein Karem. But it is definitely on the list for my next visit to Jerusalem as the place to recite the second decade of the Joyful Mysteries—before sampling the local art galleries and restaurants.



Church of the Visitation, Ein Karem



Grotto of the Nativity Bethlehem

3. The Nativity—Bethlehem

The Palestinian city of Bethlehem is located six miles south of Jerusalem on the other side of the West Bank Security Barrier. Sadly, its Christian population has declined from 85 percent in 1947 to sixteen percent in 2016. The city's economy is nonetheless fueled by tourism and Christian pilgrimage to its holy sites, especially the Basilica of the Nativity on Manger Square.

In 326, the Emperor Constantine ordered the basilica's construction over the cave identified by his mother Saint Helena as Jesus' birthplace. Although the canonical Gospels say nothing about a cave, sources from as early as the second and third centuries—including Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* and Origen's *Contra Celsum*—identified the birthplace as a cave used to shelter animals, which local Christians were happy to point out to visitors.

In the late sixth century, the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I initiated rebuilding of the basilica after it was burned down during the Samaritan Revolt of 556. It has been in continuous use as a place of Christian worship ever since. According to legend, it was miraculously spared destruction in 614 when the invading Persian King Khosrow II saw a painting just inside the door of the Magi in Persian dress bearing their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Having bowed down to enter the basilica through the "Door of Humility," less than five feet high, we waited for about an hour in the south transept to descend the steep stone staircase to the Grotto of the Nativity below. Ahead of us was a group of about a hundred traditionally dressed Ethiopian pilgrims. They told us that they had come not only from Ethiopia but also from various places in the Ethiopian diaspora around the world, including south London.

As the Ethiopians entered the Grotto, they started ululating ecstatically, the sound echoing throughout the resonant building. This sublime moment was rudely interrupted when an Armenian monk ran up and officiously bellowed down the staircase, "Quiet! QUIET! No singing! NO SINGING!" It was our only experience of the tense encounters said to occur periodically among the religious authorities sharing jurisdiction over the Holy Places under the *Status Quo* imposed by the Ottoman Sultan in the eighteenth century.

Entering the Grotto ourselves, we took turns venerating the fourteen-point silver star bearing the inscription, *Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est*, "Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary."

After looking around at the other shrines and altars, including the Manger and the place where the Magi laid their gifts, our guide led us in singing “Silent Night.” Recalling what had just happened to the Ethiopians, I joined in with some trepidation.

On the way out of the basilica, after pausing to gaze up at the magnificent recently restored Crusader-era mosaics on the nave walls, I asked our guide why the Armenian monk had not also ordered us to be quiet. He responded with a laugh, “That Armenian monk is a friend of mine; he determines who’s allowed to sing and who’s not allowed to sing.” I felt a momentary twinge of indignation on behalf of the silenced Ethiopians.

4. The Presentation—The Southern Steps

While it is easy to recite the first three Joyful Mysteries in the places associated with the events they commemorate, the fourth and fifth Joyful Mysteries present a unique problem. Today, Jerusalem’s Temple Mount is Islam’s third holiest site, after Mecca and Medina. The Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, both built in the late seventh century, stand on the great platform constructed centuries before by King Herod the Great (72-4 BC).

Non-Muslims are allowed only restricted entry to the Temple Mount, and may not enter the Dome of the Rock, where Solomon’s Temple is believed to have stood. And non-Muslim prayers are strictly prohibited by the *Waqf*, the Jordanian-appointed religious authority with jurisdiction over the complex. Signs posted by Israel’s Chief Rabbinate at the complex’s entrance also forbid Jews from entering, lest they inadvertently tread on the site of the Holy of Holies—a stricture ignored in recent years by some Israeli extremists.

Since we were in Jerusalem during the overlap of Passover and Ramadan, when religious tensions can run high, our pilgrimage organizers deemed the situation too volatile to risk a visit to the Temple Mount itself. We were nonetheless able to admire it at a distance from a number of vantage points around the city, the most spectacular being from the Mount of Olives to the East.

One surprise for me was discovering that the Western Wall is not, as I had previously supposed, the only surviving section of the massive retaining walls built by Herod the Great around the Temple complex. One of the pilgrimage’s highlights was a visit to the Southern Wall, directly below the Al-Aqsa Mosque, where archeological excavations have uncovered great flights of broad stone steps leading up to now walled-over gates.

In antiquity, Jewish pilgrims ascended these stairs during the festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. (Think of Psalms 120 to 134, the Songs of Ascent.) Approaching Jerusalem from Bethlehem to the south, Mary and Joseph would almost certainly have carried the infant Jesus up these steps to present him in the Temple forty days after his birth. So, this would be a most appropriate spot to pray the Fourth Joyful Mystery—visualizing the Holy Family’s ascent here twenty centuries ago, followed by their encounters with Simeon and Anna within.

5. Finding Jesus in the Temple—The Western Wall

Of the walls enclosing the Temple Mount, the Western Wall stands closest to where the Temple itself once stood. From as early as Byzantine times, the site was sacred to Jews who came here to lament the Temple’s destruction. In the sixteenth century, the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent confirmed Jewish rights to pray at the Western Wall in perpetuity. Before 1967, however, the only access was via a narrow alleyway running alongside the Wall in the Old City’s built-up Moroccan Quarter. After occupying East Jerusalem in the Six Day War, the Israelis bulldozed the adjacent houses and buildings (having forcibly evicted the residents) to create the spacious plaza where hundreds of thousands of pilgrims now come to pray each year.

The plaza is divided into two sections, one for men and one for women. While those making their devotions are predominantly Jews, pilgrims of all faiths are welcome. Entering the plaza, one washes one’s hands in a ceremonial fountain using a silver jug. Men are required, of course, to cover heads; my baseball cap served as a makeshift *kippah*.

Many pilgrims walk up and touch the Wall to make their prayers, often leaving folded-up notes with their prayer requests in the cracks between the massive stones. Back a bit stand rows of tables with angled tops upon which large books can be rested and opened. Here, before their sacred texts, groups of Orthodox Jews were chanting their devotions, some bobbing back and forth (*davening*). My limited Hebrew was insufficient to understand most of what they were saying apart from the periodic exclamations of *Adonai* (“O Lord”) punctuating their prayers.

Our chaplain encountered two Rabbis, who were not reciting prayers but studying the Talmud, bending over their book, and pointing at various lines in the text, arguing vigorously back and forth over the meaning. Suddenly, one of them looked up and greeted him: “*Shalom*, where are you from?” “*Shalom*,” Fr. Turner replied, “New York.” “Ah,



Temple Mount Southern Wall and Steps, Jerusalem



Western Wall Plaza and Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem

New York! And which group are you with?” Fr. Turner explained that he was an Episcopal priest accompanying pilgrims from all over the United States and Canada. A friendly conversation ensued, in which Fr. Turner mentioned that an important part of his church’s worship was singing “your Psalms.” Without hesitation, the Rabbi interjected, “But they are not just *our* Psalms! God is the God of the whole earth, and the Psalms are for all people!” The Rabbis wished Fr. Turner a good pilgrimage, admonishing him to “always see the good,” before turning back to their book and resuming their Talmudic debates.

It later occurred to me that here would be the obvious place to pray the Fifth Joyful Mystery—perhaps discreetly, using a pocket Rosary. After three days Mary and Joseph found the twelve-year-old Jesus “*in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers*” (Luke 2:36-47). Today, however, the teachers of *Torah* are found not in the Temple courts but at the Western Wall. If Mary and Joseph were to come looking for their lost son today, this is undoubtedly where they would find him.

Concluding Reflection

The Rosary and pilgrimage to the Holy Places have one key aim in common: helping us visualize the saving events recorded in the Sacred Scriptures. Perhaps a reader of this article will be inspired to organize a pilgrimage to the Holy Land structured around the Mysteries of the Rosary. It would not be too difficult—even though geographic considerations would necessitate taking some Mysteries out of order. In the meantime, when I pray the Rosary, my memories of the associated sites furnish rich material for my meditations. May it be so for all pilgrims who travel to the Holy Land seeking a deeper knowledge of Christ and Our Lady. **AVE**

The Rev’d John D. Alexander is Superior of the Society of Mary in the United States, and currently serves as Interim Priest at Christ Episcopal Church, Woodbury, New Jersey.



MARY, THE NEW EVE

by
Jonathan I. Jameson

In the creation account of Genesis 2, God says that it was not good that Adam was alone. So he caused a deep sleep to fall over him, and he took from his body a rib and formed woman out of this rib. And Adam saw the woman and said, “Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” This was Eve, Adam’s help meet; her name simply meaning *life*, her body containing in itself the possibility of new life.

There in the garden, humanity dwelt naturally with God and in communion with one another. But we know how the story goes: Adam and Eve fail to trust that life is found in friendship with God. They begin to doubt that he wants the best for them. They imagine that God is keeping things from them. And they succumb to the temptation to see themselves as rival gods.

And so follows the whole sad story of discord and division and evil and murder that Genesis tells of life outside of the garden. It is as if a bomb went off, sending what once was perfectly whole into disarray and disorder.

Of course, we know that God’s lovingkindness would not allow for this to be the end of the story. The rest of the Old Testament tells the story of how God puts into to action a plan to call all things back into communion with him — a sort of *reverse* bomb: a power that creates unity out of chaos.

He begins by calling out of obscurity a peculiar people; a people to whom he decides to reveal himself. This people come to know him as the one true God, who is “I am.” They learn that there are no other gods before him. They come to trust that he is not indifferent, but that he cares for them. They learn that he is holy. And they come to recognize that to move away from this God is to move toward death and to move closer to him is to live.

There are bumps along the way. This God wants to be their king, but they want to be more like the other nations. Their peculiarity is a bit embarrassing. So God gives them a king, but reminds them that *really* he is their king. There are ups and downs, and eventually the whole thing falls apart again. So he sends them prophets to announce what the real plan is. There will be a king, but he won’t be like the kings of other

nations. And this will be the sign: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Is. 7:14). That is, *God with us*.

Mary is the new Eve. Instead of being made from Adam’s body, God takes from her body and makes a new creation.

Here is the center point of God’s plan to bring things back into unity from the chaos and destruction wrought by sin: a young, rural, unwed woman. It is Mary. She is the hinge between the Old and New Testaments. She is the burning bush. She is the ark of salvation. She is the new Eve. Instead of being made from Adam’s body, God takes from her body and makes a new creation. God takes up residence in her womb and the unity that he intended with man from the beginning is realized in the person of his Son, Jesus. From Mary’s body, God took a body. And it is through his body that we have salvation.

This is the body that ran away from his mother and stepfather and was found in the temple listening and asking questions. This is the body that walked through Judea healing, teaching, and being with us. This is the body that was taken by the authorities, scourged, and eventually nailed to a cross. This is the body that died on that cross and was buried. This is the body that God raised on the third day, never to die again. And this body has ascended to the right hand of the Father.

This *same* body that our Lord took from his blessed mother now sits enthroned in glory, drawing all things back into unity with God.

To be a Christian is to be a member of Christ’s body, the Church. It is through baptism that we are grafted into his body. And it is in the eucharist that we are fed from his body. We are connected to one another and to every other Christian by our common membership in this same body — a body that now exists outside of time and space.

But when we speak of the mystical body of Christ we are not simply speaking of some grand metaphor. We are instead speaking of the body of *Jesus*. The body that he took from his mother. The same body that was crucified, died, and was buried. The same body that God raised and that ascended to Father. We are talking about *that particular body*. We are not members of the “idea” of Christ, we are members of his actual body, the one that Mary gave him.

We are a peculiar people. We are God’s peculiar people. It would be easier to say that we are members of a religious club. But we are *not*. We

AVE

are members of a particular body: a body born in Bethlehem and reared in Nazareth. And as we are members of Christ's body, brothers and sisters of Jesus, by adoption and grace, so Mary is our mother. Because Jesus' human body is essential to our salvation and to what the Church is, Mary's particularity too is essential. It is through her that God's plan of salvation took flesh.

Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art though amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. **AVE**

The Rev'd Jonathan I. Jameson is Associate Rector of Saint John's Episcopal Church, Savannah, Georgia.



Our Lady of Walsingham

BOOKS

The Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation. Laura Saetveit Miles.
Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2020. 301 pp. £70.00. ISBN:
9781843845348.

Review by
Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook

What book was the Virgin Mary reading when the angel Gabriel first appeared to her? The scene of the Annunciation is one of the most common in Christian iconography, imagined and reproduced by countless artists across cultures over two thousand years. Although the gospel account gives few domestic details, Mary is frequently depicted in a home setting, sometimes a chapel or garden; Gabriel flies in and announces the Holy Spirit and the divine conception. Many raised in the Christian faith and/or cognizant of the history of Western art can immediately conjure some version of the scene from images stored in the spiritual imagination. But what about the book that rests on Mary's lap in many images of the Annunciation? The investigation of Mary's book and its symbolism in reading, interpretation, and devotion during the Middle Ages through to the Reformation, is the focus of Laura Saetveit Miles' riveting and award-winning study, *The Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation*. Miles, a professor of English Literature at the University of Bergen in Norway, utilizes a range of interdisciplinary sources to support her thesis of the Virgin Mary as a role model of devotional reading that was foundational to spiritual practice in medieval England. "As in many Annunciation illuminations, Mary's book contains writing that is just barely *illegible*: its unreadability leaves it open to interpretation and allows it to bear multiple layers of meaning. The long, rich tradition of these layers of meaning of Mary's book forms the basis for this study" (p. 2).

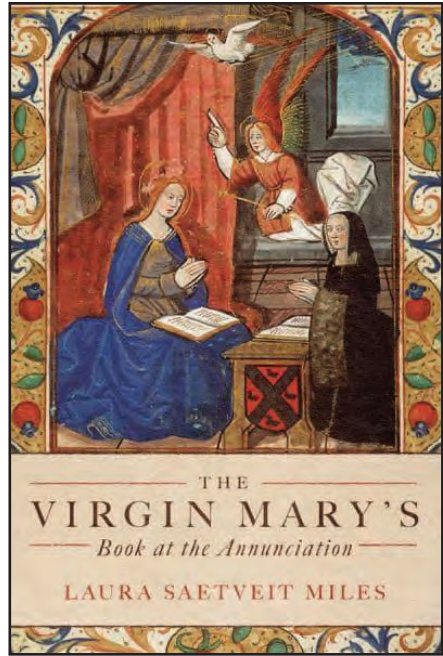
With the dramatic growth of the cult of the Virgin in the late eleventh century ... the symbolic power of the literate Mary influenced new audiences, including enclosed women religious, particularly anchoresses.

The iconography of Mary's book functioned on several levels – spiritual, physical, and intellectual. The book also serves as a practical symbol of women's devotional reading and the promotion of their scriptural literacy. "In a society where women generally had more limited

access to education and books than men, such a female model of independent literacy could be taken literally by female readers who otherwise had few precedents of literate women. If Mary's saintliness was to be imitated, and she could read the Bible unmediated by any man, could medieval women do the same" (p. 5)? Miles' thesis is that the image of the Blessed Virgin reading provided a role model for devotional reading and interpretation that influenced spiritual practice throughout England. By imitating Mary, devotees not only learned how to read, but they learned about prayer, mystical vision, and how to conceive God spiritually, just as she did intellectually and physically. In this way, the Virgin Mary was not only a model of piety for medieval people, but she was also an *intellectual* role model, a heretofore missing dimension in the study of medieval devotion. Further, images of the Annunciation offered a "hermeneutic model of conception" based in a female body that was otherwise rejected in medieval culture.

In her far-ranging introduction to the book, Miles locates Mary's reading at the Annunciation and traces its evolution from Ambrose and Bede, and thereafter in male and monastic clerical texts from the ninth and tenth centuries. With the dramatic growth of the cult of the Virgin in the late eleventh century, accompanied by a dramatic expansion of women in the religious life with access to books, the symbolic power of the literate Mary influenced new audiences, including enclosed women religious, particularly anchoresses.

Chapter one focuses on the medieval reader, polysemy, and biblical hermeneutics, arguing that the image of Mary reading was so ubiquitous "*all* authors were aware of the motif and made conscious decisions to invoke it or not" (p. 33). Miles' fascinating analysis of Mary at the Annunciation as it related to enclosure as viewed through anchoritic texts



is the focus of chapter two. “The tradition of Mary performing the psalms at the moment of the Incarnation offered medieval holy women a model of active prayer,” writes Miles (p. 76). Chapter three investigates the twelfth-century tradition of Mary reading the prophets from the Hebrew Bible foretelling the Annunciation, such as Isaiah 7:14. In Chapter four Miles explores the Annunciation from the perspective of medieval visionary accounts, such as Elizabeth of Hungary, Brigitta of Sweden, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, where “Mary emerges as a prophet, visionary, contemplative, imaginative reader, interpreter, and pregnant mother” (p. 172). Images of the Annunciation in Books of Hours from England and the Continent are central to chapter five, where Miles highlights the sacred connection between the text and the reader as they imagine “themselves represented as a special guest right next to Mary the expert reader” (p. 223).

Lastly, the pilgrimage tradition of the Shrine of our Lady of Walsingham is the focus of chapter six, where the pilgrim badges features a reading Mary, and the intention is to make the Annunciation comes alive: “Thus another difference from other pilgrim sites is that the Holy House at Walsingham not only contained Mary’s body but metaphorically *became* Mary’s body, a womb wherein each pilgrim could be born again and could conceive Christ within themselves as the mimesis of the Mother of God” (p. 236). A coda offers an overview of Mary and her book at the Reformation, tracing the resilience of the long Marian tradition despite persecution. In post-Reformation Anglican images of the Annunciation, Mary continued to be pictured reading, often in connection with scripture texts.

My own long fascination with images of the Annunciation drew me to this book, and after reading it, I will never look at that familiar scene in the same way again. The book is thought-provoking and a delight for visually oriented readers. The book would be most beneficial to those with academic backgrounds in religious art, spirituality, and mysticism.

The Rev’d Dr. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook is Professor of Practical Theology at Claremont School of Theology, Professor of Anglican Studies at Bloy House, Los Angeles, and Editor-in-Chief of Anglican and Episcopal History.

New of Wards and Cells

Illinois – Centralia: Mystical Rose Cell

This cell is hosted by St. John’s Episcopal Church, located at 700 E. Broadway, Centralia, Illinois, currently without a pastor. The cell’s current membership consists of five persons. In spite of several attempts to meet during the past twelvemonth, inclement weather, travel difficulties, and illness prevented every planned meeting but one; that meeting took place on January 8, 2023. Like all our meetings, it began with a lovely traditional tea with homemade scones. A program was presented by Father David, reflecting on the rich variety and theological depth of the season, including Twelfth Night, the various meanings of the Feast of the Epiphany including the miracle at Cana, and the history of the Feast of the Presentation. A consideration of the various meanings and titles for January 1 included how they are devotionally commemorated in the *Te Deum*. The presentation concluded with a brief Biblical exposition of evidence for Mary’s perpetual virginity, the theological significance of virginity at multiple levels, and a comparison of the Greek and Hebrew ideas of what it means to be human in light of the words “body”, “soul”, and “spirit” in both ancient cultures, and why the Hebraic theology of human nature is the fullest. The Mystical Rose’s priest advisor is Father David Baumann, retired; the secretary is Elizabeth Baumann.

Pennsylvania - Ambridge: Joy of All Who Sorrow Cell

Now in our second year, our Cell continues to meet monthly at St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church. We have between five and ten in attendance and sometimes visitors who are not members of the Society. We alternate between praying the Akathist to the Theotokos and the Rosary together. In September we sponsored a (Anglican rite) Mass for the Nativity of the BVM. Fr. Michael Husted, Rector of Grace Church (ACNA), Edgeworth, PA is our acting Chaplain and Fr. Geoffrey Mackey, Pastor of St. Mary’s and Dean of Students at Trinity School for Ministry is the Incumbent. We include prayer for the healing of Christian division in each meeting.

If you have news of activities in your Ward or Cell, we would love to hear from you! Please send submissions in a paragraph of approximately 250 words or less to Phoebe Pettingell, Editor of AVE, at editorofave@somamerica.org.



OFFICERS

Superior

The Rev'd John D. Alexander
superior@somamerica.org

Chaplain

The Rev'd Russell A. Griffin
chaplain@somamerica.org

Secretary

Dr. Paul Cooper
secretary@somamerica.org

Treasurer

Dr. David B.J. Chase
treasurer@somamerica.org

Editor of AVE

Phoebe Pettingell
editorofave@somamerica.org

Cover illustration:
Basilica of the Annunciation, Nazareth

For information on the Society of Mary
in the Church of England, including
the English edition of AVE, please visit
<http://societyofmary.weebly.com>

The Society of Mary is a not-for-profit (501c3)
corporation registered in the State of Delaware.