

“May the words from my lips and the meditations of our hearts always be pleasing to you O God.”

We are very familiar with today’s Gospel reading - Mary’s song of praise, usually called the Magnificat from the Latin for Magnify. However, we are more familiar with hearing this on the 4th Sunday of Advent - a far chillier day than today!

So why are we hearing Mary’s song of praise today - in the middle of August? Today we hear the song because today is the day the Church commemorates Mary as one of the Saints of the Church. And August 15th was selected because a Church was dedicated in her honour on this date.

An annual celebration or commemoration of the death of Mary first began in Ethiopia in the 4th century. And by the 7th century was widespread among Christians.

For many centuries the day celebrated the belief that Mary was bodily lifted into heaven - rather than dying and being buried. This teaching fit into the medieval idea that death was a punishment for sin. And if Mary was considered sinless then she could not die in the normal way! This belief still remains in some Churches.

What do we know about Mary from our scriptures? Mary’s role is not limited to giving birth to Jesus and mothering him in childhood. In John’s Gospel she is among the women gathered around the cross - although John does not use her name - Mary. Mary also

makes an appearance in the Book of Acts, where she is with the disciples as they await the coming of the Holy Spirit.

For Christians, Mary is an example of a lowly individual who has been raised high. Mary's importance is not because of anything that she has done. Mary is important because of her relationship with God. She sings praises to God. Praising God's faithfulness and the social levelling and a world to be turned upside down.

Mary's story - Mary's song of praise reminds us that God's goodness endures forever. Her song of praise proclaims God's greatness and rejoices in God as Saviour. And Mary's song reminds us that God re-ordering the world is not a new thing.

But was Mary blessed? Mary begins her song with God's actions in her own life. She says she was blessed by God.

In our culture "Blessed" has come to mean something very different. We use the term much more loosely. In fact we throw it around quite a bit. For us "Blessed" has come to mean living a life of privilege and comfort. And using the term has become a way of celebrating those moments when everything is going well. For us.....

From our culture's point of view Mary does not seem very blessed. She is poor - she is marginalized - and she is pregnant - rejected at first by Joseph. And later, once her child is grown she will watch him be rejected and killed by the State - an enemy of Rome.

But still she praises God! She does not say why me? She does not reject her God. No, she praises God and believes that God will level the ground - God will make things new and different - God will change the world. Mary praises the God who is active in the world.

So was Mary blessed? Yes. She knew God - she had a relationship with the God in which we live and move and have our being. Mary knew that God was at work in her life and because of that she lifts her song of praise. A song that resonates with us down through the centuries. A song we echo.....my soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.

AMEN