

# THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

August 15, 2021

Revelation 11:19a; 12:1–6a, 10ab • 1 Corinthians 15:20–27 • Luke 1:39–56

## I.

The front page of the newspaper indicates the storms swirling around us:

1. The end of America's military involvement in Afghanistan, and the collapse of the government there.
2. A devastating earthquake in Haiti, a country that already has so many hardships.
3. A surge in cases of COVID-19 across the United States, owing to the rapid spread of the delta variant of the coronavirus.

The inside of this church provides a peaceful respite from the storms of life.

Here, there is silence; beautiful, streaming light; and mellifluous sounds.

It's a sanctuary in the secular as well as the religious sense of the word: a shelter from what rages around us.

We need to be here, inside, for a time, but we can't live here.

God needs us, and he empowers us, to change the world for the better.

## II.

Today,  
it's worth taking a closer look at the stained-glass window in the Mary chapel:  
"The Assumption."

Like the larger stained-glass windows in the nave,  
it was installed on the occasion of the Cathedral's golden jubilee:  
the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of this church in 1956.

There were storms in the world that year also:

1. The United States and the Soviet Union were locked in the second of a decades-long ideological and geopolitical struggle that was the Cold War.
2. There was a war in the Middle East over access to the Suez Canal.
3. Here at home, the civil rights movement gathered momentum as the Supreme Court ruled that Alabama's bus segregation laws were unconstitutional.

Just six years before that window was installed, Pope Pius XII, who is depicted in the window, proclaimed the dogma or formal belief in the Assumption.

That article of faith holds that at the end of her life, the Virgin Mary was taken into heaven—she was assumed there—in both her body and her soul.

This was Mary's unique sharing in the resurrection of Christ and participation in the general resurrection of the dead.

### III.

What catches my attention in the stained-glass window is that Mary is holding a Eucharistic host.

This depiction illustrates one of themes of the Assumption: Mary as the ark or bearer of God.

In the Old Testament, the ark of the covenant was the vessel in which the Ten Commandments, along with other sacred items, were kept.

It was the place where God became visibly present.

The First Reading, from the Book of Revelation, makes the point that Mary is the ark of God.

The text does so indirectly, by aligning two separate scenes.

“God’s temple in **heaven** was opened,  
and the **ark of his covenant** could be seen in the temple.”

Then, we’re told that,

“A great sign appeared in the **sky**,  
a **woman** clothed with the sun,  
with the moon under her feet,  
and on her head a crown of twelve stars.”

The terms “heaven” and “sky” are interchangeable,  
so the woman—Mary—is the ark.

After all, she is carrying the Son of God within her:

“She was with child  
and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth.”

The Church teaches that the Assumption was the culmination or “crown”  
of the privileges that Mary received.

These privileges were special actions of God  
that helped Mary to carry out her unique role as the ark of God,  
of bringing the Son of God into the world.

The grace of the Immaculate Conception—  
being preserved from original sin—  
made her a worthy “ark” or vessel for the sinless Son of God.

As part of her unique role,  
Mary participated closely in the mission of her Son,  
as his first and perfect disciple.

She carried out his teaching.

She stood at the foot of the Cross,  
sharing in his passion or suffering.

And she shared in his resurrection immediately at the end of her life,  
by being taken to heaven in both body and soul.

Because Mary's whole life served as the ark of God,  
it was fitting that her body would not undergo decay,  
which is the effect of sin.

According to today's Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer,

“Rightly you would not allow her  
to see the corruption of the tomb  
since from her own body she marvelously brought forth  
your incarnate Son, the author of all life.”

Mary is the ark of God.

She brought Christ into the world.

And she brought others to him.

Her entire life was a compelling proclamation of the Gospel:  
“Here is Christ.”

“Here, in him, your life will have meaning, and it will flourish—  
even when there are storms.”

#### **IV.**

What is true of Mary, in a unique way,  
is true for the whole Church in a general way.

Today's Preface declares that,

“The Virgin Mother of God was assumed into heaven  
as the beginning and image  
of your Church's coming to perfection  
and a sign of sure hope and comfort to your pilgrim people.”

This statement means that the whole Church—all of us—  
will also share in Christ's resurrection.

One day, we hope to be in heaven, both body and soul,  
along with Mary.

Those souls of those who die in God's friendship,  
and who are purified from the remnants of sin,  
are in heaven.

They await the reunion of their bodies, with their soul, at the end of time.

But Mary's body, along with her soul, is already in heaven.

Since Mary is an image of the whole Church,  
this principle means that we too, in a way,  
can become an ark of the covenant.

Let's return to the stained-glass window.

Mary is holding the Eucharistic host.

That's where we will find Christ.

We take him into the world after we receive him in Holy Communion.

Like Mary, we become an ark of God.