

Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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Lectionary 622:

Rev 11:19A; 12:1-6A, 10AB

Ps 45:10, 11, 12, 16

1 Cor 15:20-27

Luke 1:39-56

Possible preaching themes:

- Gospel: Mary, **Woman on the Move**: How the Visitation connects with Mary's Assumption
- Gospel: The Science of **sound and the unborn** John the Baptist

Possible scientific resources:

- **The Visitation and the Psychology of Travel:**
 - How Travel Changes Us
https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/travel/psychology-travelvacation-identity-transformation/2021/10/07/19e2615c-2204-11ec-8200-5e3fd4c49f5e_story.html
 - For a More Creative Brain, Travel
<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/03/for-a-more-creativebrain-travel/388135/>
 - The Psychology of Travel <https://psychologyoftravel.com/about/>
- **Sound and the unborn**
 - Fetal Behavioral Responses to Maternal Voice and Touch
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4460088/>
 - What and When Can a Fetus Hear?
<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324464>
 - Auditory Development in the Fetus and Infant
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1527336908001347>

Homily outline: Mary as the First Herald of Christ

- **Introduction: The Power of a Journey** ○ From the first words of this Gospel — “Mary set out” — we encounter a woman on a journey, going places.
 - What is the significance of Mary traveling? Why didn’t she just stay home after the Annunciation? ○ Researchers have long endorsed the power of travel, finding that it fuels creativity, empathy and might even encourage new ways of thinking. Increasingly, they are finding it affects the brain in powerful and lifechanging ways.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/03/for-a-more-creative-brain-travel/388135/>
 - “Neural pathways are influenced by environment and habit... New sounds, smells, language, tastes, sensations, and sights spark different synapses in the brain and may have the potential to revitalize the mind.”
<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/03/for-a-more-creativebrain-travel/388135/>
 - Not only that: traveling to different places — leaving our comfort zone, even for a brief time or at a short distance — produces “an increase in trust” and “can increase generalized faith in humanity.” ○
<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/03/for-a-more-creativebrain-travel/388135/>
- **Mary as a traveler** ○ Mary, at a pivot point in history, is a traveler who will help introduce humanity to a new way of living, thinking, believing. A journey at this moment underscores something about the power of travel — the idea of leaving the familiar, discovering the unexpected.
 - But secondly, her encounter with her cousin, Elizabeth, offers us a dramatic scene of interaction between The Word (Christ) and the Voice who will announce him (John the Baptist) — carried out between two mothers. In this scene, we see that the first human herald of the Messiah is his mother, bringing him into the world and announcing what is to come with The Magnificat. ○
Central to this encounter is something beautiful and dramatic, an unborn child’s response to the sound of a voice. But is there more to it? What does this mean?
- **How the Unborn Respond to Sound** ○ Was Elizabeth (or the evangelist, Luke) merely being dramatic when she said, “at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy....”? Is that even possible? ○ Actually, it is. We should remember that tradition tells us that the author of this Gospel was a physician. These kinds of details help him to tell his story. ○ Research shows that the unborn respond to sound by 22 to 24 weeks (<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324464#fetal-hearing-ateach-stage-of-development>), which synchronizes with what the angel told Mary — also in Luke’s Gospel — about her cousin being, “now in her sixth month” of pregnancy (Luke 1:26-38). Researchers have also found that this particular time in pregnancy is when auditory development is strongest.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1527336908001>

- 347) ○ As one paper puts it, “the auditory system requires outside *auditory stimulation*. This needs to include speech, music, and meaningful sounds from the environment.”
- This scene blends the dramatic and the scientific to impart a stirring message: John — who will become known as “The Voice” preparing the way of the Lord (John 1:23) — responds with excitement to *another* voice, that of Jesus’s mother, really the very first evangelist. There is a strong, miraculous connection — but one that is entirely plausible.
 - **The Assumption Connection** ○ So what does any of this have to do with the Assumption and why does the Church give us this gospel for this particular solemnity?
 - The story of The Visitation recounts the first time Jesus goes into the world —Pope Benedict has called it “the first Eucharistic Procession” <https://papacitobenedicto.tumblr.com/post/652705381197447168/marysvisitation-to-her-cousin-elizabeth-was-in> and it happens through the efforts of Mary, journeying from her hometown to announce something remarkable and inexplicable. In the middle of a miracle, a virgin’s conception through “the power of the Most High,” we also find physical reality, the movement of a child in the womb, stirred by the sound of a voice. ○ In a similar way, Mary connects the earthly and the divine; that unique connection is honored and celebrated on this feast. We reflect on who she brought into the world, and how, and recall her eternal destiny in heaven.
 - If we consider Mary as a traveler, we see the Assumption as yet another moment of journeying in Mary’s story — taking her to the ultimate destination, and her destiny, in heaven.

Implications for us:

- Science tells us that those who travel may not only see the world differently; they may also develop an increased faith in humanity.
- As we travel with Mary on this feast, we commit ourselves also to developing increased faith and commitment to serve the humanity redeemed through her own son’s incarnation
- Perhaps our faith in Mary, the traveling Madonna, mirrors her faith in us — and her Son’s abiding hope for our world that will continued to be transformed through the empathy of those who journey with Mary to the heart of Christ.

Tags: empathy, fetal development, John the Baptist, psychology, travel

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with

science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.