

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

August 15, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Galatians 4:4–7; Psalm 34:1–9; Luke 1:46–55

In his commentary on Matthew, Ulrich Luz notes that the Greek word for man, even when plural, refers only to males in Matthew’s gospel. He writes that the evangelist “was hardly aware of the new position of women in the circle of Jesus or the reality that Jesus healed many women.”¹ Whenever possible, when I quote the Bible in writing or preaching, if the Hebrew or Greek is inclusive, I translate it that way.

Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John all know that Mary Magdalene was first to go to the tomb on the morning of the resurrection. In Matthew, she is there with] “the Other Mary.”² As in John, Jesus tells them, “Go, tell my brothers”—Matthew is referring to the eleven remaining male disciples—“to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”³

In John, the sight of the empty tomb prompts Mary Magdalene to run to tell Peter and the disciple Jesus

¹ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 324 n.5.

² Matthew 28:1.

³ Matthew 28:10.

loved that the body of the Lord has been taken away. They run back to the tomb, see it, enter it, and leave. Mary Magdalene followed them back to the grave. After recognizing the Risen Lord because he spoke her name, he said to her, “Go and tell my brothers and sisters, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”⁴

I begin with these words because I realized too late that it was time we heard the context in Galatians for the lesson on this feast of Mary’s Assumption. Paul isn’t writing about “sons.” Galatians is the second oldest book of the New Testament—the oldest is Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians. The Prayer Book permits any appointed reading to be lengthened.⁵

Raymond Brown begins his chapter on Galatians in his *An Introduction to the New Testament* with this sentence: “In some way [Galatians] has been considered the most Pauline of the Pauline writings, the one in which anger has caused Paul to say what he really thinks.”⁶

⁴ John 20:17.

⁵ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 888.

⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 467.

The reading we heard is short. I think the lesson should begin with words that place it in context and clarify that the word “son” here refers to believers of any gender, age, or race. These are words that are often heard in worship: "Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe."⁷

Then we get to what we heard today, “But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who

⁷ Galatians 3:23–4:3.

were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir."⁸ One suspects the evangelist we know as Matthew never met Paul or encountered the churches he founded.

August 15 is the earliest feast of Mary. It's listed in the fifth-century Armenian Lectionary from Jerusalem.⁹ In their book, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*, Paul Bradshaw and Maxwell John write, "the earliest so-called Marian feast, which ultimately will become her Dormition and/or Assumption, began as an early commemoration of the Incarnation . . . nine months before a primitive celebration of Christ's nativity."¹⁰ This morning, the second reading at Morning Prayer was John's account of the wedding in Cana. The mother of Jesus—unnamed by the evangelist—says to those who are helping with the celebration, "Do whatever he tells you."¹¹ Mary goes to visit Elizabeth in Luke, Elizabeth greets her with these words, "Why is this granted me,

⁸ Galatians 4:4–7.

⁹ Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011), 206.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹¹ John 2:5.

that the mother of my LORD¹² should come to me?”¹³
Mary’s relationship with all people changed when God
decided Mary would be the mother of his Son.¹⁴

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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¹² C. Kavin Rowe, “Luke and the Trinity: An Essay in Ecclesial Biblical Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003), 1–26. Rowe argues that Luke translates the sacred name of God by using the Greek word, *κύριος*, for “LORD.”

¹³ Luke 1:43.

¹⁴ Luke 1:31.