

**Reflection on the Gospel-The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
(Luke 1:39-44)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

A visit to the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem in 1973 was a moment of enlightenment for me, a moment to reflect on Mary's life, her death and her "assumption" to the fulness of life in God. Just over five years ago, the Greek Orthodox Church of the Dormition in Aleppo, Syria, was badly damaged by an underground explosion, yet another victim of a cruel war. The news report of that tragedy reminded me that Orthodox Christians and Eastern Catholics have long celebrated the "Holy Sleep" or "Dormition" of the Virgin Mary. Mary's "sleep", the reunion of her whole being with God, is celebrated as the feast of the "Assumption" in the Latin Rite. On November 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII defined Mary's assumption as a dogma of the Catholic faith, a dogma grounded in tradition.

Today's gospel offers the story of the young pregnant Mary travelling "in haste" from her home town of Nazareth to a town in the hill country of Judaea, some 130 kilometres to the south, to be with her cousin Elizabeth who is also pregnant. The details of that long and demanding journey are left to our imagination. In the loving embrace of the two women, the Spirit-filled life gestating within Mary encounters and physically affects the life that is coming to birth in Elizabeth. Elizabeth's words resound throughout the ages in the prayer we know as the Hail Mary: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb..." These words are addressed by one prophetic woman to another prophetic woman. Elizabeth recognises that Mary is blessed by God because she believed that God's promise to her would be fulfilled. Elizabeth gives expression to the faith that is to be embraced by all those who accept that Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary of Nazareth, is the Holy One of God (Luke 1:35). The lives of both women have been transformed through the power of God's Spirit. The birth of their children will usher in an unprecedented event in human history.

Elizabeth's proclamation of the blessing of God on Mary is found daily on the lips of countless faith-filled Christians across the globe. In our times, God's blessing on the Earth community can only become a reality when, like Mary, we open our hearts to a world in need, when we learn to read the signs of the times and work together to address the underlying causes of global distress. This gospel story invites us to ponder the various ways that God calls us to sustain life. We might turn for inspiration to Mary who, as theologian Elizabeth Johnson reminds us, is "truly our sister". Though pregnant, Mary was prepared to do "the hard yards", the whole 130 kilometres, to be with an older cousin in need. Celebrating this feast might mean doing the hard yards by "being there" for someone in need despite the personal cost.