

Wings of the Eagle
Assumption of the BVM
(Rv 12:1-10)

It is unfortunate that we know so few details of the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus. Most of what we know is recorded in the Gospels and some other New Testament books, but there are also some very early church documents and traditions, such as the “*Proto-Gospel of St. James*” which give more details about her marriage to Joseph and the Annunciation. But there was much, much more.

Other events in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary have been handed down through tradition, such as her Assumption, also called the Dormition. At the end of her life, in Jerusalem, with Apostles present, she was taken to heaven and glorified, body and soul. Her natural “death” did not end in decay or corruption, her body was never buried in any tomb. Instead, she shared fully in the power of Christ’s Resurrection, and is now in heaven already glorified with Christ, as the rest of the Church will be gloried in the resurrection on the Last Day.

St. John, who was with her during the remainder of her life on earth because Jesus entrusted his mother into his keeping (Jn 19:26-27), gives us this vision of Mary glorified in heaven, in the Book of Revelation (12:1). After the Assumption, Mary is now a “sign” for the church militant on earth, a sign of the Church’s future glorification with her. Mary is the type and image of the Church. We therefore look to her as a sign of hope in the midst of persecution.

Throughout the book of Revelation St. John describes the great struggle which the Church undergoes on earth as the ancient serpent makes war on the disciples of Jesus (Rv 12:17). But Mary our Mother (12:17) is the sign of hope and victory over sin and death, and the encouragement to perseverance. St. John tells us that the Church’s experience will imitate that of Mary. And in this important chapter he alludes to another event of the life of Mary of which we know very little, but which has great significance for the church on earth.

He alludes to another “flight into the desert” which took place after the Ascension of Jesus, but before Mary’s own Assumption: “*her child was caught up to God and to His throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God*” (Rv 12:5-6). He gives a few more details about this event a little later, indicating that she fled into the desert due to persecution by the devil: “[*the dragon*] *pursued the woman who had borne the male child, but the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and [two] times, and half a time*” (Rv 12:13-14). The three-and-a-half-year time indicates a

persecution,¹ possibly the initial persecution which broke out upon the Church in Jerusalem under King Herod (“Jr”) in which the deacon Stephen and the apostle James were martyred, and because of which the Christians were scattered to different parts (Acts 11:19, 12:1-2).

In any case, St. John reveals that the persecution unleashed against the Church was caused by the devil, that it mirrored what happened at the time of Jesus’ birth when King Herod the Great (“Sr”) tried to destroy the infant and the Holy Family had to flee into the desert (Mt 2:1-2), and that the particular object of the devil’s wrath was Mary herself. It was the woman he sought, the woman he was attacking. John now took the place of Joseph.

The devil bears a particular hatred toward Mary, because she is the New Eve. While Christ was on earth, as the New Adam he was always present to interpose himself between his mother and the devil. In fact, his cruel death on the cross can be understood as his intervention to protect Mary (who represents the Church) from the devil: “*Christ gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, that [the Church] might be holy and without blemish*” (cf. Eph 5:25-27). After his Ascension, however, the devil turned his full attention to Mary since she was vulnerable to attack. Through St. John’s care, and the safety of the desert where the totalitarian arms of the devil cannot reach, Mary remains safe until her Son can bring her heaven. The consequence of this, however, is a terrible suffering for the Church. St. John tells us that when the devil is unable to get his clutches on her, he turns his wrath against the Church (Rv 12:17). In other words, the devil’s hatred and destruction of the Church is really the venting of his wrath against Mary, whom he is not able to reach, which is ultimately his hatred of Christ.

In her Assumption, the protection of Mary from the wrath of the Serpent becomes complete. Now she is glorified with her Son in heaven, taking her place as Queen in the Kingdom of her Son, in the Kingdom of God.

This glorification is our hope, the hope of the Church on earth which continues to suffer persecution and martyrdom through the wrath of the devil. The sign of the woman about to give birth, clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, the stars on her head, i.e. Our Lady of the Assumption, moves us to remain faithful, and persevere. In apparitions such as her appearance at Tepeyac, Our Lady of the Assumption assures her children, the disciples of Jesus (Rv 12:17), that she is with them closely, and that ultimately they too will escape with “wings of an eagle” to the Promised Land.

¹ Cf. Rv 11:2 (forty two months) and 11:3, 12:6 (1260 days). This goes back to a vision of Daniel (Dn 7:25, 9:27, 12:7) in which he describes a time of tribulation.

Let us be encouraged and rejoice this day, in the victory of Christ over sin and death, a victory we celebrate fully in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary his Mother, a victory to be experienced by the Church on the last day.