

## The Emergence of Mary in the New Testament – September Scripture Talk

I think it can be safely said that the Hebrew religion, unlike other ancient religions of the Middle East, was more masculine in character and tone and of course leadership. In its hostility to fertility cults, which annually and sensually celebrated the seasonal marriage of the Sky God and the Earth Mother (the sowing of seed and harvesting of crops, the birthing of things), Israel's teaching played down the feminine to avoid succumbing to the prurience or eroticism generated by that widespread myth. It chose out of its long nomadic history, its long sojourn in the desert to attribute divinity to the transcendent *He who Is* - beyond Nature. Not that it had an easy time of it, judging by the constant warnings of the orthodox prophets.

Its narrative history plays up the male heroes, although a closer look at the Old Testament reveals many women (not always Hebrew) like Rebecca, Tamar, Noemi and Ruth, Bathsheba, Judith and Esther as factors that kept the nation moving toward its both rational and transcendent destiny when the male leadership was failing it. Still the role of the feminine in matters religious seems minimalized, although the later Wisdom writings identify Wisdom as a Lady.

Christianity also began among a collection of males, with its driving force being attributed to a Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit – which latter was also addressed as “he” as in John's Gospel where Jesus says, *But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth.* The 16<sup>th</sup> century Russian painter Andrei Rublev shows the Trinity as three males (the three angels who visited Abraham?).

Indeed in the *earliest* writings of the New Testament mention of the feminine is marginal. But as time went by, a woman emerged to take on a major role as promoter of the Gospel of Grace over the Law, which is of the essence of the Christ event. And who is the bearer of that feminine principle? The mother of Jesus! Let's consider how she emerges.

### The Chronology of the New Testament

Scholars hold that the earliest writings contained in the New Testament are the Letters of St. Paul – at least the seven out of the thirteen ascribed to him and written from 50 to 58 AD. (Incidentally may we guess that Mary, if she had lived into the 50's AD, the days of a mature Paul, would have been in her early seventies, a long time.)

1. Earliest reference to Mary – in Paul's Letter to the Galatians 4:3-5 (**53 AD**). *In the same way we also, when we were not of age, were enslaved to the elemental powers of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law - to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption.*

Does Paul even know Mary's name or in his enthusiasm over the risen Christ have any interest in the details of Jesus' birth?

2. Mark's Gospel – composed out of oral and catechetical resources – in the **mid 60's AD**. Mark makes no mention of the birth of Jesus – as later Matthew and Luke do. Jesus

starts right off as an adult preacher and miracle worker. Mention of Mary comes up in chapter 3 of this early Gospel, verses 31-35. The whole section deals with growing hostility, opposition to Jesus's actions and teaching. Even his relatives are concerned – verse 21: *his relatives set out to seize him for they said, "He is out of his mind."*

And then as the authorities begin to close in so early in his mission, the Gospel says: *His mother and his brothers arrived. Standing outside they sent word to him and called him. A crowd seated around him told him, "Your mother and your brothers [and your sisters] are outside asking for you." But he said to them in reply, "Who are my mother and [my] brothers?" And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, "Here are my mother and brothers. [For] whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."*

In other words his family wants to take him out of circulation, no doubt fearing he will bring trouble on them all. Mary seems to share their concern and the hope is that her presence will be influential in getting him to come home. But she is hardly influential. He claims to have many relatives, many mothers.

3. Matthew's Gospel – composed out of Mark and extensive Sayings of Jesus – a bit **after 70 AD**. And here Mary begins to emerge into the text as betrothed to Joseph who finds out she is already pregnant. A dream (no angelic messengers in this version) encourages him to marry her, the child being of the Holy Spirit and the virgin of Isaiah 7:14 out of whom a son named Emmanuel (God with us) will be born. Then come the Magis' encounter with King Herod, their recovery of the guiding star, their visit to the family, homage to the child, avoidance of brutal Herod on their way home – then the family's flight into Egypt, while Herod massacres the newly born boys of Bethlehem.

Mary is mentioned in passing – as almost a necessary prop. All the prime actors are men: Joseph, the Magi, and Herod. The story differs very much from Luke's later story; it is more in harmony with similar birth stories of ancient patriarchs like that of Abraham and the Exodus account of the birth of Moses – replete with similar things like guiding stars, threats, miraculous escapes – male talk. Its point? Jesus is the new and ultimate hero of Israel's ancient tradition, his birth following a familiar script.

**But now Mary (the feminine?) begins to blossom out of the New Testament text.**

4. The Gospel of Luke: between **80 and 90 AD**.

Since I have spoken of blossoming, as we approach the Gospel of Luke in the sequence of New Testament writings, let's take a walk with the young Marcel in Proust's opening volume *In Search of Lost Time* – my having been caught by the scent of flowers.

Now I know right away (from experience) that in these times many women, especially in academic and professional life, don't like to be spoken of in metaphors of flowers, fragrance, or blossoming, especially when it is well known that women can be as hard as nails. Indeed "as hard as nails" is how we shall later meet Mary in our development of

her cult. But then of course there is Molly Bloom in Joyce's masterpiece, no pushover by any means, an invincible YES to life – and yet in her grand soliloquy she delights in *the rosegardens and the jessamine and geraniums and cactuses and Gibraltar as a girl where I was a Flower of the mountain yes . . .*

But given the dominant male tone of the New Testament as far as characters and authors – Mary does emerge as something different; the texts are musical, colorful, fragrant – if I may say so – with grace as in some way the best metaphor to capture the transfiguration of our once stern, patriarchal image of God.

At any rate that's how Marcel Proust comes to understand her as – while vacationing with his family in the French village of Combray - he takes a walk with his grandfather and others – easy going, no undue haste, casual under a clouded sky. They were not going anywhere in particular, aimlessly, *past the front door of my aunt's house, which opened on to the Rue du Saint-Esprit . . . and we would leave the town by the road that ran along the white fence of M. Swann's park. Before reaching it we would be met on our way by the scent of his lilac-trees, come out to welcome strangers. Out of their foliage the lilacs raised inquisitively over the fence of the park their plumes of white or purple blossoms, which glowed, even in the shade, with the sunlight in which they had been bathed . . . Despite my desire to throw my arms about their pliant forms and to draw down towards me the starry locks that crowned their fragrant heads, we would pass them without stopping . . . to avoid Swann's park because of his questionable marriage and we would choose another way . . . [which would bring] us out rather too far from home.*

Except that . . . Marcel's grandfather reminded his father that Swann's wife and daughter would be in Rheims this day and M. Swann would be spending a day or two in Paris. So they might go along by the park as the shorter route. *We stopped for a moment by the fence. Lilac-time was nearly over; . . .*

*In front of us a path bordered with nasturtiums rose in the full glare of the sun toward the house . . . to our right . . . an 'ornamental lake' had been constructed . . . but in certain places nature persisted in affirming her own sovereignty [just as the emerging Mary of the Gospel, let's call her our feminine principle, will do in Luke's narrative] . . . just as she would have done far from any human interference . . . And so it was that, at the foot of the path which led down to this artificial lake, there might be seen . . . forget-me-nots [from this feminine principle] and . . . periwinkle flowers above . . . when I was obliged to run after my father and grandfather, who were calling to me.*

*And I found the whole path throbbing with the fragrance of hawthorn blossoms [the overwhelming presence and scent of grace].*

This was not Marcel's first exposure to hawthorn blossoms. Earlier in his story he speaks of first falling in love with them during the "Month of Mary" services at church – of all things! We would set out for the church [but] *the hawthorn was not merely in the church, . . . but, arranged upon the altar itself, inseparable from the mysteries of whose celebration it was playing a part, it thrust its branches among the tapers and sacred*

*vessels in a festal scene of decoration; and they were made more lovely still by . . . the dark leaves, over which were scattered in profusion, as over a bridal train, little clusters of buds of a dazzling whiteness.*

*I could feel that the formal scene was composed of living things, and that it was Nature herself [the forgotten feminine] who, . . . by adding the crowning ornament of those snowy buds, had made the decorations worthy of what was at once a public rejoicing and a solemn mystery.*

*Higher up on the altar, a flower had opened here and there with a careless grace, holding so unconcernedly, . . . its bunch of stamens, slender as gossamer, . . . that in following these my eyes, in trying to imitate, somewhere inside myself, the action of their blossoming, I imagined it as a swift and thoughtless movement of the head with an enticing glance from . . . a young girl in white, careless and alive.*

*When, before turning to leave the church, I made a genuflection before the altar, . . . gusts of fragrance came to me like the murmuring of an intense vitality . . .*

What is it about Luke's first two chapters narrating the annunciation to Mary and the birth of Jesus that allows me to introduce it by way of Marcel Proust's experience of hawthorn flowers in the context of a Marian liturgy? Luke's opening narrative has all the qualities of a blossoming, a fragrance, *an enticing glance from . . . a young girl in white, careless and alive*, the growing return within the Gospel of that feminine aspect of the divine, the budding of grace.

### **Catching the blossoming and fragrance of Luke 1 and 2**

Let's now get closer to Luke's first two chapters. But first let me say I used to read these chapters as factual, verified by eyewitnesses – like any modern history event. I read them literally, not poetically. Then during my first semester at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome way back in 1957 I was made to see the chapters loaded with poetic liberty, alluding not too subtly to Old Testament characters and events. “So it's not true????!!” I thought – and broke into a cold sweat. I can still call up the chill.

At that moment my naïve, former education in many ways came to an end – and my real education began. I myself began to blossom like a hawthorn bud, awake to truth in other than literal, journalistic ways. I widened and deepened my trust in other forms of discourse, more true, more profound than just the facts, ma'am. I discovered real faith in the “story” of these chapters and not so much in their seemingly photographic, stenographic accuracy. They were true even as a great work of Tolstoy is truer than any documentary of his subject matter could be.

In other words, most of the happenings in the Bible, Old and New, are presented to us not just as *records* about the past and proof that they happened but rather as valid interpretations, challenges thrown at us to awaken our faith or trust that things really meaningful have happened, requiring language that's extraordinary, even miraculous in

manner – to crack beneath the surface level of events as we normally know them. Sacred Scripture requires that we take a leap into a world where things strange to modern minds are normal.

**Parallelism:**

Luke's account arranges the annunciation and birth story of Jesus parallel to a similar arrangement of the annunciation and birth story of John the Baptist. **Look at the chart.** Now I'm not going to exhaust all that's hidden beneath the literal surface of these chapters – but enough for you to see its inexhaustible depth of meaning. Also allow that Luke did not create these chapters but picked them up from some earlier composer(s), some from a possible follower of John the Baptist.

First note how the sequence of Jesus' annunciation and birth story is matched *almost line by line* by that of John's – laid out like a formal garden. Follow the chart – both sides. They are linked by Mary's visit to Elizabeth in the hill country.

**On the John/Zachary/Elizabeth side:**

Zachary, a priest at the Temple in Jerusalem is serving his term in the sanctuary at the scheduled evening incense offering before a crowd of worshippers. He and his wife are old, having observed "all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly", the very words in the Greek version of the Old Testament (Septuagint) that describe the patriarchs Abraham and Sarah. Indeed, Zachary's wife Elizabeth stands within the long tradition of childless women like Rebecca, Rachel, the mother of Samson, Hannah, the mother of Samuel who miraculously beget prophets and heroes at crucial moments in Hebrew history. [Evening offering? Signal of the eventide of the Old Testament and dawning of the New?]

The angel Gabriel, mentioned in the Book of Daniel, appears to Zachary as he performs his service. Gabriel predicts that Zachary and Elizabeth will have a child. And then describes the child (to be called John) as a composite of the prophet Samuel, the fiery Elijah and the hero Samson. Zachary can't quite believe it and so he is struck mute until the child is born. Elizabeth, the woman, on the contrary rejoices over the promise.

In other words, Zachary and Elizabeth and John become together a composite of the whole Old Testament, patriarchs, matriarchs, heroes, prophets longing for the promise of Gabriel in Daniel: 9: *Then transgression will stop and sin will end, guilt will be expiated, Everlasting justice will be introduced, vision and prophecy ratified, and a holy of holies will be anointed.* – the end of waiting.

And Zachary's hesitation to believe exemplifies the unbelief that Jesus and the early church will meet from the majority of the Jewish leadership – priests and rabbis. Which according to the Christian tone of the story explains why the Temple and Law at that time have become mute, unable to utter the poetry, the faith, the fragrance it once did.

Annunciation to Zachary

Temple Setting/Jerusalem/ Centered

Zach & Elizabeth/ observant of Law

Barren/old

Temple evening ritual

Angel Gabriel

Don't be afraid, wife shall conceive

He will be great . . . Neither drink wine, will go before . . .

How?

You will be mute until . . . Because hesitated

Elizabeth conceives

"So has the Lord done for me . . ."

Elizabeth visited in her sixth month by Mary

John leaps in womb in presence of Jesus

Magnificat of Mary

Birth of John

Benedictus of Zachary (no longer mute)

Child became strong . . . In spirit and was

in the desert until . . .

Annunciation to Mary

Galilee/ Nazareth/Boondocks

Mary

Virgin

Angel Gabriel

Don't be afraid, found favor . . . grace

He will be great . . . Son of Most High . . .

How?

Spirit will come upon you . . .

Son of most High no end to kingdom

Behold handmaid of Lord . . .

"Nothing impossible with God"

Birth of Jesus Bethlehem (city of David)

"And the angels sing . . ."

Presentation in Temple - Simeon sings

his Nunc Dimittis

Child grew and became strong . . . Wisdom

Stays at Temple . . . Why did you look for me . . .

On the Mary side (notice the relative absence of Joseph):

Matching the Zachary narrative almost line for line the annunciation to Mary by the same angel Gabriel occurs not at the center of Judaism, at the Temple in Jerusalem as in the case of the priest Zachary but way off in Nazareth (of which in the fourth Gospel the apostle Nathanael wonders, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?") – in Galilee of the Gentiles. Mary is betrothed and a virgin. "You have found grace with God, you shall conceive . . . the Son of the Most High . . . his kingdom will have no end." He will be the new David. "How?" says Mary, since she hadn't had intercourse. "By the Holy Spirit." [It takes grace to conceive, i.e. to think clearly!]

Mary is more than Mary. Even as Zachary, Elizabeth and John become the composite of Israel's history – threatened with demise, so often seeming to fail to survive amid the troubles of history and the need to be miraculously reborn, so Mary becomes the early Christian community, Jewish but remote from Jerusalem, close to the Gentile world, the virgin of Isaiah 7:14, virginal in the purity of her allegiance to God; she becomes the new, universal Israel, overshadowed, impregnated by God's creative presence. She is a community that believes *without hesitancy*, the way Zachary and the Temple leaders did not. She is Grace taking over from the regime of the Law, mother of a New Moses, a New Law as enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard it said, but I say to you . . ."

The Visit to Elizabeth:

Note now the interval in which Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth upon hearing of her pregnancy. The Old and New Testaments meet, the one pregnant with prophecy, the other pregnant with grace and the fulfillment of prophecy. And John, the ultimate prophet of the Old Testament leaps for joy in his mother's womb. And Mary launches into her song: *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. . . , for behold, from now on will all ages call me [the Woman, Virgin Israel] blessed.* Which is almost an echo of the hymn sung by Samuel's mother Hannah upon Samuel's birth. [Again the Old Testament infiltrates - with affirmation - the beginning of the New].

The Birth of John

Back to John, who is now born to the tune of the *no longer mute* Zachary singing his own song with its phrase "And you, child . . . will go before the Lord to prepare his ways."

The Birth of Jesus – the Shepherds

What about the birth of Jesus being announced first to shepherds? David was a shepherd. Abel was a shepherd who meandered freely about in open country only to be murdered by Cain, the builder of fences and cities and walls, and was ancestor to Lamech who avenged himself seventy times seven times (the world as history would describe it). Jesus favors the pastoral type versus the settled, acquisitive, violent type. So who but shepherds should be the first to hear of his birth?

## Back to the Temple

Of course all of this relationship plays out during the adult careers of the two infants – John preaching in advance of Jesus, Jesus honoring John as the ultimate prophet. The whole story insists on the unity of the old and the new. Jumping ahead to chapter two we meet the Christian story's counterparts to Zachary and Elizabeth. At the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, old Simeon sings his song to match that of Zachary: "for my eyes have seen your salvation . . . a light of revelation to the Gentiles and glory for your people Israel."

And then we meet Anna (Hannah whose name means Grace), eighty-four years old (seven times twelve – whole numbers), a prophetess who tells everyone about the child.

The birth narrative of Luke indeed widens and deepens the perspective of the New Testament, uses the birth events of John and Jesus as a means of breaking the ground, cultivating the roots of the Gospel story, the significance of Jewish fidelity to its tradition right up to the moment when the white buds appear and break open into flowers – fragrance – a hawthorn tree – the virgin mother's entry into the attention of the Church.

### **But let's resume our earlier walk with Marcel and his grandfather and father.**

The older men, having called Marcel to follow them, he ran after them along a little path and *found the whole path throbbing with the fragrance of hawthorn blossoms. [the feminine principle has taken hold] The hedge resembled a series of chapels, whose walls were no longer visible under the mountains of flowers that were heaped upon their altars; the scent that swept over me was as rich . . . as though I had been standing before the Lady altar, and the flowers, themselves adorned also, held out each its little bunch of glittering stamens with an air of inattention, fine, radiating . . . like strawberry beds in spring.*

*But it was in vain that I lingered before the hawthorns, to breath in . . . in vain did I shape my fingers into a frame, so as to have nothing but the hawthorns before my eyes; the sentiment which they aroused in me remained obscure and vague . . . They themselves offered me no enlightenment, and I couldn't call upon any other flowers to satisfy this mysterious longing. [My need for a divine mother as much as a father? I couldn't quite grasp it.]*

*And then, inspiring me with that rapture which we . . . when a piece of music which we have heard played over on the piano bursts out again in our ears with all the splendor and fullness of an orchestra, my grandfather called me to him and pointing to the hedge of Tansonville said, "You are fond of hawthorns; just look at this pink one; isn't it pretty?"*

*And it was indeed a hawthorn, but one whose flowers were . . . lovelier even than the white. It too was in holiday attire, for one of those days which are the only true holidays,*



*the holy days of religion, because they are not appointed by capricious accident [as are secular holidays] - - but it was attired even more richly than the rest, for the flowers which clung to its branches . . . were everyone of them in color and consequently of a superior quality, by the aesthetic standards of Combray . . . where the most expensive biscuits were those whose sugar was pink . . .*

*And these flowers had chosen precisely the color of some . . . delicious thing . . . And, indeed, I felt at once, as I had felt before the white blossom, but now still more marveling, that it was in no artificial manner, by no device of human construction, that the festal intention of these flowers was revealed, but that it was Nature herself who had spontaneously expressed it (with the simplicity of a woman . . . laboring at the decoration of a street altar for some procession) . . . High up on the branches . . . a thousand buds were swelling and opening, paler in color, but each disclosing as it burst . . . the irresistible quality of the hawthorn-tree . . . Taking its place in the hedge, but as different from the rest as a young girl in holiday attire among a crowd of dowdy women in everyday clothes, . . . equipped and ready for the 'Month of Mary', of which it seemed already to form a part, it shone and smiled in its cool, rosy garments, a Catholic bush indeed and altogether delightful.*

So much for the impact of Luke's Infancy Narrative!

#### 5. The Gospel of John – c. 100 AD

Changing Water into Wine – John 2:1 ff.

Mary is mentioned in John as present at the foot of the cross and more in depth at the marriage in Cana where she informs Jesus the party has run out of wine – and despite Jesus' hesitation – tells the servers to do whatever her son tells them. She has emerged from hardly being mentioned in Paul's Letter of the 50's AD to becoming by 100 AD the prime mover or manager of the inauguration of a New Era, a New Israel, a Cosmic Wedding.

The large water jars used for ritual washing are filled with water, which changes into fifteen to twenty-five gallons of the best wine money could buy. Pale water to red wine, which is what Jesus will be doing throughout the Gospel: replacing the now flavorless institutions of the Old Law into the rich, red, lively features of the new.

For instance, in subsequent episodes Jesus reveals the passing of worship in fixed Temples like that of Jerusalem and Samaria (“neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem”). It is he who becomes the new, the really real Temple, the presence of God, making it unnecessary to worship only in Jerusalem nor in any other “holy” place – as in Samaria, for “the hour is coming and is now here when true worshippers will worship in Spirit and in Truth . . . God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.” God will be found not within walls but in the space in between the walled off places of this world, in the Wide Open which is like a flower in bloom.

As for waiting for the Messiah, forget it: "I am he." And as for the Passover meal and the manna experience during the Exodus, Jesus near the Passover feast feeds a large crowd with more than they can eat – a new Exodus (from death to resurrection) has taken over - life abundantly. Indeed Jesus is now the Bread of Life.

At the feast of Tabernacles at which rain and light are celebrated by an agricultural people, when illuminations take place at the Temple, Jesus says, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink." Beyond the Temple illuminations Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

But why go on? In compelling Jesus to replace water with abundant wine at a wedding feast, Mary reveals the glory of Jesus, that something special about him, luminous with divinity. Maybe *this* is the way John's Gospel speaks of her *giving birth to Christ*, to God, to the Church among us.

It's like the red hawthorns replacing the white in Marcel's experience. The red had an advantage – or as he puts it:

*His grandfather said, "You are fond of hawthorns; just look at this pink one; isn't it pretty?" And it was indeed a hawthorn, but one whose flowers were pink and lovelier even than the white. . . . And these flowers had chosen precisely the color of some . . . delicious thing . . . And, indeed, I felt at once, as I had felt before the white blossom, but now still more marveling, that it was in no artificial manner, by no device of human construction, that the festal intention of these flowers was revealed. [Echoes of a Virgin Birth?]*

Since the New Testament:

The early Church leaders eventually spent much theological thought on Mary – so much so that she became lost to us in Greek philosophical language, theotokos (the God-beggetter) – pedestalled, immaculately conceived, the occasion of so much piety that it took litanies to bunch up rapidly everything people felt about her – reducing her to a punctuated murmuring.

But it took the early Middle Ages, the age of the great cathedrals (almost each of which was named for her), when the Church became so organized, stratified, legalist, juridical in style, worrisome – that Mary began to re-emerge as almost a protest, as the champion of Grace, Mercy, the heart of the Gospel. She recovers the energy of her Cana miracle initiative in John. Even belligerent about it. Henry Adams, a New England Protestant, says it best I think in his lovely study: *Mont-Saint-Michel & Chartres*:

*Intensely human, but always Queen, [in the legends about her] she upset at her pleasure, the decisions of every court and the orders of every authority, human or divine; . . . altered the processes of nature; abolished space; annihilated time. . . She was not in the least a prude. To her, sin was simply humanity, and she seemed often*

*on the point of defending her arbitrary acts of mercy, by frankly telling the Trinity that if the Creator meant to punish man, He should not have made him. The people, who always in their hearts protested against bearing the responsibility for the Creator's arbitrary creations, delighted to see her upset the law and reverse the rulings of the Trinity. They idolized her for being strong, physically and in will, so that she feared nothing and was as helpful to the knight in the melee of battle as to the young mother in childbed. The only character in which they were slow to recognize Mary was that of the bourgeoisie . . . she seemed to be at home on the farm, rather than in the shop.*

*She was above the law; she took feminine pleasure in turning hell into an ornament; she delighted in trampling on every social distinction in this world and the next. She knew that the universe was as unintelligible to her, on any theory of morals, as it was to her worshippers, and she felt, like them, no sure conviction that it was any more intelligible to the Creator . . . To her, every suppliant was a universe in itself, to be judged apart, on his own merits, by his love for her – by no means on his orthodoxy, or his conventional standing in the Church or according to his correctness in defining the nature of the Trinity.*

In other words, she was Grace itself to which she gave birth in the Gospel tradition. The violent squabbles of the Reformation and Counter Reformation squeezed her out of the picture, leaving her a kind of piety – like in a devotionally arranged baroque side chapel – and you can see what discord and even religious wars have happened ever since. Still she keeps showing up in other ways as in 1957, the same year I was exposed to Luke's birth narrative and Pope John XXIII declared our need for a Second Vatican Council and women began to appear all over the place, in doctoral robes, in positions of authority, in the courageous, outspoken promotion of the values of salvation history in a world on the verge of chaos. The matronly Mary as Caravaggio imagined her in his unusual painting of her Dormition – large feet, stout, hands worn with labor – not exactly a lovely lady and not dressed in blue – but in red.