



SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

The Assumption of Our Lady - Luke 1: 39-56

Family is important – yours, mine, everyone's. The genes, the degree of nurturing, the values, the interactions, all give us a formation we deal with in many and varied ways all throughout our lives, capitalising on some features of our upbringing and working against others. Growing through possibility and discovery is our hope. May we never stop learning.

Exploring family ancestry, its saints and hoodlums, is fascinating. Jewish family life and relationships likewise hold a fascination as we turn the pages of the Bible. History and contacts with the extended family bring us to today's Gospel of Mary and cousin Elizabeth. It takes us into the story of each of them affirming the other as they share and explore what God is doing in their lives. We have no fly on the wall, but Luke's Gospel invites us to see both women taking their place in the always emerging drama of God's love for his people.

Church devotion to Mary, Mother of God, has had its highs and lows. Today's Gospel takes us back to a young teenager called Miriam, from a Nazareth family with no pretensions to greatness, beginning to cope in all humility with the wonder of a down to earth God and herself as an accepting servant of his mysterious ways.

We don't have much in the Gospels about Mary. Centuries of prayer, reflection and the Holy Spirit lead us to see brilliance in the background ordinariness of her life, glimpses of her maternal care, concern and pain as one who, as described by Jesus, hears the word of God and keeps it – just as he did, and as we are asked to do. Her total faith and devotion to God prompted St Augustine to write that Mary conceived Christ in her mind and heart before she conceived him in her body. Mary comes to us as the first apostle, the one, par excellence, who directs us to her Son who, from the cross, gives her to us as a heartfelt support along our life's journey.

We know nothing reliable about her personality, her skills, resourcefulness and humour. She was a young woman confused by Gabriel's message in the story of the annunciation, but was open and generous in accepting what God was asking. Family life? I'm fascinated about how, with Joseph, they raised Jesus to adulthood.

We have no stories of the end of her life. In 1950, Pope Pius XII declared a long-held Church belief that she received the fullness of the Lord's redemption and was taken body and soul into heaven to share in her Son's glory.

Holy Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.



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More from Pope Leo's Dilexi Te Encyclical Letter on care of the poor

In the thirteenth century, faced with the growth of cities, the concentration of wealth and the emergence of new forms of poverty, the Holy Spirit gave rise to a new type of consecration in the Church; the mendicant orders. Unlike the stable monastic model, mendicants adopted an itinerant life, without personal or communal property, entrusting themselves entirely to providence. They did not merely serve the poor; they made themselves poor with them. They saw the city as a new desert and the marginalised as new spiritual teachers. These orders, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians and Carmelites represented an evangelical revolution, in which a simple and poor lifestyle became a prophetic sign for mission, reviving the experience of the first Christian community (cf. Acts 4: 32). The witness of the mendicants challenged both clerical opulence and the coldness of urban society.

St Francis of Assisi became the icon of this spiritual springtime. By embracing poverty, he wanted to imitate Christ who was poor, naked and crucified. In his Rule, he asks that "the brothers should not appropriate anything, neither house, nor place, nor anything else. And as pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility, they should go about begging with confidence, and should not be ashamed, because the Lord made himself poor for us in this world." His life was one of continuous self-emptying; from the palace to the leper, from eloquence to silence, from possession to total gift. Francis did not found a social service organisation, but an evangelical fraternity. In the poor, he saw brothers and sisters, living images of the Lord. His mission was to be with them, and he did so through a solidarity that overcame distances and a compassionate love. Francis' poverty was relational; it led him to become a neighbour, equal to, or indeed lesser than others. His holiness sprang from the conviction that Christ can be only truly received by giving oneself generously to one's brothers and sisters.

Dilexi Te paras 63 and 64