

FutureChurch | Women Witnesses for Racial Justice
Feast of the Assumption
August 15, 2021 Prayer Service

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Brief Greeting & Opening Song: *Sanctuary*

- Good evening and welcome to our prayer service celebrating the feast of the Assumption. It is part of the Women Witnesses for Racial Justice series.
- Our readers tonight will be Rose Lue and Crystal Catalan.
- Our speaker will be Naudia Loftis
- Russ Petrus will be leading our music tonight
- My name is Vickey McBride and I'll be serving as the presider.
- Our opening song will be "Sanctuary". The words are shared on the screen. Please join in singing at home. We do, however, ask that you keep yourself on mute.

Sign of Cross & Greeting:

Leader: We gather in the name of *(making the sign of the cross)*
God, our loving Mother, in whose divine image we are all made;
of our Christ our Liberator, who leads us to fullness of life;
And of the Holy Spirit of courage and boldness,

All: Amen.

Leader: The unshakable peace of Jesus, the boundless love of God,
and the power of the Holy Spirit *is* with you,

All: And also with you.

Introductory Remarks:

Leader: Church, we gather today to celebrate the feast of the Assumption. Tradition tells us that at the end of her natural life, Mary the Mother of God was assumed into Heaven, body and soul.

We celebrate that by collaborating with God and consenting to God's plan, Mary became one of the foremost proclaimers of the Good News. We will hear in tonight's readings how Mary put her trust in the promises God made. We will also lift up and recall woman witnesses of racial justice who embody that trust through their faithful, diligent work to bring about the *kingdom* of God.

We are richly blessed to be able to look to their example. And it is a blessing to be able to gather as a holy community to pray in gratitude for these figures and to offer each other support as we also try to place even deeper trust in God's promises to us.

And so, let us pray: *(allow for a brief moment of silent centering)*

Opening Prayer:

Leader: God, our Mother,

You, whose blessings are numerous, whose mercies renew each morning,
You have created us for connection with you and with all creation.
You gave us agency and autonomy to pursue the desires of our hearts,
To strive after justice,
To love our neighbors as ourselves,
To experience fullness of life, and to glorify You.

Tune our hearts, Mothering God, guide us,
When we stray from the plans you have in mind for us
Plans for fullness and communion.
Help us to listen for your voice in our lives however it appears,
In scripture,
In prayerful meditation,
In community and conversation
In the courageous prophets and witnesses you ordain.

Tune our hearts so that we may stay aligned with your holy will.
We make this prayer in the name of Christ Jesus,

ALL: AMEN.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

1st Reading: Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a; 10ab

Reader (Crystal): A Reading from the Book of Revelations:

Then God's sanctuary in heaven was opened, and within it the Ark of the Covenant could be seen. There were flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a violent hailstorm.

Then a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, with twelve stars on her head for a crown. She was pregnant and in labor, crying out in pain as she was about to give birth.

Then another sign appeared in heaven: a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and each of the seven heads with a crown. Its tail swept a third of the stars from the sky and hurled them down to the earth. The dragon stood before the woman about to deliver, to devour her child the moment she gave birth. The woman gave birth to a male child, a son, who is to rule the world with an iron rod. But the child was snatched straight up to God and God's throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven shout:

"Now have come salvation and power,
And the *kingdom* of God,
And all authority for God's Anointed.
For the accuser of our sisters and brothes,
Who accused them before our God night and day,
Has been brougth down."

The Word of God,
ALL: Thanks be to God

Responsorial Psalm (*sung*): Psalm 25

*To you, O God, I lift up my soul
Lift up my spirit to my Lord
To you, I lift up my soul*

2nd Reading: Luke 1:39-56

Reader (Rose): A Reading from the Gospel according to Luke:

Within a few days Mary set out and hurried to the hill country to a town of Judah, where she entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth.

As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, an dblessed is the fruit of your womb! But why am I so favored that the mother of the Messiah should come to me? The moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who believed that what our God said to her would be accomplished!"

Mary said:

“My soul proclaims your greatness, O God,
And my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior.
For you have looked with favor upon your lowly servant,
And from this day forward
All generations will call me blessed.
For you, the Almighty, have done great things for me,
And holy is your Name.
Your mercy reaches from age to age
For those who fear you.
You have shown strength with your arm;
You have scattered the proud in their conceit;
You have dposed the mighty from their thrones
And raised the lowly to high places.
You have filled the hungry with good things,
Whil you have sent the rich away empty.
You have come to the aid of Israel yourservant,
Mindful of your mercy—
The promise you made to our ancestors—
To Sarah and Abraham
And their descendants forever.”

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home.

This is the Gospel, the Good News of God:

ALL: Praise to You, O Christ.

Brief Reflection & Introduction of the Witnesses

Leader: From “Pregnant with the Promise – Mary’s Testimony”

God calls us. God chooses us. God selects us for the missions we are to perform in life.

We can rebel against God, we can ignore God, or we can submit. [Mary] was a willing vessel. [She] was living for God. [She] was available. And [she] was willing to become pregnant with the promise.

When you meet those conditions, the Holy Spirit will impregnate you. It makes no difference that you are female, male, old, or young. God is yet seeking those who are willing to bear Jesus into their world. Meister Eckhart, a German theologian fo the fourteenth century, asked himself the rhetorical question “What does god do all day?” and he answered himself, “God lies on a maternity bed, giving birth to thoughts, dreams, and visions.”

A brief reflection from VM.

Introduction of Naudia Loftis:

Let us listen now with open and willing minds, hearts, and bodies as we hear from Ms. Naudia Loftis:

May her witness open our minds, touch our hearts, inspire our words and actions and awaken us to the pursuit of racial justice and harmony.

Witness from Naudia Loftis

Reflection Song: *This Day* *Edwin Hawkins (performed by Kierra Sheard)*

*Give us this day our daily bread
You said you would supply all our need
According to your riches
We have but to ask and we shall receive.*

*To go from here and share this love you gave to me
To help someone who’s lost and help them find their way
The way to truth and faith so they can be free like me
Free like me...
Lord, we need your love.
Lord, we need your peace
Lord, we need your joy
This day
Give us this day.
Lord, we thank you for this day.*

Moment of Quiet Reflection (3 minutes)

Leader: As we take a moment to reflect silently, I ask you to consider:

- What is the most recent “infant” (idea, relationship, plan, project) you birthed into the realm of God?
- Who was there to help you with your labor?
- In what places do you feel safe giving birth to the new?

Litany for Black Women (adapted from the AA Heritage Hymnal #70)

Vickey: I will now ask our readers to lead us in this litany for Black women. When you see the bolded responses on the screen, you are invited to say them aloud though we ask you to continue to stay on mute.

Crystal: Today, O God, we recall the Feast of Mary’s Assumption and we honor Black women, especially those who embodied Mary’s spirit of trust in God. There are so many women of Black heritage who we can uplift and recall – carriers and cultivators of culture for the past and future. In a lush African garden, your hands fashioned her as Mother of Creation. Bless her now as she continues to pass culture on to future generations.

Rose: Thank you for Black women, Lord. Their descendants have blessed the earth.

Crystal: We remember some of the African queens: Hatshetsut, Nefertiti, Makeda, Nzingha, and Ya Asantewa. Through the centuries they grew in wisdom and strength. Fertile minds were formed at their knee. They nurtured kingdoms as queen rulers of might nations. Bless Black women now, Lord, as they continue to educate and lead their people.

Rose: Strengthen Black women, God. Their genius has enriched the earth.

Crystal: We remember Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Pauli Murray, and Rosa Parks. The Black woman was treated as property during enslavement and the Middle Passage. Yet she survived and her vision of freedom ignited a determination to struggle for human and civil rights. Bless Black women now, Lord, as they fight against injustice through strategies for hope, survival, and advancement.

Rose: Empower Black women, God. Their bravery has ennobled the earth.

Crystal: We remember Augusta Savage, Katherin Dunham, Marian Anderson, Mahalia Jackson, and Meta Warrick Fuller. They birthed Black literacy and artistic traditions. Through autobiography, quilts, sculpture, dance, song, and poetry, the once muffled voices of Black women ring clear with creative power. Bless them now, Lord, as their moans and hums, whispers and shouts make our land beautiful.

Rose: Inspire Black women, God. Their beauty has adorned the earth.

Crystal: We remember Rahab, Zipporah, Jarena Lee, Julia Foote, and Zilpha Elaw Black women prayed and preached, healed and helped faithfully at all times. As prayer warriors, they knew how to trust you, O God, especially in times of trouble. Their triumph has sparked fire in our souls. May the light that radiates from you today cast beautiful patterns on our lives through them.

Rose: We rejoice now, O God, with Black women everywhere. Thank you, God. Their work blesses the earth. AMEN.

CLOSING RITES

Announcements Deborah Rose-Milavec

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray:
 God our Mother,
 Living Water,
 River of Mercy,
 Source of Life,
 In whom we live and move and have our being,
 Who quenches our thirst,
 Refreshes our weariness,
 Bathes and washes and cleanses our wound,
 Be for us always a fountain of life,
 And for all the world
 A river of hope,
 Springing up in the midst of the deserts of despair.
 Honor and blessings,
 Glory and praise,
 To you forever.
 AMEN.

“Prayer for Social Justice” by Miriam Therese Winter

Closing Song

Lead Me, Lord

John Becker