

The gospel today begins with a journey.

*"Mary set out and travelled to the hill country in haste..."*

At this time of year many of us would usually be considering taking a trip. August has traditionally been the month when millions of people take a holiday and travel, either in this country or abroad, for some rest and recreation.

Of course, this year, things are rather different. Travelling abroad, especially if you're wanting to fly, is fraught with new regulations and, depending on where you're going, can involve you in going into quarantine when you get back.

As a holiday island, we can see the numbers of holidaymakers coming over to the Isle of Wight with a mixture of relief, especially for those in the tourist industry, and anxiety that the influx of visitors might bring another spike in Covid 19 cases.

But the journey Mary makes, as we heard about in our Gospel reading, is far from being a holiday trip. She has just been told that she is to be the Mother of God. And rather than keeping this news to herself, or wondering how she will cope, she sets out on a journey to visit her cousin, Elizabeth — and we have this momentous scene that follows, The Visitation.

Not only does Mary take this journey to a town of Judah but, with this event, the great journey of her LIFE begins – an adventure that will not end until her final journey, to heaven, on the feast we celebrate today, the Assumption.

We often tend to think of the Blessed Mother as a quiet, serene figure – a woman of few words, but blessed with tremendous faith, and boundless trust; and that is true.

But I'd like to ask you to think of her a little differently. I'd like you to think of her as a woman of action.

This is because Mary is a woman on a continual journey — constantly, by necessity, on the move. She is restless, rarely sitting still or staying in one place.

After her journey to see Elizabeth, we next find Mary embarking on another arduous trip, again while pregnant, to Bethlehem for the birth of her baby; and then, after the birth of Jesus, we see her and her small family on the move again, fleeing to Egypt to escape death.

We meet her again when, traveling home from Jerusalem where they had been for the Passover festival, Jesus goes missing – and we follow Mary as she goes in search of him. Finding him in the temple, she continues her travels and brings him home to Nazareth.

Mary, as the first disciple, in many ways prefigures all the disciples who will follow – those who have travelled, mostly on foot, throughout the world to spread the gospel and proclaim the Good News. Like those apostles, Mary was a missionary – the first missionary, a woman who travelled and carried Christ to the world.

In today's gospel we see her, literally, bringing Jesus to another person, as she carries him in her womb and goes to see her cousin Elizabeth, where she speaks the words any missionary might pronounce – words which are the very essence of The Good News, and the beginning of all belief: *"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord."*

What follows, the Magnificat, is Mary's great gift to scripture, one of its most beautiful prayers. It is prayed every evening in the Liturgy of the Hours by millions around the world and, with that, Mary's great acclamation becomes the Church's prayer.

We can only imagine what other travels she took in the course of her life ... but we can't forget one in particular, the most difficult of all, as she followed her son on HIS journey to Calvary.

However today, on this Feast, we celebrate her ultimate journey – her assumption into heaven, body and soul. The woman who spent so much of her life in motion – setting out, travelling, searching and fleeing – finally is given a place of rest, a place "prepared by God," as Revelation puts it. This day,

we honour that, and honour how God has “looked with favour on his lowly servant.”

This feast marks the end of Mary’s earthly story – and the beginning of one that continues, to this day, in heaven. She becomes, for all time, what Elizabeth says in her first word of greeting: “Blessed.”

But the important thing to remember is that though she left this world, Mary is not removed from us. Her life is closely entwined with ours. All of us, like Mary, are on a journey. All of us are traveling to places we may not understand, to destinations we cannot see. This is life. But we ask Mary to help guide us on our way.

The road is long and the journey isn’t easy; so we need to pray to have the trust in God that we need to travel whatever road we must take – just as Mary did.

And we need to pray, too, that one day our journeying will lead us to meet her face to face – in that place prepared for her, that destination that became her home, and where she waits for us, with a mother’s love and a mother’s hope.