

Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



The East Window

Mary, Queen of Heaven

Friday in the Second Week of Lent

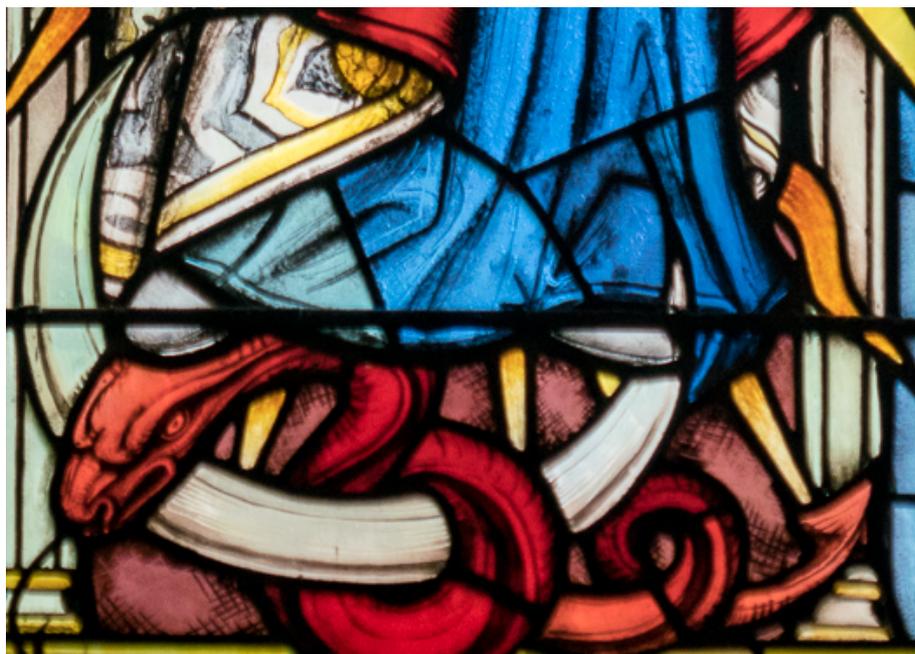
Reading: Revelation 12: 1-6

A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Commentary

The figure described in this passage is often called the 'Woman of the Apocalypse', or the 'Woman Clothed with the Sun.' She is widely identified as the Virgin Mary who is depicted, as in our window, 'clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.' (Rev: 12:1). This passage is followed by 'War in Heaven' in which Michael defeats Evil: 'the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole world.' (12:9). Mary stands on the defeated dragon which has sought to destroy

her and her Son, for He has gained victory over evil through His Death on the Cross.



St Justin writing about 155 AD was among the first to draw a parallel between Eve and Mary. He wrote that Eve's disobedience, inspired by the serpent, which brought death to the world, was overcome by the obedience of Mary who received the Angel's announcement with faith

and joy. Through her Christ was born ‘by who God destroys both the serpent and those angels and men like him...’

The 4th century Council of Ephesus defined Mary as ‘Theotokos,’ ‘Mother of God.’ This was to affirm the humanity of Christ (through Mary’s body) as well as His divinity.

Mary is often seen wearing a crown, not just because of the description from Revelation, but because the New Testament speaks of ‘the incorruptible crown, the crown of life,’ (James 1:12) that ‘fadeth not away.’ (1 Peter 5:4) awarded in Heaven to those who had been faithful in this life through trials and tribulations. (‘Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.’ Rev 2:10) It is a sign that Mary now shares in the life and glory of Heaven with her Son and the angelic host.

Since the 6th century, the Blessed Virgin Mary has had as one of her titles ‘Queen of Heaven,’ and she is addressed as such in many ancient hymns such as the Salve Regina, Regina Coeli, Ave Regina Caecolorum. There are many beautiful musical settings of these words.

In the Hebrew Bible, there was under some of the Kings, the position of the Queen Mother, or ‘Great Lady.’ She held great power as counsel to the King. It was the highest honour and highest authority that could be bestowed on a woman in Israel. Some have seen in this a ‘type’ of the Virgin Mary. For instance, when Bathsheba went to her son King Solomon to speak on behalf of someone, 1 Kings 2:19 tells us that Solomon sat on his throne, ‘then he had a throne set for the King’s Mother... and the King said to her ‘Ask, my mother, for I will not refuse you.’

Meditation

A prayer was written in the 4th century called ‘Tota Pulchra es’ – ‘you are completely beautiful.’ The text is based on verses from the Song of Songs (4:7) and speaks of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Many composers have set it to music through the centuries from plainsong to Schumann and Bruckner and in the 20th century, among others, Duruflé and James Macmillan.

As part of your meditation today, you might like to listen to one of these settings (or one of the ancient hymns listed above). I recommend the setting by the Norwegian composer, Ola Gjeilo, written in 2009 which you can find on YouTube here. <https://youtu.be/4YEn14zx7UE>

Prayer

WE beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts;
that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ
by the message of an angel,
so by his cross and passion
we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.