

“From the beginning, and before the world, was I created.”

Ecclus 24:14

There are two theological opinions about the Incarnation. St Thomas Aquinas says that the Son of God became Man as a result of original sin: Adam sinned, and so God chose to send His only-begotten Son into the world. St Bonaventure, on the other hand, says that the Son of God would have become Man even had there been no sin. On *this* point of view, the Incarnate Son of God was the model that God the Father had in His mind when He created Adam. Christ was the mould which provided the shape for Adam even though Christ was not yet born.

The Church generally sides with the opinion of St Thomas Aquinas, namely that had there been no sin then the Son of God would not have been made Man. But the Church has never definitively ruled on the matter and we are free to hold either view, so long as we do not thereby compromise any of the Church’s other teachings.

So, let’s pause and think. Even before God created Adam, it was always the plan that the Son of God would become Man and be the model for all human beings: the model of virtue and holiness, the model by which we would all live. When sin entered the world through Adam, death was introduced into the world. As a result, Christ – if He were still to be the model for all of mankind – chose to undergo all of the sufferings that mankind had now brought down upon himself, include the ultimate suffering of death. By choosing to die, Christ could redeem mankind by forgiving him his sins and raising him up once more to where he was always intended by God to have been. Indeed, by grace, we are raised to an even higher plane than before because in Baptism we actually become adopted sons and daughters of God and co-heirs with Christ to all the graces and blessings of the heavenly

places (Rom 8:17), whereas before the Fall we would simply have been privileged creatures among the whole body of God's creatures.

But Eve played a part in Mankind's fall too. It was Eve who was first tempted. And it was Eve who had the choice to co-operate in the serpent's plan or to rebut that plan. By her act of free will, Eve co-operated in the Fall of Mankind which was actually brought about by Adam's original sin because it was Adam, created first, who had been endowed with the supernatural gift of grace that he was to have held on behalf of the whole human race and pass on to the rest of us.

In a similar fashion, Mary played a part in our redemption. It was Mary who was given the free choice to co-operate with God's plan or to rebut that plan. By her act of free will, Mary co-operated in our redemption which was actually brought about by Christ, the Second Adam, because it was Christ who – through His suffering, death, and resurrection – bestowed the new life of grace upon the human race once more, and so passed onto those who are baptized the freely given gifts of God that the Father always willed us to have from the outset.

Now, if the Son of God would have become Incarnate even had there been no sin, might it not follow that God would always have had in mind a Mother for His Son too? *Ab initio et ante sæcula creata sum*: 'From the beginning, and before the world, was I created' (Ecclus 24:14). These words from the Book of Ecclesiasticus are placed by the Church onto the lips of Mary on her feast days: 'From the beginning, and before the world, was I created.'

In the mind of God, from the beginning and even before the work of creation had begun, Mary was part of the Divine plan for Mankind. Held up as a model for us all, just as Christ was a model for us all even before Adam was created, Mary was preserved by God to be free from every taint of sin so that in the purity of her heart she would have the freedom to

be able to choose to co-operate fully with God's plan. And indeed she did so choose. And as a result of her integrity of soul and body – as a result of her soul and body remaining in harmony with each other and with God, as opposed to being torn in different directions by sin as our souls and bodies are – Mary was preserved throughout her life so that when her natural life on earth came to a close she was taken up, body and soul together, to share in the glorious splendour of her Son, just as Christ Himself had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven body and soul together to be seated at the right hand of the Father.

This is the mystery which we celebrate today on the feast of Our Lady's Assumption: that from the beginning and before the world was created, Mary had always been in the mind of God as a fitting helpmeet in His Son's work of redemption, and so in the Divine plan she was taken straight up into heaven, body and soul together, as part of a single and uninterrupted trajectory, from the beginning and unto all eternity.

No wonder the angels in heaven exalt on this day!