



Karel Kupka *Mary of the Aborigines* Darwin Cathedral

*Mary ... truly our sister
who as a poor
and humble woman
fully shared our lot*

Pope Paul VI *Marialis Cultis*

MARIAN MONTH OF MAY

The tradition of dedicating the month of May to Mary, seems to have emerged in Europe during the 13th century. May in Europe is when the season of Spring is at its most beautiful, when renewal and new life in nature is visible. May became connected with the new life promised in Jesus Christ and a way of honouring Jesus' mother Mary.

During May, there are three Marian feast days: Our Lady Help of Christians, Patron of Australia on the 24 May; The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth on 31 May and Mary Star of the Sea, Patron of Broken Bay also on 31 May.

THE THOUSAND FACES OF MARY

In the mid 1990s, George Tavard wrote a book titled, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* to explore the barriers to ecumenical dialogue about Mary. Part of the study revealed the myriad cultural expressions of devotion to Mary and cultural understandings of Mary across time.

THE BASILICA OF THE ANNUNCIATION, NAZARETH

In the mid 4th century an altar was built in a grotto in Nazareth where Mary's house was thought to have been. Since then, the church has been either destroyed or demolished and then rebuilt five times. It was completed as a basilica in 1969.

The courtyard of the basilica has mosaics of Mary from forty three different nations. These are a remarkable illustration of the portrayal of Mary of Nazareth with the national characteristics from many diverse places. Within the basilica, there are many other artworks that also image Mary according to diverse cultural characteristics. These can be viewed at:

<https://www.biblewalks.com/annunciation-mosaics>

MADONNA OF THE ABORIGINES

The image above was commissioned by Bishop John O'Loughlin, who built the Mary Star of the Sea Cathedral in Darwin. The Czech artist, Karel Kupka, shows Mary carrying Jesus on her shoulders in the way Aboriginal women from the Tiwi Islands and the Daly River do with their babies, with one of her hands clasping the baby by the ankle and the other gently resting on his hip.

MARIAN ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) have been in dialogue for a number of years. Their landmark 1982 statement, *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry* led to mutual recognition of Christian Baptism with growing agreement and some remaining differences still part of dialogue.

In 2005, ARCIC released an agreed statement titled, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*. In his homily for the launch of the statement, Cardinal Walter Kasper said:

As with all of ARCIC's work, the Mary document came about as Catholic and Anglican scholars gathered together to rediscover and ponder the testimony about Mary in the Scriptures and in our ancient common traditions. For 450 years, we have lived with the understanding that there were important teachings about Mary regarding which we differed; we have lived with the consequences of not sharing a common faith about the one we both believed to be the Mother of God. With a view to addressing these obstacles, the Commission worked its way calmly and systematically through the Scriptures and through the Tradition, asking to what extent a common understanding of the place of Mary in the economy of salvation could now be stated.

MARY OF NAZARETH

Nazareth was a rather small village where people lived at a subsistence level in very basic shelter. Miriam of Nazareth, as she acknowledges in her song, the Magnificat lived as part of the 'anawim'. The anawim lived an interior poverty of spirit with ultimate trust in God's love and mercy. They were materially poor, vulnerable and often marginalised, without power or influence, in larger Roman occupied society.

Miriam of Nazareth was a Jewish woman in a long Jewish tradition of women who sang songs of thanksgiving, triumphal songs of the oppressed. For example. Miriam in Exodus 15:2-21, Deborah in Judges 5:1-31, Judith 16:1-17 and Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Mary's Magnificat strongly echoes Hannah's song.

MARY IN ISLAM

Mary, named Mariyam, has an important place in the *Qu'ran* of Islam as mother of the prophet Jesus whom she conceived by the Holy Spirit. She is considered as one of God's chosen ones in the line of the great prophets.

Mariyam is a popular name for Muslim girls.

REMEMBERING MARY OF NAZARETH

... Mary of Nazareth, while completely devoted to the will of God, was far from being a timidly submissive woman or one whose piety was repellent to others; on the contrary, she was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed ...

Pope Paul VI *Marialis Cultus*

The memory of her partnership with God through the power of the Spirit can create liberating energies for justice, especially given her low estate as poor and female. ... Miriam of Nazareth abides in the circle of disciples as our sister, a poor woman of the people for whom God has done great things.

- A young Spirit-filled Jewish woman finding her joy in God
- A woman vulnerable to violence in a patriarchal setting
- A friend of God who made her own difficult choices with courage
- A prophet whose word announced the awesome changes God's coming would bring about in this world
- A God-bearer who had divinity dancing under her heart in developing human flesh
- A married woman, who with her husband, toiled hard to provide for their family
- A woman with a questioning mind who pondered what God was doing in the midst of her life
- The mother of the itinerate preacher Jesus, terribly worried about his ministry
- A middle-aged woman whose agonised grief over the public execution of her son connects her with legions of bereaved women
- An elder in the budding community of the church
- She kept faith
- We remember her
- We connect her story with our own amid the searching narrative of the human race in its history of suffering and hope.
- We thereby find courage to enact the critical dream of God for the world.