

THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY

Frederick Gingell, 2024, Oil on Canvas, 91.4x61cm

The painting depicts Mary at the moment of her being taken up into Heaven.

According to the Patristic tradition, the dormition of Mary happened in Jerusalem. On the third day, her resting place was found empty. The place where her body had been placed was covered with flowers. The field of flowers in the painting represents the harvest where Paulist Missionaries minister, the flowers are in full bloom, ready to be picked. Mary holds in her hands the national flower of each country where Paulist Missionaries have worked in or have a presence: the Australian Golden Wattle, the Canadian Bunchberry, the Cuban Jasmine, the Ethiopian Calla Lily, the Italian Lily, the Maltese Widnet il-Bahar, the Pakistani Jasmine, the Peruvian Kantuta, the Filipino Sampaguita and the Vietnamese Lotus. Mary takes these flowers with her into Heaven.

The top left of the painting is dark, but Mary is looking to the light on the right side; she is being taken up by the Light, Jesus her Son. The flowing clothes give the impression that she is about to leave earth. The gown and the flowing mantles represent the five continents. The gown is the traditional attire of an Ethiopian lady representing Africa. The multi-coloured headdress is a Peruvian woven cloth representing the Americas. Beneath the headdress is part of the Australian flag, representing Oceania. The striped red, yellow and black cloak is a traditional Filipino skirt material, representing Asia. On the right-hand side is a blue mantle with stars, representing Europe.

PAUL THE MISSIONARY

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Before becoming a follower of Christ, Paul was the prime example of a “righteous” Jew. He was a Pharisee educated by Gamaliel, a respected rabbi. His Jewish credentials included his heritage, discipline, and zeal. After his conversion, the Apostle Paul was one of the most influential leaders of the early Christian church. He played a crucial role in spreading the gospel to the Gentiles, and his missionary journeys took him to many foreign lands. “Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation” (Mark 16:15).

Paul’s stature is not conventional, he is the formidable preacher standing on missionary ground, denoted by the national flowers of countries where Paulist Missionaries have a presence. Paul’s attire is both Jewish and Roman, he was a Jew with Roman citizenship. The white tunic is gathered up at the waist by a red girdle. The purple outer garment is a Roman toga, symbolising the sacrifices the missionary goes through. Over his shoulders Paul is wearing a Jewish prayer shawl with tassels, striped in black and white. Paul is carries a sword, symbolising both his martyrdom and the power of the Spirit; in his letter to the Ephesians he writes “Take the ... sword of the Spirit.”

The book in his hand represents the Word of God which he preached. His audience, like that of the Paulist Missionaries, is made up of children and adults. They represent different nationalities. The man, wearing a shirt with the Canadian bunchberry flower, is sitting next to his Filipino wife. Their daughter has the Australian Golden Wattle on her red top and the second girl sitting on the grass is from Peru. The child squatting facing away from us represents all the other peoples where the Paulist Missionaries minister. The colours of the sky signify Paul’s conversion from darkness to light.