

About the Cover Art

Mary, Star of the Sea

Our Lady, Star of the Sea is an ancient title for Mary, the mother of Jesus. The words “Star of the Sea” are a translation of the Latin title *Stella Maris*. The title has been in use since at least the early medieval period. Mary came to be seen as the “guiding star” on the way to following Christ. Under this name, Mary is believed to intercede as a guide and protector of seafarers in particular. Many coastal churches are named *Stella Maris* or Star of the Sea. This title has often been used as a spiritual allegory. However, I wanted to depict it in a slightly different way.

In this icon, I have Mary, who is also called “the protectress of the oppressed,” guiding a rescue boat to a large group of migrants out at sea. Refugees and migrants are continuing to make these voyages out at sea to find a better life for their families. However, the migrant sea routes have become some of the most dangerous. According to the Migration Data Portal, since 2014, more than 4,000 fatalities have been recorded annually on migratory routes worldwide. 2023 marked the deadliest year with more than 8,000 deaths recorded. Many countries have begun to refuse aid to refugee and migrant boats attempting to come ashore. Many boats are not able to make the journeys at all or can become lost and quickly carried out into the open ocean.

Thankfully, there are many organizations that now patrol the various sea routes that migrants are taking and when they find boats are able to bring everyone aboard and safely to various refugee camps ashore. The people making these journeys are sacred. It is my hope that this icon isn’t a version of Mary just up in the clouds but also down in the water with the lowly and oppressed peoples of the earth.

— Kelly Latimore, artist

For more iconography and artwork by Kelly Latimore, visit kellylatimoreicons.com.

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Six Reasons
Mary Is for Lutherans Too

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Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Chicago has a famous icon of Mary and the Child in its worship space. The prayers of intercession spoken each week conclude with a thanksgiving for the saints – especially those to be observed in the coming week – and Blessed Mary is always named first.

Here are six reasons why devotion to Mary can enrich the spiritual and liturgical lives of Lutherans and other Protestants.

- 1 Mary has been honored by Christians through the ages.** The vast majority of Christians throughout the centuries – Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox – have held a deep devotion to Mary. August 15 is observed as the Feast of the Dormition (“falling asleep”) by the Eastern Orthodox, the Feast of the Assumption by Roman Catholics, and Mary, Mother of Our Lord by Lutherans.
- 2 Mary is the Godbearer.** Amid conflict and controversy in the fifth century, Mary was declared *Theotokos*, the “Godbearer.” This affirmation of Mary as the Mother of God was linked to the affirmation of Jesus as truly human and divine. Through baptism, we are also called to be Godbearers. Through us, God brings to birth justice, peace, hope, and new life.
- 3 Mary reveals the feminine side of faith.** We may not honor Mary as divine, yet she provides some feminine balance to our scriptural and liturgical vocabulary that is saturated with traditionally masculine language for God. A number of religions have some kind of devotion to the Divine Mother, and there is a hunger, among some today, for a sense of the sacred feminine. For Christians, the church’s tradition regarding Mary seems the most natural place to begin.

4 In Mary is space for God. The famous Chora Church in Istanbul has awesome art from the lives of Mary and Jesus. Of several associations with the word *chora*, one is the Greek phrase which describes Mary as the “container of the uncontainable.” In the same way the people of Israel acknowledged the Tabernacle as the dwelling place of God, Christians marvel that the Word was made flesh in the womb of Mary. To make space for God in sacred places or within our very bodies, Mary is an icon of the incarnation.

5 Mary sings of radical justice. Mary’s *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) is sometimes described as revolutionary. She sings of God lifting up the lowly, the poor, the hungry, the forgotten, and the marginalized. Mary sings a radical song of hope for those on the bottom of life’s heap.

6 Mary models openness to mystery. When the angel Gabriel announces that Mary will bear a child, she utters her most famous words: “Let it be” (Luke 1:38). As Mary responds with trust to this startling word, she is sometimes called the first Christian disciple. In the midst of things she cannot understand, Mary opens her life to divine mystery. Seeking God’s will does not mean there is a predetermined plan for each one of us. As our lives become more technological and programmed, Mary teaches us to let go of control and be open to whatever comes our way.

These short reflections were written by the Rev. Dr. Craig Mueller, lead pastor at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Chicago, Illinois, and shared here by permission. We hope that they are an inspiration for your own spiritual journey.

