

Feast Day of The Blessed Mother

A medieval illuminated manuscript shows Mary, who's handed Jesus to a mindful angel for safe keeping while she, sitting atop the devil like some WWE wrestler, beats the shit out of him. In another, she's poking the devil's eye out or punching him in the face or both. It's not clear which. In one she stands atop Satan driving a cross into his heart. Another wrestling one depicts Mary holding Beelzebub's arm behind him with one hand to get him to cry "Uncle!" as she flogs him with the other hand so that he's vomiting up Theophilus' contract. In yet another she's beheaded Satan with her terrible swift sword, victorious like St. George with his dragon. When Jesus gets a little older, she raises a rod to some chicken-footed demon, as if to thump him aside so she can cross the street safely with her boy in hand. And then there's the one where she's hammering on the devil's head like a wild blacksmith while a grown Jesus, hanging out in a cloud, looks down with his hand up as if to say, "That's enough now, Mother." The angels in all these works look a little alarmed. As are we. Here's a woman who outmatches the devil in her blue dress for sure.



Illustration, *Taymouth Hours*, c. 1240, England, British Library, London



Illustration, *The De Brailles Hours*, 13th-century MS, England, British Museum, London



Illustration, *Taymouth Hours*, 14th century MS, England British Library, Yates Thompson MS 13



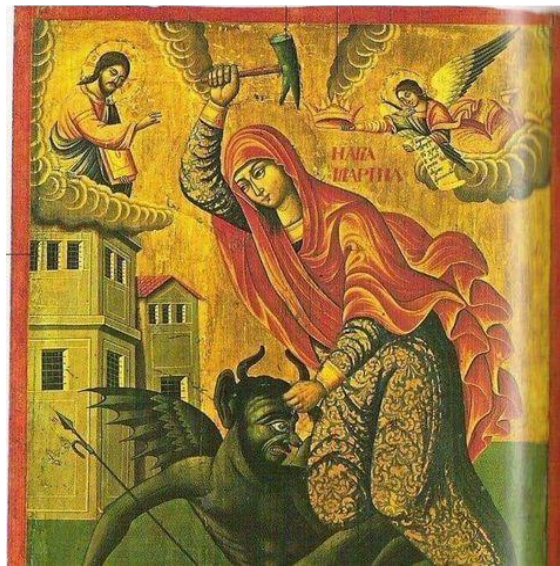
Illustration, *Smithfield Decretals*, c. 1300-1340, France, British Library, Royal MS 10 E IV



Juan de Miranda, Painting on Canvas, 1778, Iglesia de la Concepción, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain



Giovanni da Monte Rubiano, *Our Lady of Succour*, c. 1506, Caltavuturo



Ikon of St. Marina, c. 1850, Greece, Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens. Though not Mother Mary, Saint Marina is acting in accord with the tradition of good women beating the devil.

I confess: I never much cared for artistic depictions of Mary. She seems an insipid vessel for men's salvation, painted as some passive, acted-upon milk cow cowering before the male gaze when she wasn't expressing the Milky Way from exposed breast. She's merely there to hold the baby most of the time, like too many women—mother meek and mild,

never any trouble, draping her blues about her
with lilies tucked away somewhere for abused consolation.
Every now and then she gets to play the Queen
as men dress her up in ermine and jewels
like some ancient beauty pageant goddess
sitting atop the world's pedestal in a gold throne.
But mostly she's just there
to further someone else's plotline.
The blessed mother, blessed because she's mother,
not real, flesh-and-blood woman.

I prefer the wild wrestling Mary
because these crude depictions are true.
Real mothers beat off the devil all the time
for the sake of furthering their children's plots.
They submit to the surgical rape of childbirth
to ensure the first gasping breaths of someone else's life,
endure bleeding nipples and mastitis seven times
as they wonder if they'll ever wear anything
but this blue nightgown ever again.
A real mother leaps out of her car
to bless out some careless kid driver
who didn't look before turning
and almost hit her car where her baby sat.
She stops the car in the middle of the street,
blocking the driver's way, knocking on his window.
"Look! That's my baby you almost hit! No, don't you look away!
Look at what you almost did! You need to pay attention!"
Shocked into meek and mild, the boy driver cowers before her
and promises to be more careful.
Bullhorn in hand, a real mother protests before capitols,
rhetorically wresting rulers into submission
to the demands of justice for the least of these.
A real mother, upon seeing a stranger pull her child into his car,
picks up a rock and hurls it through the windshield,
startling the driver to release. Then, holding her child's hand,
she marches down to the police station to give a statement
and description that nails the culprit, saving others.
A real mother responds to her sassy child saying
she hates her when she won't let her do something harmful
with "Yeah? Well, I love you enough to have you hate me."
Motherhood is not for the passive, decorative faint-of-heart
but for valiant warriors who'll harrow hell itself
for the sake of their child.

So give us more of the WWE Mary

with flailing arms and legs on prayers
while shocked angels wonder
what in the world
God has done now
with the creation of such awesome women
that even startled demons run for cover—
as they should.

*** For more on this more robust tradition of Mary, see Vanessa R. Corcoran, “Queen of Heaven, Empress of Hell,” Contingent Magazine, 25 April 2020, accessed online at <https://contingentmagazine.org/2020/04/25/empress-of-hell/>.*

