

Sunday Morning Worship
Readings and Prayers 10th March 2024

Mothering Sunday



Exodus 2.1-10

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. 'This must be one of the Hebrews' children,' she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?' Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, 'because', she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'

This is the word of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 1.3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

This is the word of the Lord.

Luke 2.33-35

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Reflection (by Margaret Mandrell)

My name is Mary, and I would like to share my story with you. I had an uneventful childhood in an ordinary Jewish family in Nazareth. We could trace our family line back to David, but although our faith was important to us, we were just like everyone else in our small community. I was betrothed to Joseph, our local carpenter, who was older than me, but steady and reliable. I expected to have a life like my mother and grandmother, like all the women I knew.

Then a series of events shook my certainties and my life changed dramatically. Firstly, Elizabeth conceived despite being barren, and an angel appeared to her husband Zechariah, saying that they would have a son who was to be named John. They were godly people, and the angel came when Zechariah was serving in the Temple, but this was an amazing event. John was to play a special role in bringing people back to God.

Then something even more remarkable happened as an angel came to me, Mary, at home in Nazareth. I was told that I would have a son, Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who would be called the Son of the Most High. The angel said I would give birth to the Son of God. I was overcome with emotion, but managed to say that I accepted this before the angel disappeared, leaving me in a state of confusion. I went to stay with Elizabeth, who understood, and said that I was blessed to be the mother of God. We both experienced joy and praised God for all He was doing for us, and through us. We were awestruck for having been chosen to fulfil the roles and responsibilities given to us, ordinary women, with no special gifts or talents. It was good to spend time together and to support each other as we absorbed the reality of God's presence with us.

When John was born his father was able to speak again, and he praised God and spoke of redemption and the coming of a saviour, and how John would be a prophet preparing the way. He said that light would

come to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. Word spread quickly and everyone was talking about this.

Back to my story now. So Joseph did not reject me, but stood by me, as he also was visited by an angel who told him about the role Jesus would have in saving people from their sins. He accepted that the baby was of the Holy Spirit, and was prepared to play his part in protecting the child. Then we both went on a long and tiring journey to Bethlehem for the census which the Romans ordered. While we were there I gave birth, not in my home, but in a hovel, a stable of sorts, attached to a house, as the town was full of people returning from all over the region because of this edict. Another remarkable event took place as an angel appeared to shepherds in the fields nearby, telling them that a Saviour was born, the Messiah, the Lord. Then more angels, a multitude they said, appeared and praised God. The shepherds came to find us and told us all that had happened to them. It was amazing as everyone knows that shepherds are not educated or of high status, but are poor and looked down upon. Fancy them being chosen to see the Saviour and to share in our joy at his birth.

That was followed by one of my most special times ever. We went to the Temple to present Jesus and to make an offering, and there we met Simeon, a righteous and devout man. He took my child in his arms and said the most beautiful words, saying that Jesus would be a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to our people Israel. I could hardly breathe for a few moments. Another sign from God through this gentle old man who had waited patiently and with hope for this promise to be fulfilled. Some of his words cast a chill however as he said that a sword would pierce my soul. How true this was to be, but not for many years yet. Then Anna, who was well known to us all for her devotion to God and her life of prayer and fasting spoke up, praising God, and talking about Jesus to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Whenever I was worried about the future, I looked back on those events and found reassurance in them. The gentleness of Simeon, the vision of Anna, the presence of the shepherds, the support given by Elizabeth, the appearance of the angels and the continued comfort of the Holy Spirit gave me strength.

The next drama took place in the Temple in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve. We had gone for the Passover festival, were returning home, and then we found he was missing. We were distraught as it took a day to return and another three days before we found him. He was engrossed in discussion with the teachers in the Temple, listening and asking questions. I couldn't help myself. I told him how anxious we had been. I probably shouted at him in my distress and relief that he was safe, and shed a few tears. He was calm and told us that he needed to be in his Father's house. He returned with us, but I was aware of his understanding and knowledge, more confirmation of his special role for our people.

As I sit here thinking, I realise that I haven't mentioned the visit of the Magi, wise men from the East who brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They had followed a star all the way from the East to pay homage to the baby, who they knew to be the Messiah. As you can imagine, this gave King Herod a great deal of anxiety. Some said he was paranoid, he certainly had his enemies and even family members killed when he felt threatened. I think I did not include this as it was so traumatic. Joseph had a dream in which an angel said we must flee to Egypt as Herod was about to go on a killing spree, massacring all children under two years around Bethlehem. The fear and insecurity of being refugees in an alien country stayed with me for a long time. After Herod died, Joseph had another dream, and we returned to our own country, to Nazareth.

Things settled down then. Joseph was a good husband and father, and life was stable and I lost the fear and anxiety of our early years together. John grew up and went about calling people to repent, and many were

baptised in the river Jordan. He said that he was preparing the way of the Lord. My boy was also baptised and the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended on Him. A voice said that "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

That marked the next stage in my life. My son was now following his calling and I had to stand back and allow him to do God's work. It was not easy, as when he spoke in Nazareth, he was rejected by the people. John was arrested and beheaded, and then Jesus became a wandering preacher, surrounded by followers called disciples. We had one occasion when he was with us at a wedding and he turned water into wine, saving the reputation of the family and showing his powers.

I heard about his teaching and healing ministry, but I could only stay home and pray for him and for his safety.

He gave sight to the blind, cleansed lepers, cured the lame, even raising the dead, and told many parables. It was never going to end well, as the Pharisees and Scribes were out to get him, and to get rid of the threat to their authority and power structures. I could do nothing to change events, could only watch and wait.

At the cross as my boy suffered an excruciating death, he asked John, the beloved disciple, to take me home and care for me. He thought of others even then. I am sometimes asked if I would have done things differently. All I know is that God chose me for a special purpose and He gave me the strength to carry it out. I was honoured to be the mother of the Son of God and although I suffered when he underwent trials and temptations and the horrible death of crucifixion, I know that I was doing the task that God had given me. Another amazing confirmation of Jesus as the Son of God is revealed in the Resurrection, but that is for another time. Now I will reflect on his ministry and the miracles he performed and thank God that he lived and died to save us from our sins and bring hope to the world, revealing God's love and mercy.

Prayers

As we gather together
in the presence of our parent God,
let us pray.

To the bidding: We are all your children:
Please respond: help us grow in love.

We are all your children:
help us grow in love.

Loving Father, we pray
for all who are persecuted for their faith,
and for whom following you brings danger.
We pray for those who are new to faith
and those who no longer walk with you.
We thank you for the example of those
whose faith shines out in their lives.
Silence

We are all your children:
help us grow in love.

Loving Father, we pray
for those who forced to leave their homes,
their families or their countries.
We pray for those who, through war and famine,
must watch their children suffer or die.
We pray for your peace and comfort.
Silence

We are all your children:
help us grow in love.

Loving Father, we pray
for all the mothering that goes on

in this community
and for those who crave tenderness
and are weary of the struggle to be strong.
Help us to welcome those who seek to belong
and be part of our church family.

Silence

We are all your children:
help us grow in love.

Loving Father, we thank you
for our families and friends.
Be with all who grieve the loss
of their mother, grandmother or close relationships.
Be near those who are far apart from those they love.
May your presence fill our homes,
and give us the will to help those we meet who are sad.
We pray for all who enter this church
that they may know your love through our words and actions.

Silence

We are all your children:
help us grow in love.

Loving Father, we pray
for all who are sick, or in any kind of need.
From our own community we pray especially for: Joyce Pringle, Chris
Hankin, Rev. Michael Dunn, Peter Murphy, Anuwat Wanggane, Alan
Coe, Sam and Andy Fellows, Jack Tubby, Stacey Pearce, Richard
Mallaber, Rob & Lucy, Roger Jones, Patricia Ash, Jason Thomson, Ryan
Day, Bryan Plester, Brenda Hullahnd, David New, and Adrina and Alan
Price.

Silence

We are all your children:
help us grow in love.

We remember the recently departed: Jo Bunn, Raymond Pritchard, and Diane Atkinson;
and we pray for all who mourn their loss.

We remember with love and gratitude those whose anniversary of death falls at this time: Frank Kington, Mary Kington, Tony Deakin, Anne Plester, Doreen Harvey, Lily Morris, Don Smyth, Lillian Miller, Phyllis Miller, Lillian Francis, Bill Wood, Patrick Greenow.

And we remember those we love but see no longer.

Grant us with them,
a share in your eternal kingdom.

Silence

We are all your children:

help us grow in love.

Loving Father, we give you thanks
for the comfort you provide in all our troubles,
and for the richness of all our relationships.

Merciful Father,

accept these prayers

**for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

Amen.