

MOTHERING SUNDAY 27 March 2022

It's Mothering Sunday. Well, what does that mean to you?

Is it a day for mothers to be celebrated by their offspring, or a day for shops to make some extra money by putting up the price of flowers? Or only one of two occasions when the rector can wear a pink chasuble (if he has one)!

Our reading from Luke's Gospel this morning is about when Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to the Temple to fulfil their religious obligations. I want us to focus for a moment on Mary and her situation.

She became a mother when she was probably about twelve or thirteen years old, a very young teenager. Did she really understand what she was letting herself in for when she said *YES* to God's messenger?

I have a small black and white photograph of myself and my best friend when we were about four to five years old in the garden of the house our families shared. We each have a scrap of lace curtain draped over our heads and each holding the arm of a doll between us. We were acting out our wedding day and neither of us fancied being the bridegroom. But the doll is more significant here, as we were holding our symbolic baby. Neither of us had any idea what being a *mother* might mean.

A few verses before the reading we heard this morning – about Jesus and his parents in the Temple – we have the more familiar story of Jesus's birth in the stable in Bethlehem. You know how it goes, but it ends with these words: *But Mary (our twelve year old mother) treasured all these things and **pondered** them in her heart.* And I pondered on what she might be considering now she was faced with the responsibilities of having another human being completely dependent on her.

When I was teaching in a large comprehensive girls' school in London, the local authority was worried about the rise in very young single mothers in the area. They felt that schools should be involved in trying to make young girls aware of the responsibilities that came with motherhood. I don't know what happened in the boys' schools. It was called the *flour baby experiment*. Each pupil in year seven, i.e. the eleven-twelve year olds, was given a two pound bag of flour. They had to keep a diary of what responsibility they took for this object. It had to come to school with them every morning and stay with them throughout the day. They could not just dump it down somewhere and go off to play. And the same applied when they were at home and wanted to go out with their friends.

Some girls found it enjoyable, even persuaded their mothers to knit baby clothes for it, gave most of them a name and even a face. Of course, there were accidents when the bags broke and the classroom would be covered in flour. But Sellotape and plastic bags usually saved the day. I have no idea what the long-term results of this experiment were.

Now back to our bible reading. Simeon, the old prophet who had wandered into the temple while Mary and Joseph were there, takes the baby from them, blesses him and says that Jesus will be the salvation of the world. Both parents are amazed at what is being foretold about their baby son, but as Simeon hands the baby back to Mary he makes a very challenging statement to her. He says that her son will make many enemies as a result of his life and teachings and be put to death as a result of this; and she, too, will have her soul pierced by his suffering and rejection. This is a young teenager just beginning her new role as a mother, finding out what the everyday life responsibilities of being a mother mean.

Let's think about motherhood, parenthood, being an aunt or uncle – in fact, being any part of a family; it brings wonderful rewards as each generation is added to it. But we, too, can have our souls pierced by the suffering of our children, nieces, nephews.

At the Annunciation, Mary had said *YES* to God, and her *YES* brings Jesus into the world. We also are invited to make Christ present in our world. Mary's *YES* encourages us to say *YES* to Jesus, to bring him to birth in our lives and to accept the joy and pain that lie in store for each of us.

Mary, the very young mother pondering the things she has seen and heard has been there before us and shown us the way. Before we ever search for God, he seeks us out, he starts the conversation and waits for our *YES*. Lord, help us to say *YES*. And we have to accept what saying *YES* to God can bring in the way we live in our families, including our church family.

Mary's *YES* offered to God should encourage us to say our *YES* to Jesus, to bring him to birth in our lives and accept the joy and pain that lie in store for each of us. **AMEN**