

Advent Course 2020: Matriarchs, Patriarchs, Prophets: the Hope and Promise of Jesus

Week 3: The Blessed Virgin Mary: Matriarch and Prophet

'I want to speak about Mary... as a person who by virtue of the resurrection is still alive. That means we can be in contemporary relationship with her, one that is dynamic and mutual, and one that is related to, but also distinct from, the relationship we have with her son...

Mary is the model evangelist. She is incredibly good at making new Christians...for four reasons:

1. She shows us through her own life that it is in Christ we find the *dignity of our humanity*....the beaten up, the marginalized, the left-behind and the disregarded are those in whom God invests his plan of salvation.
2. She *enriches our spiritual life*, so that in company with her, we find relationship with God...at places of her pilgrimage, you don't need an order of service, you don't need to be literate, you just need to be there!
3. She shows us that *suffering has a purpose*. Personal suffering is one of the great blocks in evangelism as those exploring faith can wonder where this God of love is when they are going through hard times...I remember as part of an outreach project taking the image of Our Lady of Walsingham to Aldershot Barracks during the Iraq war. We visited a parent and toddler group attended by about 30 young mothers, none of whom had any Christian connection and most of whose husbands were away fighting in Iraq. I spoke to them about the image of Mary standing at the foot of the Cross. As a group of young women who were worried sick about their partners, they found this story to be an incredibly powerful one...it is a potent image precisely because it does not provide easy answers; Mary stands in the place of suffering; she is just there. And often that is all we can do too.
4. And fourth, Mary is an evangelist because she *points to the joy of salvation*. Mary brings joy to the world through her 'yes' to the Angel...the teenage girl, living in poverty, brought up in occupation, shows us the source of lasting joy. The Gospel we proclaim is one of joy. We often forget this in an anxious Church, worried about decline, battered by scandals and anxious about money and buildings. Congregations can become infected by anxiety and obsessed with the glories of the past. But the promise Jesus makes to us is one of joy that awaits us through his saving work on the cross but that can be

anticipated now in the sacramental life of the church.
(Philip North, Bishop of Burnley)

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

Isaiah 7.14-16

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed;
the Almighty has done great things for me
and holy is his name.

He has mercy on those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,

Casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
to remember his promise of mercy,

The promise made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children for ever.

Luke 1.46-55

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of

the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 1.26-38

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

Luke 1. 39-45

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's

house?' But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

Luke 2.41-52

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

John 19.25-27

My Fat Virgin Mary

I'm tired of skinny Virgin Marys,
Medieval, milk-mild.

The one I want has a bosom and a heart.

Brooding, maternal and magnificent.

You listen, you love

and you understand.

O most funny,

Glorious, vulgar fat lady.

I love you

and the God who made your

commodious bosom,

head rest, heart rest

for the uncomforted.

Hold us and love us,

you who dare to be big

and despise corsets.

You who love

bottles of stout, pork pies and

bags of greasy chips,

wrapped in newspaper.

Belligerently beautiful,

Queen of all fat women,

Defender of the unloved.

Accuser of the small-minded, sawdust people,

who never get involved nor find the

time to love your son,

wrapped in themselves.

O most funny lady, most funny lady,
Mother of mothers,
Praise be to you for showing us your acceptance,
your grief and your rejoicing.
Praise be to you for daring to be big,
proud of your girth
and all Glorious within.

Penelope Dent

