

**Mary,
Mother of God**

by

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Preface

It's summer and I'm thinking about the next project – another set of twelve monologues for our church's monthly magazine, St Bart's, to run from January to December, 2018. I'd already done Peter and Judas and, of course, there were the thirty chapters of 'The Gospel according to Bartholomew'. So who next ?

I'm sitting in church – Wednesday 26th July, an evening concert by Paul Kuentz and his chamber orchestra. A soprano sings three 'Ave Maria', dotted throughout the evening: Gounod, Schubert and one by Caccini. And, by the third, I know with certainty about whom I should write – Mary, mother of Jesus, wife of Joseph, full of grace, handmaid of the Lord.

To me, an Anglican priest, Mary is at the heart of our Christian story, the incarnation of the Son of God through the life-giving womb of a virgin who has said yes to God. Now, I'm not sure about the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (in the Anglican calendar, December 8th is the feast of the conception of Mary) or the Assumption, when at last she falls asleep, a wonderful reflection of the unique purity of Mary. But I am sure that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived but whether the brothers and sisters of Jesus mentioned in the Synoptic gospels are the result of her marriage to Joseph may depend on how you make sense of Matthew 1 v25. And I am sure that Mary enjoys to the full the grace of our Lord, not least because

through the fact of Jesus growing in her womb, Mary was uniquely in touch with the presence of God.

The twelve moments in her life I should focus on quickly suggested themselves to me – would you have chosen differently ? I imagined Mary speaking directly to her son in the present, looking back on their shared past, often using the historic present to make what is said all the more immediate. The idea for a 13th (Resurrection placed 12th in the sequence) was suggested by Pauline Eyre.

And if I a man could imagine giving voice to Mary, then why not a man to read them ? Dr David Norris over the past decade has read my poetry in Church: ‘Stations of the Cross’; ‘The Seven Last Words’; Crib services where he has been a wise man and a camel. Latterly, David has read the dramatic monologues at the Groupement Oecuménique, first ‘Judas Redeemed’ then ‘Walking with Peter’. So why not a man to articulate the human being who most nearly reflects the love of God for Man ?

May you enjoy hearing them, enjoy reading them for yourselves !

Father Gareth

The Feast of St Bartholomew

24th August, 2017

Annunciation

“The Lord is with you.”

Luke 1 v27

Midday,
at home, alone,
waiting for my parents,
for Anne and Joachim,
when an angel of the Lord,
young, strong, handsome,
appears to me and says
I've found favour with the Lord.
His voice is kind and gentle
but I don't know what he means
and so he tells me clearly
I'm going to have a son,
a son a gift from God.
In shock, confused,
I ask him how can I
when I am still a virgin
and never known a man ?
He tells me the Holy Spirit
will overshadow me
and I will conceive
and bear a son

who will be called Jesus,
the Son of God,
born to rule for ever.
His words reassure me.
I feel at peace,
at one with the Lord I love
and who clearly loves me too,
enough for me to bear His child.
Lowering my eyes, I say yes:
“Let God’s will for me be done.
I am the handmaid of the Lord.
Let it be even as He wills.”
Gabriel leaves me alone
and alone again I wonder
what will become of me
and you, my child to be,
because of Him ?

9 8 17



With Elizabeth

“My soul magnifies the Lord.”

Luke 1 v46

My cousin, Elizabeth, is pregnant.

Gabriel told me it was so

so I go to see her

and when I get there

and she hears my voice,

the baby in her womb,

awake to our presence,

stirs, moves and kicks her,

overjoyed we are there.

Delighted to see me,

Elizabeth tells me

I am pregnant too.

I stay with her some time,

glad of her company,

glad to share my secret.

The two of us,

overshadowed,

our babies to be

children of God,

sharing His mission.

Before I go home

to tell Joseph 'our' news,
I'm inspired, encouraged
and the words of the Magnificat
first come to me:
joyful,
knowing I'm known;
humble, blessed,
knowing He is with me
in the person of you, my son;
surprised, amazed,
knowing the proud and rich
are going to be challenged
and salvation made possible
even for the poor.
I take you home
and her son, John,
is born, circumcised and named.

10 8 17



In an inn

'Joseph took Mary as his wife.'

Matthew 1 v24

There's no room in the inn for us
but Joseph made room in his heart for us
because Gabriel appeared in a dream to him
and told him of God's will for me
and what he still should do for us.
And a good man, who loves me,
who loves the God we worship,
he's prepared to play his part
that God intends for him.
So Joseph accepts me,
accepts you as our son
and he marries me
and takes me, pregnant,
to Bethlehem for the census.
No room in the inn
so in the stable,
at ease, I give birth
and wrap you in linen
and lay you in a manger for a crib.
And then, strange visitors at dawn,
shepherds from outside the town

come to see us, overjoyed,
telling of an angel
bidding them to come
and see you for themselves,
you who've just been born:
the Son of God; Messiah;
God's anointed one;
Our Saviour and our King.
And a shepherd boy
leaves a lamb for us, for you,
a little lamb for the Lamb of God,
you, our son, my son.

11 8 17



*The Temple**Jesus, 40-days-old*

'Simeon took him in his arms.'

Luke 2 v28

As a baby, in my arms,
you were so good to hold,
to feed you at my breast.
You looked up at me in love:
and, in love, I cuddled you,
played with you, talked to you.
On your 8th day,
you were circumcised.
On your 40th day,
we went to Jerusalem
to make the sacrifice
according to the Law:
a pair of turtle doves
for the birth of a first-born son.
The Temple courts were crowded
but an old man stops and talks to us
and I let him take you in his arms.
Simeon seems delighted to hold you
and prays out loud to God,
ready to depart in peace

because he has seen you,
knows the promise is fulfilled
that you will be a light for us,
not just for us but for the Gentiles too.
He gives you back to me, then tells me
you will be a sword to pierce my heart.
And now I know just what he meant:
the cost of loving, of knowing you.
Then, an old woman, Anna,
comes up to us and sees you
and recognises who you are.
She goes and shares her joy
with any prepared to listen.

12 8 17



Wise men

‘ . . . wise men from the east . . . ’

Matthew 2 v1

We were minded to return to Nazareth.
We'd done all that was necessary
and I was feeling strong enough
to make our way back home
when another set of strangers
came to where we were staying.
They were foreigners, not Jews,
astrologers, dressed like kings.
And what did these wise men say
but what they'd said to Herod:
that, rising in the East,
they'd seen your natal star,
heralding your birth
as the King of the Jews,
the Messiah promised Israel.
And kneeling by your crib,
they gave you gifts:
gold for kingship;
frankincense for priesthood;
myrrh for death-anointing –
further witness to what we knew:

that you are very special, my son,
and that other folk know you are
by what they say and do.

They left, satisfied they'd found you,
satisfied what they'd seen was true,
satisfied they had respected you.

And they left us wondering
what would become of you,
what would become of us
and what you would do.

13 8 17



Flight to Egypt

“Get up . . . and flee to Egypt . . .”

Matthew 2 v13

If we'd been disturbed
by the visit of the Magi,
then think how disturbing
was Joseph's dream that night.
Again, an angel appears to him;
Gabriel tells him to get up and go,
to take you and me away without delay
and to go now, not home to Nazareth
but out of Herod's reach
by taking us three to Egypt.
To Egypt, a Joseph called his family
to come and stay with him
to save them from the famine.
To Egypt now we went
to save your life, my son.
Knowing you'd been born,
Herod wanted you dead
to stop you stealing his throne.
So, around the town of Bethlehem,
his soldiers killed all the boys
less than two-years-old.

We stayed in Egypt till, in a dream,
Gabriel told us of Herod's death
and called us home to Nazareth
where you grew up a man.

Out of Egypt,
God called His Son
and, in Galilee, you grew up,
full of grace and favour,
to be a carpenter's son,
Jesus of Nazareth.

14 8 17



The Temple

Jesus, 12-years-old

'Every year his parents went to Jerusalem
for the festival of the Passover.'

Luke 2 v41

Passover, Pesach.

Where better to be

to celebrate our freedom

from our slavery in Egypt

than in the Temple in Jerusalem ?

All had gone well.

With everything done,

we'd packed up and,

with friends from Nazareth,

we set off for home.

You weren't with us

but we weren't worried:

we thought you with boys your age.

But, at nightfall, when we stopped,

we discovered the truth:

that you were missing !

So we hurried back to find you.

And there, in the Temple, you were,

sitting with teachers of the Law,

listening attentively to them,
answering wisely their questions.

We were so relieved
you were safe and found !

Why, I asked, had you
not come home with us ?

And your reason:
we should surely know
that you were bound to be
about your father's business.

I smiled, now knowing you know
who you are and what you are.

But first, the years to come,
preparing to do His will.

15 8 17



*Wedding in Cana**Water into wine*

'the first of his signs'

John 2 v11

We'd been invited to a family wedding.

Now a widow, I came on my own

from Nazareth up to Cana.

You were there too with the Twelve:

with Andrew and John,

disciples of your cousin, John,

each with a brother,

with Simon Peter and James –

all four fishermen;

young Philip with his friend,

Nathaniel Bartholomew,

a nice lad from Cana;

Matthew the tax collector;

Thomas the twin;

Simon the Zealot;

James, son of Alphaeus,

Thaddeus,

and Judas Iscariot,

the one to hand you over.

All was going well,

all good, until I heard
there was not enough wine
so I told you
and you told me
it wasn't the time.
But I knew you'd do
what you had to do
so I told the servants
to do what you said.
So they filled six jars
with water from the well,
took some for tasting
and the groom was told
how good the wine was;
how odd to save
the best till last !
So all was well in the end
because God's will was done
because you are ready to do it.

16 8 17



Outside the door

“Your mother and brothers and sisters
are outside asking for you.”

Mark 3 v32

From home, alone, with the Twelve,
you go and do what you're meant to do.
You share the good news of the Kingdom,
the word of God by the Word of God.
You heal the sick:
the blind see;
the deaf hear;
the lame walk;
the leper cleansed.
Forgiveness of sin.
Talk of miracles:
feeding 5,000;
walking on water;
calming a storm on the lake;
restoring the dead to life anew.
But are you all right ?
We worry about you;
that all is well with you
so, as family, we come to you:
your brothers and sisters and I,

James, Joses, Judas and Simon.
And we stand outside the place
where you are speaking to people
and we ask one of the disciples
to tell you that we're outside,
waiting, wanting to see to you.
And, to my great surprise,
our visit inspires a wonderful truth:
that we are all family, part of God's family,
all brothers and sisters and mothers to you
if only we were minded in our hearts
to love God and neighbour and stranger
even as we love ourselves,
by doing what God wills for us.
So, my son, you are more than just *my* son,
but a brother and son to all who seek God
through the door you are opening for us.

17 8 17



Mother your son

“Here is your son . . . Here is your mother”

John 19 v26/27

Not good. Not right. No way to die.

My poor boy, my little lamb, here dying,
dying in front of me who gave him life.

Nailed to a cross,
sweating, bleeding,
naked for all to see.

Exhausted, hungry, thirsty,
bruised from the beating
and carrying his cross
out of town up this hill.

Is our dream
become our nightmare ?

Is it possible that my boy,
who preached love, peace, joy,
should be subject to such hate ?

Those who dislike him, disrespect him,
enjoying mocking him as he hangs here.

Then, in a moment out of time,
he looks down at me and speaks,
pointing me to the disciple he loves,
to young John, the brother of James.

“Mother, behold your son.”

Then, to John he says,

“Brother, behold your mum.”

What can I say ?

He gives me one

he loves to love

because he loves me

as I do him.

My son, thank you

for your care of us.

May you rest in peace

before night falls.

18 8 17



In a mother's arms

'They took the body of Jesus . . .'

John 19 v40

And with a prayer, you died:
"Into your hands," you prayed,
"I commit my spirit."
And so the pain was ended,
the torture come to an end.
So impressed with you,
the centurion in charge
was heard to say of you
you were the Son of God.
Joseph of Arimathea
went to see Pilate,
asking permission
to take you down
to be decently buried.
Permission granted,
with help he did.
Nicodemus gave spices;
Joseph gave the linen
and his unused tomb.
Briefly, I held you in my arms;
once more pressed your flesh

against your mother's breast.

I, who gave you life,

held you now in death.

Full of pain and grief,

I prayed for you,

for the repose of your soul,

that one day you would wake

and all be well.

That night, bereft,

my heart aching,

I longed for you,

longed to touch you,

be touched by you.

What now is left for me to do ?

19 8 17



Resurrection

‘ . . . he is risen . . . ’

Mark 16 v6

And so you come to me.
Your tomb is empty;
the stone rolled away.
Where you had briefly slept,
your folded grave clothes lay.
I'd been told what went on
early that Sunday morning:
what John and Peter saw;
what Mary Magdalene said.
And now you're here with me
as if you'd never died.
“Mother.”
“My son.”
You hold me close to you
and I feel your heart beat.
You are warm in my arms.
You kiss me on my cheek
and your love flows through me.
My boy returned to me,
Our son alive again,
is an answer to prayer:

that all would be well,
Your Father's will be done.
You are here in the flesh.
Born, dead and buried,
you've risen from the dead
with the promise of new life,
a life beyond the grave.
Spirit embodied,
flesh and blood,
presence in absence,
in our Passover meal,
in the bread and the wine,
your body and your blood,
you are with us always.
All will be well with us.

18 12 17



Afterwards

‘ . . . prayer together . . . ’

Acts 1 v14

And live with John I did,
like a mother to him
and he to me a son.
And, as you promised,
on the third day
your tomb was empty,
your grave clothes lying
where you left them –
no longer needed.
Mary Magdalene was first
to see you, to touch you.
Thereafter, many of us
were touched by you.
Later, I saw you ascend,
rising heavenwards
till clouds hid you from sight.
Then, at Shavuot, at Pentecost,
in the Upper Room,
the coming of the Spirit
and Spirit-filled, inspired,
belief in you spread

out from Jerusalem
into Judea, Galilee,
even to Rome:
the good news
that God our Father loves us
and that through you, His Son,
our sins are forgiven
and all can be saved
and come home to you.
So I grew old,
cherishing your memory
till the day I fell asleep,
drawn up by your love
to be with you again,
world without end,
Amen.

20 8 17

