

Sermon for Mothering Sunday at Holy Trinity Geneva on 15 March 2026 at 9h00

*Texts: Exodus 2. 1-10; Luke 2.33-35*

## **Midwives and Mothers**

Mothering Sunday is a bittersweet day. It's joyful festival dating right back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in which children gave thanks for their mothers. If they were working as servants, they were often given the day off to go and see their mothers, bearing gifts of cards, hand-picked flowers and sometimes a cake as well. It was also the day when people were encouraged to return to their Mother church for worship.

Since then, it has grown to the festival we celebrate today within the Church of England and in early May here in Switzerland and in various other countries.

It's a day we quite rightly celebrate both for the miracle of birth and children and also for love we have received from our mothers and children and the love we can offer in return.

But we also know that it can be a hard and painful day. Hard if the mothering we received as a child was lacking; hard if we longed to have a child and it never happened or we miscarried. It's a painful day if relationships within our family are ruptured or under stress; if our child is suffering from physical or mental illness; or if we have endured the death of a child.

There is also the reality that being a parent includes both times of intense joy and satisfaction with time of stress and grief. We think of the joy of seeing a child's first smile, first tottering steps and first words and seeing them grow in strength and confidence. But we also remember the harder time, beginning with the toddler tantrums, teenage rebellion and the pain when we as parents have to let go and allow them to live their own lives.

We see this in the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus who holds together this bittersweet essence of being a mother throughout his earthly life. She receives the joyful news from the Angel Gabriel that she has found favour with God and will conceive a son who will save his people. She and her cousin Elizabeth when they meet shortly afterwards are led by the Holy Spirit to recognize with joy that the children they will each bear will bring about God's kingdom.

Yet almost immediately, Mary has to face hardship and suffering as she has to give birth to this precious child in a stable. When she and Joseph take Jesus to be presented in the Temple, the old priest Simeon takes and blesses Jesus, recognises with joy that this child is indeed God's chosen one. But he also warns her that he will face opposition and that a sword will pierce her own heart, those words which we heard in our Gospel today.

Since then, Mary endures life as a refugee mother in Egypt as she and Joseph have to flee with baby Jesus to escape King Herod's murderous pogrom. She with Joseph witness Jesus as a 12-year-old, questioning the religious leaders in the Temple and wonder what this signifies. Mary, probably by then a widow, faces Jesus beginning

his ministry with his first miracle at Cana. She endures the pain of Jesus pronouncing before his newly formed group of disciples that they are 'his mother, his brother and his sisters'. Finally, she endures the greatest anguish of all as she waits with beloved disciple John at the foot of the Cross for her son to die.

Yet on the Cross, Jesus reaches out to her in her grief. In his dying words, he commits her to John's care and John to her care with the words, "Woman, here is your son". Then he says to the disciple, "Here is your mother". (John 19.26-27). We're told in St John's gospel that from that time on, the disciple took her into his own home.

It's a profoundly important moment for in this act, Jesus is creating a new family, one that is based not on physical ties but on their love of God as they have experienced it in Jesus. This new family is the foundation of the church and it will transcend the limits of human families, reaching out across all barriers to invite and welcome new members.

As Jesus in the last moments of his earthly life, creates this new family, so we glimpse the anarchistic nature of church will arise from it. We also glimpse the roots of this in the story of Moses whose early childhood we have heard about today.

For baby Moses, just like the infant Jesus centuries later was born into a world in which his life was under immediate threat. We're told in the first chapter of Exodus, that Egyptians were alarmed that they would be overrun by the Hebrew people living in their land. Their ruler, Pharaoh was so concerned that he ordered the midwives to kill all male Hebrew children at the point of birth.

Yet the midwives resist this murderous order and when questioned, argue that the Hebrew women give birth so quickly that it is impossible to do this. In reality we see a solidarity at work between the women and what is really interesting is many theologians believe that the midwives were Egyptian. Not only do they resist Pharaoh's order but his own daughter, one of the top hierarchy of Egypt, ignores it too when she knowingly adopts Moses, a Hebrew baby, as her own son.

Today we can perhaps see the Church as a midwife and one carrying out an equally anarchistic role. For in a world which is so bitterly divided and at war with itself, the Church invites, in the name of Christ, any who wish to join the family of Christ. It's an invitation to join a family which transcends divisions of human families, tribe, race, nationality or status to join Christ's family which is rooted on the love of God.

For God is our perfect mother and father. Both the 11th century saint St Anselm and the 12<sup>th</sup> mystic Julian of Norwich have wonderful descriptions of God as our mother and Jesus himself described his love for us as like that of a mother hen who longs to shelter her young ones under her wings.

As our mother, God, like Mary must have experienced the anguish, that sense of the sword piercing the heart, witnessing the agony of Jesus' death on the Cross. But it is God, our Father and our Mother, who raised Jesus from the dead and sends the Holy Spirit to give birth to Christ's family of the Church at Pentecost.

So, on this Mothering Sunday as we celebrate the joy of human families and the relationships within them but also acknowledge the pain, let's also remember that we are called to be midwives in Christ's name. Whether we are male or female, we receive at our baptism a commission by Christ to go out and invite all who are willing to join his family. It's a family which transcends all our human barriers and divisions, in which all are welcomed, all are precious in God's sight, and all are accepted by God who is our Father and our Mother.

**Amen**

**Canon Daphne Green**