

2021.08.15 St Mary the Virgin SERMON ©Gyllian Daviest†

It's a hot Sunday in August of 2010. After church the priest at our small Anglican parish in Grand Forks comes up to me and says, "Would you like to preach the sermon next Sunday?" I'm sure my eyes get very big and I say "Absolutely not! No thank you!" And then he says, with a twinkle in his eyes, "It's the holy day for Mary..." I'm sure my eyes must then narrow at him as I consider his underhandedness. Cause he knows me. He knows Mary's close to my heart.

And I stand there thinking. It's true - *Mary is* very close to my heart. And people do have all kinds of old out-of-date ideas about Mary, when they even think about her at all. I remember once an Anglican telling me "The only time I think about Mary is when I take the creche figures out of the closet before Christmas." I *could* give them something different to consider.... "OK. Yes. I'll do it." And that is how I came to preach my first sermon ever.

Of course I went home and wondered how I ever agreed to such a thing... "Me - preach on Sunday! What was I thinking!" But then I take a deep breath, spend some time praying and write a sermon. Because in the end - I love Mary. I love writing. I enjoy presenting to groups. And maybe God will be with me as I do this thing. Maybe God wants me to help the people to see Mary in a different way.

For the most part we Anglicans don't think of Mary very much. Doesn't she belong to the Roman Catholics? And besides, asking us to believe in a virgin birth? For some that's a bridge too far. When we brush off Mary as having nothing to do with us I believe we are making a fundamental and profound error. We are casting aside spiritual and theological richness. Once again we're eliminating the feminine from our church. I ask you to think about that - isn't that not only sexist but spiritually impoverished?

First, this: - Mary Theotokos. This is her name in the Eastern Orthodox churches. You don't speak classical Greek? No worries. Here you go: Theotokos derives from the Greek terms: Theos / 'God'; and tiktein / 'to give birth'. Mary is the Theotokos, the one who gave birth to God. ... Usually the term is translated into English as '**Mother of God**'. Official use of the title, *Theotokos* was formally sanctioned by the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431. But for most of us Anglicans over the centuries Mary became almost invisible... except at Christmas time. No more though, because here we are - celebrating her day. Celebrating what she stands for. So what does she stand for?

There's many songs, carols and hymns written about Mary... Perhaps answers can be found there... There's the Child Ballad, The Cherry Tree Carol, dating from the 1400's. That's the one where Joseph flies in anger to discover his bride-to-be already pregnant. Until the Baby Jesus bids the cherry tree bend down its tallest branch that his mother might have some. Creation bows down to the Mother of God! At the other end of the historical spectrum there's the 20th century carol, Mary, Did You Know? Here Mary is asked

"When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God – Mary, did you know?"

The song continues:

Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?

Mary did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nations?

Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect lamb?

That sleeping child you're holding is the great I am...

This song seems to assume Mary doesn't know all these things.

But really - the most powerful song of all is the Magnificat - the one Mary sings to her cousin Elizabeth. It's a hymn of justice, a manifesto, a prophecy of God's great reversal. And *that* is what Mary has signed up for. The essence of Mary is found in the Magnificat. Here we encounter the Prophet, Mary of Nazareth. Here we find out what Mary understood she was saying 'yes' to when she answered the angel Gabriel. Her song is of God's mercy and God's strength, the banishing of those who abuse their powers, the filling of the hungry with good things - more than food. It's all God remembering the promise made to Israel for justice and mercy for all and most especially for the marginalized.

So yes - Mary did know. The words of the Magnificat reveal that fully. She knew her son would heal, would give sight to the blind, would give hope to the despairing, would continually reveal God's abundance... remember when she 'outs' him at the wedding feast at Cana? It's one of my favourite stories of Mary. Jesus doesn't want to transform the water into wine. "My hour has not yet come," he tells her. But Mary turns to the servants and says, "Do whatever he tells you." And there he is with all the servants looking at him. And Mary? - I picture her smiling at him, nodding her head, silently reminding him - "You came for this." Mary, the great yes-sayer. The one who shows us all how to say "yes" to God.

Amen. And Yes!