

Vigil, Mary Mother of the Lord

14th August 2008 Christ Church South Yarra

Fr Nigel Wright

Is. 61: 10-11 Gal. 4: 4-7 Luke 1: 46-55

Thankyou for inviting and having me here to preach at this eucharist. It is a great privilege, pleasure and responsibility. Fr Richard, you and your clergy and people are to be congratulated on the many ways Christ Church is become a beacon again in the Diocese for vibrancy, imagination and quality in worship, a home for those who can have difficulty in finding one, in visible contact with the world beyond the ecclesia and for being, doing and speaking good theology.

In the name of the Most Holy Wisdom, her exulted Child Jesus Christ and their proceeding Spirit. Amen.

Like many preachers I am indebted to others for content for tonight's preaching; among them Joseph Fitzmyer in his commentary on Luke's gospel, Marina Warner from her book *Alone of all her Sex*, Jaroslav Pelikan and his book *Mary through the Centuries* and *Mary Grace and Hope is Christ* from the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission – an agreed statement 2005. And also from a message from Christ Church's Director of music to be aware of the theme of "weaving" in the hymnody for tonight.

Something I have become acutely aware of as I prepared myself for tonight's celebration is that signalling important for a developed understanding of the place of Mary in the story of salvation is the point in time from which she is viewed.

If she is viewed from temporal time and caught in history then she remains yon Virgin of "Silent Night" or Mary mother mild of Mrs Alexander's Christmas hymn. Perhaps slightly remote, always humble and certainly earth bound. If however she is viewed from that time in the future when the divine purpose is accomplished and as Isaiah alludes tonight we will all rejoice in garments of salvation as the bridegroom in his garland and the bride in her jewels, or as the garden of God's planting flowers and righteousness sprung up among the nations then she can be seen already as participating in the blessings of her son by whom is and defined and joined inexorably in flesh and Spirit.

Mariology is the gathering of not only the biblical witness about Mary which is scant to say the least but also the gathering of the experience of the Church of her vocation, life and ministry.

Imagine if you will with me a master weaver about to make a complex and gorgeous carpet. This carpet will be the whole work and acme of her career. It will be as big as creation and she will be the author of it.

She lays the foundations; the warp the long and strong threads that are sorted with care so that any weakness is eliminated. These threads are attached to the beams that hold them fast so that she and those of her school can work the pattern she has devised. The threads she has to work with despite her best efforts came to her in different qualities and sometimes the dyers send different colour batches. These she has to work with.

Those who work with her and under her guidance each bring their own skill and temperament to the work and she tries to achieve a harmonious finish to the piece.

Gradually as the patterns evolve each of the weavers realize that they only know well the pieces that they work. It will not be until the carpet is finished that the entire scheme of the master weavers design will be seen and known.

James McAuley I think speaks of similar things when he says Luke's "woven cloth so finely that the eye must prick the weave to catch the gold meander, light of Eden, second Eve, single rose of candour, silence in which the Eternal Word came from heaven's high throne."

We of the twenty/twenty-first century have become perhaps so wedded to temporal time, present reality, and to instant gratification that we have become literally mundane. The writers of the gospels and those who wove the fundamental patterns of Christology in the early centuries of post Resurrection experience seemed to be more easily available to the theological reality of God's cosmic and eternal time.

They were able to view these things from the finished state of the carpet
"Eternally begotten of the Father
God from God
Light from Light
True God from true God
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit"
while not being divorced from the temporal time in which they worked and became "truly human."

These things from the Council of Nicea in the 4th century defining the nature of Christ truly God and truly man seen in the light of his being raised from the dead are the foundation of the place from which Mary is viewed. We thus view the economy of grace from its fulfilment in Christ back into history rather than forward from its beginning in fallen creation – towards the future in Christ and as we do we are offered fresh light in which to consider Mary.

We are able to recognize her as *Theotokos* "the one who gave birth to the one who is God".

This is not only the joy of a mother giving birth to her first born in an overcrowded caravanserai in an obscure but important town but it opens the way for all the other mysteries, graces, titles and pieties that are associated with her. The Christmass Day Collect in the BCP refers to her as pure Virgin. This is more than her biological state. Virginitiy in theological and ecclesiastical terms is not only a physical integrity it is also an interior disposition of open obedience and single hearted fidelity to Christ which models Christian discipleship and issues in spiritual fruitfulness.

Mary hears and is obedient, the words at root are connected; full of grace no room for sin; fit to be *Theotokos* – the God-Bearer.

Thus when Mary visits Elizabeth, Elizabeth exclaims "Why should this happen to me that the mother of my Lord shall visit me?"

The Lord is of course not only the child Mary is carrying but the one God who is one – John Baptist in Elizabeth's womb leaps with delight in the Lukan mythology at the presence of his creator and prophetic vocation.

Luke also places Mary at the Pentecost as the Spirit is poured out afresh in wind and fire and a shaking of the foundations.

John too places her at his first Pentecost when at the foot of the Cross she and the beloved disciple hear Jesus speak "It is finished" and then his dying breath expires over them. Surely meant to remind us of the breath over the water of primordial chaos and the creative voice of God calling forth order.

Mary is more than mother with a small 'm'. From very early centuries the recognition of her as God-bearer was present and at various of the Councils this was refined. It was the Council of Ephesus 431 and then the Council of Chalcedon in 451 that this state was finally upheld and its orthodoxy generally undisputed in the Church.

Thus with this background let us turn to the section of the carpet where the Magnificat – Mary's song is to be found.

It would be naïve indeed to think that this outburst would be the voluntary song of a teenager from Nazareth or anywhere else for that matter. As we have noted earlier we are here dealing with theology and a mythology that speaks about the ineffable.

Luke puts into Mary's mouth this song that is largely not of his creating. It is ascribed by some scholars to pre-Lukan sources, there are echoes of other biblical songs not least the song of Hannah in the 2nd Chapter of 1 Samuel although the delivery is different. Hannah prays the song to God, Mary says it to her kinwomen and to the world extolling publically God's goodness, eschatological justice and loving mercy and faithfulness for all time.

At times it sounds like a sermon at other times a battle cry to usher in the reign of God.

Mary proclaims the reversal of the ways of the world as God would have them over against conditions humans create for themselves.

In all of this she takes her part in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ and is Mother of all the living, Mother of Humanity, disciple and prophet.

As we celebrate this feast Mary Mother of the Lord we can be called to see ourselves differently?

Is it possible to see ourselves from the future backwards – we who have been buried with Christ in the deep water of Baptism and raised with him through the waters of new birth?

Is it possible for us like Mary to hear the word of God so clearly and deeply that we too conceive that living Word in our own bodies and bear it into the world?

Is it possible for us to proclaim Mary's Song, not only in the Church but to our kinsfolk, in our places of labour, in our electorate, and with her perceiving, yearning for and taking our part in the redemption of the world in our place time in God's weaving; and for our edification and inspiration to prick the finely woven piece to catch the gold meander for encouragement and the discernment of God with us.

Let me finish by reading from 'Rule for a new Brother' from the Brakkenstein Community of Blessed Sacrament Fathers of Holland. (page 52)

Mary will have her own place in your life.
You cannot separate her from the Lord
who chose her as His mother and His bride.

She is the selfless space
where God became truly human;
she is the silence in which God's Word
can be heard.
She is the free woman, subject to none,
not even to the powers of evil.

She is the image of the church.
Her self-effacing service will guide you to the Lord.
Her faith and fidelity
are a model for your life.

She has trodden all the paths
of our human existence;
she has gone through darkness and suffering,
through the abyss of loneliness and pain.

She is the little creature
through whom God's grandeur shines out;
she is the poor one
filled with divine riches.
She is wholly grace,
and grace for you.

Then take your part joyfully
in the prophecy of scripture:
'Behold, henceforth all generations
will call me blessed.'

Hail Mary full of grace
The Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women
And blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus
Holy Mary
Mother of God
Prayer for us sinners
Now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

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