

**Sunday 8 September 2024**  
**The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity**  
**The Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Isaiah 61: 10-end**

**NT: Galatians 4: 4-7**

**Gp: Luke 1: 46-55**

I recently rewatched the James Corden Carpool Karaoke episode in which Paul McCartney sat next to James on a tour of McCartney's South Liverpool home. I would recommend you watch it as it takes the viewers on a journey through Liverpool picking out the highlights of Paul and The Beatles formative years. I still find it a fascinating insight into the area of Liverpool that I was privileged to grow up into and now still live in. Travelling up Smithdown Road, Paul describes how his mother Mary came to him in a dream and spoke those famous words '*Let it Be*', the inspiration for the Lennon and McCartney penned Beatles hit '*Let it Be*' and the album of the same name. The last of their albums to be released. Paul describes waking up from the dream and coming to a realisation that his dream was a reassurance that everything would be ok. '*When the night is cloudy, There is still a light that shines on me. Shine on till tomorrow. Let it be*'. Let it be a reassurance that all would be well, a comfort in difficult times and an acceptance that the future although uncertain is under control.

Today we celebrate the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of God and I began this sermon with the first words that we hear spoken by Mary in all of the Gospels. '*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*' Incredible words that Luke attributes to Mary. When you put into context that Mary was an unmarried teenage girl, who had just been told by an angel that she was to become pregnant through the Holy Spirit, and deliver a boy that would become known as the 'Son of God', a context that makes Mary's response even more remarkable and sets the Magnificat, the words read from Luke as a glorious hymn of praise and thanks for all that God would achieve through her.

It is right then that we celebrate her life and incredible courage today and, in her example, we see a model for our own lives. Accepting all that God has asked of us as we seek to serve him. Mary's example for us is to receive with thanks the ministry we have acknowledged, as the Angel said to Mary '*nothing will be impossible with God*'. This could be transformational for ourselves and our church if we lived by this example, the example of a young woman, a young woman who said yes.

The earliest New Testament scriptures make it clear: Christ was born of a woman, born under the law, as the passage from Galatians puts it, rooting Christ's humanity firmly in Mary, his human DNA if you like, as something real, not imaginary. Son of God, but son of Mary also. The Creeds that we recite – here at the Eucharist and at Evensong – mention only three human individuals: Jesus, Mary and Pontius Pilate. Rowan Williams, in his little book on the creeds *Tokens of Trust* puts it like this: '*Jesus, Mary, Pilate: that is Jesus, the one who says "yes" to him and the one who says "no" to him. You could say that those three names map out the territory in which we all live. Throughout our lives, we swing towards one pole of the other, towards a deeper "yes" or a*

*deeper “no”. And in the middle of it all stands the one who makes sense of it all. Jesus – the one into whose life we must all try to grow; who can work with our “yes” and can even overcome our “no”.*

Mary’s Magnificat, which we sing at Evensong, is a wonderful canticle that expresses this ‘yes’ to God. It echoes several passages from the Old Testament, like Hannah’s song at the birth of Samuel and the portion of Isaiah that we heard as our first reading: rejoicing and exulting in God and the wonderful things God makes possible; clothing mortals with garments of salvation and covering them with the robe of righteousness.

Mary gives us a model of how, as creatures, we can hope for resurrection and transformation and the glory of God’s eternal kingdom. We declare, every time we say the Apostle’s Creed, that we believe in *‘the resurrection of the body’* – this way of understanding resurrection is about being shaped and clothed and transformed into what we are meant to be.

Like the seed becoming the plant or the foetus being born as the child, we will find ourselves in a new environment, the mortal clothed with immortality. So much of what makes us individual and unique is due to the physical, bodily experiences we have had. The sensations, sights and sounds which shape us - and scar us - still make us who we are. Our uniqueness is precious to God and will be transformed and perfected after death. We will be transformed, not into something unrecognisable, but into something for which the seed has been sown in this life.

This feast of Mary, recalling the eternal destiny in heaven in which we will share, comes at the height of the summer as it transitions to Autumn when the harvest is taking place. This is a traditional association of Mary with the harvest of souls, of which she is depicted as being among the first fruits to be gathered into the glory that awaits us all. In the end, the whole of physical creation, of which our bodies are a part, will be taken up and will have a share in redemption. God is united with our whole humanity, body and soul, and ultimately that whole humanity, including its scars, is destined to be with him in glory.

Mary gives us a model of the glorious hope to which we are called. She also shows how we can live towards that hope in this life. The words of the Magnificat attributed to her present a wonderful example of trust, hope and joy. God’s power and presence can be for each of us a source of song and a reason to rejoice each day.

Daily we are reminded that God can overturn our expectations but can also exceed our longings. Our hunger will be satisfied with good things, but our empty imaginings will dissolve in the reality of God’s mercy. The Magnificat is a daily antidote to pretence and pretension, and a promise in the midst of daily uncertainty and insecurity. God can do the impossible: for us, for others and for the world, the Magnificat reminds us – and goodness knows we need this reminder daily sometimes to support and sustain us in faith.

God promises to fill us with good things, and it is in the Eucharist that we know God's presence most directly. In the Sacrament that we celebrate together, we receive Christ into our bodies, and like Mary, we become God-bearers as we go out from here into the world. We are changed and transformed, body and soul, as God dwells with us; as the seed is sown for the transformation that continues to work in us beyond this life; as we are prepared for the glorious, corporate life of heaven itself – that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Hail Mary, Full of Grace, The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

**Fr Bill Addy**