



## The Fourth Sunday of Lent 15<sup>th</sup> March 2026

In the name of the + Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen

### HYMN

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,  
Christ, the true, the only Light,  
Sun of Righteousness, arise,  
Triumph o'er the shades of night;  
Dayspring from on high, be near;  
Day-star, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn  
Unaccompanied by Thee;  
Joyless is the day's return  
Till Thy mercy's beams I see;  
Till they inward light impart,  
Glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine,  
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;  
Fill me, Radiancy divine,  
Scatter all my unbelief;  
More and more Thyself display,  
Shining to the perfect day.

### Introduction to confession

Let us prepare ourselves to receive God's Word.

Compassion and forgiveness belong to the Lord our God,  
though we have rebelled against him.

Let us then renounce our wilfulness and ask his mercy  
by confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin:  
Lord, have mercy.

Against you, you only have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight:  
Christ, have mercy.

Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me:  
Lord, have mercy.

### Absolution

The Lord enrich you with his grace,  
and nourish you with his blessing;  
the Lord defend you in trouble and  
keep you from all evil  
the Lord accept your prayers  
and absolve you from your offences, +  
for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

Let us pray.

The Collect

God of Compassion,  
whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary,  
shared the life of a home in Nazareth,  
and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself:  
strengthen us in our daily living  
that in joy and in sorrow  
we may know the power of your presence  
to bind together and to heal;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
Amen

The Lent Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,  
you hate nothing that you have made  
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:  
create and make in us new and contrite hearts  
that we, worthily lamenting our sins  
and acknowledging our wretchedness,  
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,  
perfect remission and forgiveness;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
Amen

First Scripture reading 1 Samuel 1.20-end

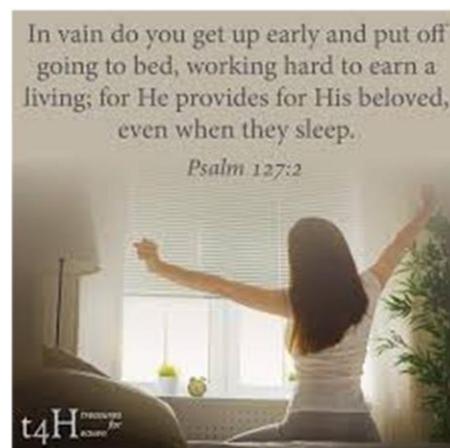
#### Samuel's Birth and Dedication

20 In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord."

21 The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow. 22 But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and remain there forever; I will offer him as a Nazirite for all time." 23 Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only—may the Lord establish his word." So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him. 24 When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. 25 Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. 26 And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. 27 For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. 28 Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord."

This is the word of the Lord  
Thanks be to God

1 Unless the Lord builds the house,  
 those who build it labour in vain.  
 Unless the Lord guards the city,  
 the guard keeps watch in vain.  
 2 It is in vain that you rise up early  
 and go late to rest,  
 eating the bread of anxious toil;  
 for he gives sleep to his beloved.  
 3 Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord,  
 the fruit of the womb a reward.  
 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior  
 are the sons of one's youth.  
 5 Happy is the man who has  
 his quiver full of them.  
 He shall not be put to shame  
 when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.



Second Scripture reading Colossians 3 12-17

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup>And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

<sup>15</sup>Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This is the word of the Lord  
 Thanks be to God

HYMN

1 The God of love my shepherd is,  
 and he that doth me feed;  
 while he is mine and I am his,  
 what can I want or need?

3 Or if I stray, he doth convert,  
 and bring my mind in frame,  
 and all this not for my desert,  
 but for his holy name.

2 He leads me to the tender grass,  
 where I both feed and rest;  
 then to the streams that gently pass:  
 in both I have the best.

4 Yea, in death's shady black abode  
 well may I walk, not fear;  
 for thou art with me, and thy rod  
 to guide, thy staff to bear.

5 Surely thy sweet and wondrous love  
 shall measure all my days;  
 and, as it never shall remove,  
 so neither shall my praise.

Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.  
Blessed are those who have endured temptation;  
they have stood the test and will receive the crown of life.  
Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John  
Glory be to thee O Lord

The Crucifixion of Jesus

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

This is the Gospel of the Lord  
Praise to thee, O Christ

Reflection

This Sunday is kept by the Church as – Mothering Sunday – I don't expect that has escaped your notice – the shops are full of gifts and flower prices have rocketed – the usual thing.

But let's dig beneath the daffodils to remind ourselves of its origins for the commercial 'Mother's Day' falls or rather, has been placed, on Mothering Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent - exactly three weeks before Easter Sunday.

This Sunday is also called Laetare Sunday, meaning Rejoice – and was a day of refreshment during Lent recognising that Easter is near. It was a day to honour and give thanks to the Virgin Mary. Such celebrations required people to visit their 'mother' church - the main church or cathedral in a family's area. It was a time of refreshment and reunion as families gathered.

The gospel reading brings Mary the mother of Jesus to the fore. We need to rediscover her. Devotion to Mary is not just emotional, it is deeply theological. It is through Mary's "Yes" that Jesus comes to us. If she is the Mother of Jesus, she is surely our mother too. Like the best mother she is with us in our ordeals.

Mary is represented in so many ways, thought about and imagined in so many forms, she speaks to us deeply about the world's transformation through Jesus. She literally makes a home for the creator of all things in her own body and raises him in her own home,

When Mary and Joseph bring their son to the Temple to offer sacrifice in thanksgiving, they are met by Anna and Simeon who by revelation, know that this is God's promised child. Mary and Joseph are amazed at what was said about Jesus and Mary pondered the words in her heart, "he will be a light to the gentiles.... but a sword shall pierce your own soul too".

We meet Mary again and again in the gospels struggling with the strangeness of her son, from finding him when in the temple aged twelve, knowing that he can ‘help’ at a wedding, and at the last, standing beneath the cross.

It is as she, along with all the believers, enters the transformation of the Resurrection that Mary understands her song, the Magnificat, in its full prophetic revelation, Jesus the Christ, the light to the world.

There is an icon which particularly helps guide our thoughts: ‘Mary of the Way’. Icons are not pictures as such but ‘windows’ that invite us to follow a line, a journey around the entire complex image. Wherever you start you are guided by the flow of lines and the direction of the eyes. It is not so much a message as an invitation to continue contemplating.



We cannot understand Mary without her pointing to Christ and cannot understand Christ without his attention to her. In this icon, ‘She who shows the way’ Mary points away from herself – her identity is caught up with leading us to Jesus. Her large hand is the most powerful gesture in the icon. She addresses us with her eyes longing, urging us to look to her son the source of salvation. “My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour....”

Both she and Jesus look directly to us. They draw us in. Christ’s hand is raised in blessing, the fingers symbolic of the trinity. Here Mary becomes, as the church becomes, a sign, by virtue of Christ’s action, praying, and blessing within her. He looks out to us – in the world now – to follow the way. To be ‘in the way’ means engagement with the world as he always is. To be with Jesus is to be caught up with self-forgetting. This is the way, she says – now walk in the Way.

Whenever we give ourselves purposefully to consider what we will call the holy, whether it be a place, a person, a picture, or music, it can be a place of transition. It becomes so - because familiar things, some bits of this world, lead us directly into strangeness. This icon or this piece of music are so depicted, so constructed as to open the world to the energy of God at work in what we see and hear. Devotion to Mary is not just emotional, it is deeply theological.

This Sunday also directs us to reflect on how the church is sometimes described as our ‘mother’ in the sense that like a mother we are held by her teaching, by the fellowship we share and importantly it is where we are fed and nourished by the Word of God and the food Jesus gives us in the bread and wine. These are mystical, transcendent sacraments whose workings we will never fully grasp, but are essential to our life in Christ.

And we will today, give thanks for our own mothers and for all they gave to us – even if that was only life.

I know that Mothering Sunday, especially with the commercial trimmings of Mother’s Day placed on top, can be difficult for many. It can stir up memories and emotions around our parents, our experience of being a parent, or not, and all the diffuse messiness of family life.

But the deeper truths are the ones that must hold us.

That God has brought us into being in his love, given us life with all its beauty and joy. In Mary we are shown how to bear that gift even when swords pierce our hearts as we go through life. And joy is keynote for Mothering Sunday - a day for us to rejoice and be thankful and this we will do.

We will give thanks for the Church throughout the world and through time and our incorporation into it, we will give thanks for Mary our Mother in the faith, and thanks for our mothers who gave us life, and thanks for any, and all, of the good experiences of family life that are ours to enjoy.

## The Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth;  
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;  
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried.  
He descended into hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Ghost,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

## Intercessions

God who is love, we pray for our broken world.

For mothers around the world.  
who have lost children through illness, famine or war.  
For refugees, women and children are particularly vulnerable.  
Hide them from abuse and violence.  
Lord in your mercy,  
hear our prayer.

For our mother church.  
We give thanks for the community that nurtures us in the faith  
and provides for our spiritual needs.  
Challenge us to see where we can help practically in our communities,  
to serve all your children in need.  
Lord in your mercy,  
hear our prayer.

For those who find this Sunday challenging.  
who have lost their mothers through death or through circumstance,  
who had, or still have a difficult relationship,  
Those who long to be mothers but no child is theirs.  
May they find emotional rest and quietness in your loving arms.

Lord in your mercy,  
hear our prayer.

For those who grieve for children miscarried, or who died in infancy;  
in childhood or on the verge of stepping into life;  
Those who died, grown men and women whose death their parents never thought to see.  
Each is known and cannot be forgotten by you,  
and in your love they rest.  
Lord in your mercy,  
hear our prayer.

For the poor, the sick, the troubled and the lonely  
We pray for those in need known to us  
and those who have asked the prayers of the Church ...  
Lord in your mercy,  
hear our prayer.

God you are the source of all life.  
we pray in communion with all those who have walked in the way of holiness  
and now rest in your nearer presence.  
For those who died this night,  
those who have died recently and those who mourn...  
For those whose anniversary of death is at this time...  
for all whom we remember always,  
Lord in your mercy,  
hear our prayer.

God our Father,  
in your love and goodness  
you have taught us to come close to you in penitence  
with prayer, fasting and generosity;  
accept our Lenten discipline,  
and when we fall by our weakness,  
raise us up by your unfailing mercy;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen

In the compassion of God we pray

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours now and for ever.  
Amen.

God, who from the death of sin raised you to new life in Christ,

keep you from falling and set you in the presence of his glory;  
And the blessing of God almighty, +  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always.  
Amen.

#### HYMN

1 Sing we of the blessed Mother  
Who received the angel's word,  
And obedient to his summons  
Bore in love the infant Lord;  
Sing we of the joys of Mary  
At whose breast that child was fed  
Who is Son of God eternal  
And the everlasting Bread.

2 Sing we, too, of Mary's sorrows,  
Of the sword that pierced her through,  
When beneath the cross of Jesus  
She his weight of suffering knew,  
Looked upon her Son and Saviour  
Reigning high on Calvary's tree,  
Saw the price of man's redemption  
Paid to set the sinner free.

3 Sing again the joys of Mary  
When she saw the risen Lord,  
And in prayer with Christ's apostles,  
Waited on his promised word;  
From on high the blazing glory  
Of the Spirit's presence came,  
Heavenly breath of God's own being,  
Manifest through wind and flame.

4 Sing the chiefest joy of Mary  
When on earth her work was done,  
And the Lord of all creation  
Brought her to his heavenly home;  
Virgin Mother, Mary blessed,  
Raised on high and crowned with grace,  
May your Son, the world's redeemer,  
Grant us all to see his face.