

## Mothering Sunday 2018

### Arks

We will all know the story of the birth of Moses – the setting of the scene of a people enslaved and treated harshly at the hands of another nation. Yet in our first reading we have the powerful imagery of the self-sacrifice of motherhood that seems to sit rather uneasily with us on this Mothering Sunday. It made me read the whole of the opening of the Book of Exodus.

I don't think that I had ever noticed before that the Pharaoh first orders the destruction of the Hebrew baby boys within his kingdom, and then **all** of the new-born boys, charging his own people, *'Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.'* – this is the command of someone who we can identify with dictatorship and hatred of the other, to the point of destruction for their own. Think Bashar al Assad, Kim Jong-un, or any despot you can think of at work within the world today – indeed of any who try to trample down other people's rights, aspirations and hopes.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing to note is the importance of **women** within the story of the birth of Moses. First the Hebrew midwives Shiprah and Puah, who disobey the Pharaoh's orders to kill male boys; Moses' mother casting him on to the water, his sister watching as the river carries him along. Then the Pharaoh's daughter, who has him drawn out of the water, who names him – Moses is probably based on an Egyptian word meaning 'gave birth' but interpreted as if from the Hebrew meaning 'to draw out.' The Pharaoh's daughter then raises him, with the help of his own mother, who becomes his wet-nurse. It's an extraordinary empowering of women within the telling of what many regard as a Patriarchal story.

However, on this Mothering Sunday, I want to dwell on another powerful image. The boy is cast on to the Nile in what our translation described as a basket – covered with pitch to give it a degree of waterproofing. In fact, the word used in Hebrew 'tevah' means not basket, but **ARK** – and the only other time this word is used in the Old Testament is in the account of Noah.

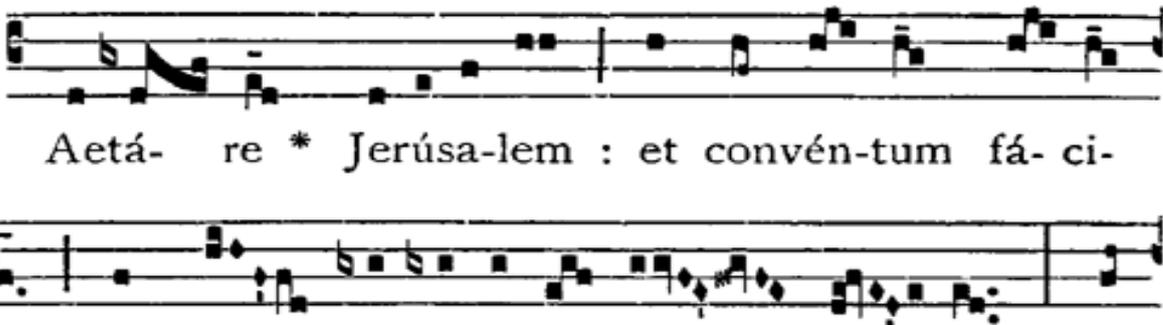
This linking is no accident – Noah and his family are saved from the waters as they build an ark, covered with pitch; and then Moses – the great patriarch who will lead his people to freedom – is saved through his casting on to the waters by his mother. Powerful imagery! In both there is a sense that a tevah has no rudder, but is a vessel guided by God. Moses the man goes on to construct the Ark of the Covenant (different spelling) – the dwelling place of the tablets of the 10 commandments.

Our short Gospel reading takes us back to the Temple – formerly the home to the Ark which is long gone by the time of Jesus, and in this bustling holy place we hear the extraordinary words spoken by Simeon to Mary. Whatever they are, they are not words of comfort – quite the opposite. Jesus will be *'A child destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword shall pierce your own soul also.'*

With these words, we are reminded that Mary walks the path of Jesus' life and ministry from beginning to end, standing beside the cross, when he, in his love for her, hands her care to John -*Woman behold your son, Son behold you mother.*

More imagery: the ancient name for today is **Laetare Sunday** - named after the Introit, or opening sentence of the Mass, taken from the Prophet Isaiah

Intr.  
5.



**L** Aetá- re \* Jerúsa-lem : et convén-tum fá- ci-  
te ómnes qui di- lí-gi- tis é- am : gau-

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a common time signature. It contains a melodic line with various note values and rests. Below the first staff, the Latin text 'Aetá- re \* Jerúsa-lem : et convén-tum fá- ci-' is written in a Gothic-style font. The second staff continues the melody, and below it, the text 'te ómnes qui di- lí-gi- tis é- am : gau-' is written. The text is aligned with the notes above it.

That passage from Isaiah goes on to say, *'Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her 'that you may drink deeply with delight from her consoling breast. For thus says our God, 'You shall be nursed and carried on her arm. As a mother comforts her children, so I will comfort you.'*

The vivid nature of this passage, particularly in the rather sanitized age we live in helps us to explore the great richness which enables us to be enriched by the many facets we can derive through Mothering Sunday – the mid-point of Lent.

So here, perhaps, I can leave you with three insights:

It is an appropriate time to celebrate the love of Mothers, and indeed of all of those who have cared for us and made us who we are. Mary says yes to God and becomes the Mother of the Saviour. Her womb, like that of every birth mother becomes a life-giving ark. So too is the loving care of those who embrace us and hold us up as we journey through life.

It is also a time to give thanks for the Church, formed in the blood of Christ. Mother Church: flawed, because we are human and perhaps don't allow the Holy Spirit due freedom. Yet at its best the Church is an ark where we can find comfort and support, encouragement, love and hospitality. Today, **we**, in our church and parish here in Cuckfield are **signs** of God's urgent call of love revealed through the babe suckled at Mary's breast at the Temple.

Our journey through Lent now becomes urgent - a journey in deepening our understanding of Jesus' love for each of us revealed in his self-offering through death on the cross. The third insight then is that, as we prepare to join Mary at the foot of that cross, so too we also will be able to rejoice with her in knowledge of the Resurrection and **true** life found in Jesus Christ, whose Easter Day becomes both hers and ours. Amen.



The Finding of Moses – Dura-Europos Synagogue - fresco c. 244 AD now in a Damascus museum  
*The remains of the city of Dura-Europos have been largely levelled by the so-called Islamic State*

### Exodus 2:1-10

**2** Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. **2** The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. **3** When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. **4** His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

**5** The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. **6** When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. 'This must be one of the Hebrews' children,' she said. **7** Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?' **8** Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother.

**9** Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed it. **10** When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses,<sup>[a]</sup> 'because', she said, 'I drew him out<sup>[b]</sup> of the water.'

### Colossians 3:12-17

**12** As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. **13** Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord<sup>[a]</sup> has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. **14** Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. **15** And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. **16** Let the word of Christ<sup>[b]</sup> dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.<sup>[c]</sup> **17** And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

### Luke 2:33-35

**33** And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. **34** Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed **35** so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

*Collect (alternate) for Mothering Sunday*

God of love,  
passionate and strong,  
tender and careful:  
watch over us and hold us  
all the days of our life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Post Communion*

Loving God,  
as a mother feeds her children at the breast  
you feed us in this sacrament with the food and drink of eternal life:  
help us who have tasted your goodness  
to grow in grace within the household of faith;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.