

Luke 2: 33-35; Exodus 2.1-10; Col.3.12-17;
Mothering Sunday: 14th March 2021, Virtual Communion from
St Andrew's Vicarage – 10:30 am

‘[And a sword will pierce your own soul too.](#)’ (Luke 2.35)

These are the words of the elder Simeon, a devout and holy man on whom, we are told, the Holy Spirit rested. He was made aware that, before the end of his life, he would see the Lord's Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one. Through this God/Man, people like you and I would be made aware of a divine saving grace at work in the world. But, as Simeon was enabled to believe in a prophecy concerning God's Son, so he was able to make a prophecy concerning Jesus to his mother, St. Mary, that her unconditional love for her extraordinary Son would one day bring her extraordinary pain.

No parent should ever outlive their child, but as we all know only too well, this happens. Just last week, a bright young woman disappeared and lost her life. Sarah Everard had a mother and father too, and I have no doubt that they will even now be feeling the keen edge of that sword Simeon describes.

Simeon cannot bring himself to tell Mary outright that her Son will have to die, but he does say that Jesus would confront the dark forces of his time with truths their leaders wouldn't be able to handle, and that the consequence of this would be an agony both mother and Son would have to endure. It's difficult to imagine anything much worse than the loss of a child, especially as the business of parenting is intrinsically sacrificial and courageous but so rarely affirmed.

The prophecy that Mary and Joseph hear from Simeon would have inevitably placed the rest of their family life under the shadow of loss. Here's a story of another kind of loss which I imagine most mother's will be familiar with to some degree. It comes from a book by mother and priest, Michele Guinness, who writes,

“Until that moment when you held your first baby, you had thought yourself a fairly easygoing sort of person: anger issues were dealt with, temper was firmly under control. But, within weeks of sleepless nights, unexplained crying, and feeding problems (why does baby not know that breastfeeding is best?), you discover, with shock, that lurking within you is some kind of harridan that shouts and screams, and is even tempted to lash out. All those aspirations to be the perfect mother evaporate, because no one told you what exhaustion would feel like – or what it could do to you.”

But this is only a part of the story, as indeed is the prophecy Simeon offers to Mary. St. Luke insists that the more sombre note introduced by Simeon's words should be readjusted to joy, and this is Anna's cue in the gospel verses that immediately follow. She sees straight to the redemption of Israel, and begins to proclaim to all who share in the hope that it's fulfilment

is imminent (Luke 2.38). So, there is a carefully controlled oscillation between suspense and relaxation, darkness and light, and sorrow and joy, that is the mark of a skilled narrator.

We see this same oscillation reflected in the world, in our experiences of a lifetime, in the intricacies of family life, and in the stories I've touched on today. Life is not easy and we have to learn to take the rough with the smooth and not be overcome. Mothering Sunday is itself a part of this, and true to its complexity as a day of refreshment and joy in the dryness of the desert, it is also the point at which Lent moves closer to the Passion, as God in Christ draws closer to finding himself on the cross, and as the Collect of the day brought home:

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 our Lord. Amen.

(5m.)

Luke 2: 33-35

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 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 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Exodus 2.1-10

Birth and Youth of Moses

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. 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. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

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. 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. 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?' Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. 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. When the

child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, 'because', she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'

Colossians 3.12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ 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. 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.