

6.30pm Evensong – 15th August 2010
BVM – Year C

Song of Solomon 2: 1-7
Acts 1: 6-14

The last line from our second reading this evening:

All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Today, the Church, or at least the more Catholic wing of the Church, celebrates, amongst other things, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Well, let me make my position quite clear, as far as the Assumption of Mary is concerned.

The belief that Mary, at the end of her life on earth, was in body and soul assumed into heaven, is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible.

This belief did not appear until the late 4th century, and then in mainly Gnostic documents.

So tonight I will only consider what is known about Mary, according to the Bible.

What our text, from Acts, tells us, is that Mary was present in the inner circle of the new family of God, after Jesus' ascension into heaven.

All the members of this circle had known Jesus since before the cross, at the cross, and beyond the cross.

Mary was in the middle of this new family of Jesus.

So what role would Mary now have played, as the Mother of Jesus ?

Some of us are not realistic when it comes to looking into Jesus' own development.

As a result, we miss observing the influence of his earthly mother, and father.

Jesus would have learnt his ABC's – in Hebrew his *aleph, bet, gimels*, and his three R's, as any Jewish boy would have learned them - from his parents.

Luke's Gospel tells us that Jesus grew and increased in wisdom as he grew up.

Christian theology has always taught that Jesus was both fully God and fully human.

So, if he was fully human, he grew as we grow, he learnt as we learn, and he developed as we develop.

And we learnt much of what we know from our parents.

It is highly likely that Joseph probably taught his son the tricks of his trade, and, because Joseph was known as a 'righteous' man, he probably also taught Jesus the in and outs of the Torah.

But what influence would Mary have had upon the young Jesus ?

I think that she had a profound influence, particularly if we consider Mary's Song, the Magnificat, and the similarities with many of the central themes of Jesus' mission.

I suppose that the Magnificat was for Mary's world what "We Shall Overcome" was to the African-American community in the USA in the 1960s and 70s.

Did you know that in the 1980s the government of Guatemala banned any public reciting of the Magnificat because it was thought to be politically subversive ?

So what are the similarities ?

As Mary began her song with "**holy is his name,**" so Jesus taught his followers to pray to the Father, "hallowed [holy] be your name."

Mary gloried in the arrival of food and the elevation of the oppressed with "**he has filled the hungry with good things,**" and so her son blessed the poor and fed the hungry.

As Mary saw God at work "**bringing down rulers from their thrones,**" so her son regularly had strong words with political and religious leaders about injustice and corruption.

Isn't it likely that at least some of these themes from the ministry of Jesus were shaped by his mother ?

The real Jesus learned real things from the real Mary.

She influenced her son and taught him in the way of the Magnificat.

But Mary did more than that, she also influenced another son, James.

Sometime, read the Magnificat quickly and then quickly read the letter of James.

You'll notice similarities, in James' blessing of the poor, and then his stiff warnings for the rich, and his emphasis on mercy, humility, peace and wisdom.

These are all messages that he probably heard at home, along with his brother, that he remembered for his entire life.

So, for Luke to mention Mary, along with the brothers of Jesus, is an indication of her importance to that first gathering of the followers of Jesus, at least as far as Luke was concerned.

We can be reasonably sure that Mary participated in the gift of tongues at Pentecost, and she was surely an integral part of those first active apostolic church gatherings.

Yet, more so for Mary than any other person in the New Testament, Christians throughout almost two thousand years of Church history have felt compelled to fill in the gaps of what we do not know about Mary.

What happened to Mary after Pentecost ?

We really don't know.

We never hear of Mary again in the New Testament, but again we can be reasonably sure that she continued to be the woman she had always been.

The real Mary was an ordinary Jewish woman with an extraordinary vocation, who struggled, as all ordinary Jews did, with who Jesus was.

This real Mary, the one who struggled to embrace Jesus' mission, is no offense to Protestants, but rather she is a woman for us all to honour.

Not only did Mary have courage in her convictions, but also she had *chutzpah*, the confidence that she knew what God was doing in the world.

Mary was always courageous, dangerous, faithful, assertive, and hopeful for the kingdom of God.

So we should be cautious, but not sceptical, about the influence of Mary on Jesus, James and the early Christian churches.

But when we are called to answer 'Yes' to God, not knowing where the commitment will lead us, Mary gives us hope that it is enough to trust in God's grace and promise of salvation.

So let me finish with the words of two modern poets.

Firstly, the Anglican poet G.A. Studdert Kennedy, better known as 'Woodbine Willie', who put together Mary's witness to Jesus remarkably well in his poem "Good Friday Falls on Lady Day":

And has our Lady lost her place?
Does her white star burn dim?
Nay, she has lowly veiled her face
Because of Him.

Men give to her the jewelled crown,
And robe with broidered rim,
But she is fain to cast them down
Because of Him.

She claims no crown from Christ apart,
Who gave God life and limb,
She only claims a broken heart,
Because of him.

And secondly, the words of the 20th century Welsh druid, poet, minister and New Testament specialist, John Gwili Jenkins:

Forgive us, gentle maiden, if we learnt to give you
Less respect than heaven would have wished,
For we fell in love with the Son of your great love,
So as not to venerate you more than him.

Amen.