

# Sermon for the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, Festal Eucharist for the Patronal Festival, 12th September 2021 *Mother Emma*

Readings: Isaiah 61:10-end, Galatians 4:4-7, Luke 1:46-55

“Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!”

Whether we are most familiar with the words of the Magnificat through Timothy Dudley Smith’s hymn, which we sang at the start of our service, or in the traditional words sung at Choral Evensong, “My soul doth magnify the Lord”, the Song of Mary surely provides the foundational text for any parish dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

We gather here today before God’s altar so that our spirits, like hers, may rejoice together in God our Saviour.

We may recall our own lowliness, set against the holiness and greatness of the Lord, and yet we recognise once again his goodness and mercy shown to the generations of people who have formed his holy Church, across the world and throughout the centuries, and for the past eight hundred or so years, here on this sacred spot in the heart of Kensington.

But Mary’s Song is not simply a song of joy and thanksgiving from a young and humble girl, chosen to be the Mother of the Lord.

It builds on the teaching and faith of the Hebrew Scriptures; on their theological understanding of a society chosen and moulded by God.

It recalls the exhortations of the Old Testament prophets who cried out against the powerful as they ignored the poor and marginalised, or put their own desires and comforts before the needs of others.

Here in Kensington, in an area of relative affluence, some of us who hold positions of authority or seniority might listen to the Song of Mary with some discomfort – are we the proud or the powerful, whose positions are overturned by God’s grace to the lowly?

Are we the rich, given all kinds of advantages in life, who will be turned away empty?

Of course, God never actually sends anyone away empty, whether rich or poor.

As we come before him in penitence, praise and thanksgiving, we are richly fed with the Sacrament of his own Body and Blood, in the Word preserved for us in the Holy Scriptures and in the beauty and joy of worship.

But these are gifts and sustenance which may be shared freely by all, and they exist to show us the way in which God’s gifts to us should be open to every human being in his creation.

Those who are rich in material ways are, according to the Scriptures, to share their goods with those less fortunate, whilst at the same time never forgetting that they also have much to learn and to gain from the Christian faith and practice of others who might in worldly terms appear to be less successful in life.

After all, Mary herself praised God for the great things he had done for her, from a social position many might have considered unimportant, if not to say unenviable. \*\*\*

Today we celebrate the day traditionally associated, with the **birth** of the Virgin Mary.

Whilst some may retain an entirely understandable degree of scepticism about how we could possibly know the date of her birthday, we might remember that Her Majesty The Queen also has an official birthday, regardless of the date she was born.

The celebration of a birthday is simply the opportunity to give thanks for the life and existence of a human being, made in the image of God, for everything they mean to us and bring to the world.

Without the existence, humility and obedience of the Virgin Mary, God's plan for the redemption of the world through his Incarnate Son, would not have taken place – as least in the way that it did.

There is much to celebrate in Mary's life and much for which we express our gratitude today.

At the same time, we can take this opportunity to give thanks for our parish named for her, for the generations of faithful Christians who have worshipped here, giving of their time, talents and treasure to build and sustain this community and the several different church buildings which have stood upon this site.

We should also – and perhaps supremely – give thanks for the good work done in bringing the message of the Gospel and the outworking of the love of Christ to those in the heart of Kensington.

Just this week, Fr Christopher and a group of volunteers from this parish have been working hard to welcome hundreds of Afghan refugees arriving in our area.

Generous donations of clothing and essential items have been received and distributed, together with hours of practical and physical assistance.

We continue to ask both for donations and for volunteers to keep up the good work.

At the same time, volunteers have come forward to sleep out in October and raise funds for the homeless; coffee and cakes have been served to parents leaving their children at school for the first time, and we have offered daily worship to our God, both in church and online, holding the needs of all in this parish before him.

Every one of us can join, in some way, in the building of God's kingdom on earth.

We are called to do precisely this, to care for those in need, to proclaim the story of his love to all and to offer our lives in service as we hold God's people in our prayers.

Perhaps today we recall those known to us who have played an important part in our own faith development here and who have now moved away or passed through death into God's safekeeping.

Perhaps we look around us, first at the many memorial stones which recall former parishioners and then at the familiar - or new - faces in the pews who form part of our worshipping community today.

We give thanks that we are reunited in God's house after a long period of uncertainty, suffering and isolation, and we pray that our living, loving and serving community may, under God, draw others to join in our worship and our work.

And so, fed by Christ in the Eucharist this morning, we shall re-dedicate ourselves in the service of God, strengthened by the example and the prayers of our Patron Saint, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Amen.