

Pershore Abbey Iona Evening Prayers 23rd March 2025

Welcome and introduction:

Theme- Mothering Sunday: We celebrate all those who 'mother' in whatever context.

In the Mediaeval times Mothering Sunday was also known as Refreshment Sunday, falling half way through Lent when there could be a respite from fasting with special buns and cakes being made. Its connection with mothering came from the bible readings for that Sunday which were all to do with mothers or mothering. In the 16th century it became the practice to return to your Mother church to the place where you were baptised and young people in service would be given the day off to do this and visit their mothers and family. In 1913 the connection was made with the Virgin Mary, "mothers of the home", 'mother nature', and under American influence has become more secular. Today let us consider 'mothering' in all its forms in today's world.

Gathering Song: God welcomes all, stranger and friends.

God's love is strong and it never ends. (x 3)

Opening Prayers:

Leader: Peace to each one who comes in need.

All: Peace on each one who comes in joy

Leader: Peace on each one who offers prayers.

All: Peace on each one who offers song:

Leader: Peace of the maker, peace of the Son.

All: Peace of the Spirit, the Triune One.

Song: (*Loving Spirit, Loving Spirit - Common Ground 81*)

Prayer:

Leader: O God, for your love for us, warm and brooding, which has brought us to birth and opened our eyes to the wonder and beauty of creation.

All: We give you thanks.

Leader: For your love for us, wild and freeing, which has awakened us to the energy of creation; to the sap that flows, the blood that pulses, the heart that sings,

All: We give you thanks.

Leader: For your love for us compassionate and patient, which has carried us through our pain, wept beside us in our sin, and waited for us in our confusion.

All: We give you thanks.

Leader: For your love for us, strong and challenging, which has called us to risk for you, asked for the best in us, and shown us how to serve,

All: We give you thanks.

Leader: O God we celebrate that your Holy Spirit is present deep within us, and at the heart of life.

All: Forgive us when we forget your gift of love made known to us in Jesus, and draw us into your presence.

Readings: *There will be a pause for reflection after each reading.*

Birth of Jesus: *John 19:25-27*

Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary his betrothed who was with child. While they were there the time came for her to be delivered and she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger.

Pharaoh's Daughter *by Joy Mead based on Exodus: 2: 1-10*

They are everywhere; small Hebrew children, lifeblood of a people, fertile, fecund, flowing; a river of life she walks beside. The basket: a floating flower, comes towards her on the stream, offering its contents like a promise. Her hands reach out disturbing the glistening flow. Broody birds rise, their wings beating wildly like her startled heart as she draws the baby from the water. The girl, her eyes alert from minding, moves to her side, whispering of mother's milk, while she, childless daughter of Pharaoh, longs to feed honey to another woman's child.

Reading from 'Follow me' *by Jan Sutch Pickard based on Mark 1: 16-20*

"Go" he said. "Let the children be fed first – why should the dogs eat their bread?" but I would not be turned away; hoping for healing, hungry for justice, I stood my ground and argued. "In God's household even the dogs are fed". Seeing my faith, he told me to go home and find my daughter healed. "Go", he said – and I did.

Sisera's Mother *by Joy Mead based on Judges: 19-22; 24-31*

Who does not cast a glance to where the unnamed mother sits silently at the edge of her story. Pondering in her heart the things of his growing, she waits, powerless and voiceless for the hoofbeat of his horses on the soil of home. She watches the dawning: the gradual revealing of vast emptiness, for many share the dying but few the knowing. The rays of the sun pierce her heart and her still body is the shape of a multitude of grieving women; for no one asks the mothers when the talk is of war.

Jesus – *John 19: 25-27*

Standing near the cross were Jesus' mother, Mary, his aunt, the wife of Cleopas and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother standing there

beside me, his close friend, he said to her, "He is your son" and to me he said "She is your mother" and from then on, I took her into my home.

Reflection: *How do these stories relate to today's world?*

Song:

1. **There is a line of women extending back to Eve,
Whose role in shaping history God only could conceive.
And though through endless ages, their witness was repressed,
God valued and encouraged them through whom the world was blessed.
So, sing a song of Sarah to laughter she gave birth:
And sing a song of Tamar who stood for women's worth;
And sing a song of Hannah who bargained with her Lord;
And sing a song of Mary who bore and bred God's worth.**
2. **There is a line of women who took on powerful men
defying laws and scruples to let life live again.
And though, despite their triumph, their stories stayed untold,
God kept their number growing, creative, strong and bold.
So sing a song of Shiphrah with Puah close at hand,
engaged to kill male children, they foiled the king's command.
And sing a song of Rahab who sheltered spies and lied;
And sing a song of Esther preventing genocide.**
3. **There is a line of women who stood by Jesus' side,
who housed him while he ministered and held him when he died.
And though they claimed he'd risen their news was deemed suspect
Till Jesus stood among them, His womanly elect.
So, sing a song of Anna who saw Christ's infant face
And sing a song of Martha who gave him food and space
And sing a song of all the Marys who heeded his requests
And now at heaven's banquet are Jesus' fondest guests.**

Prayer: *There will be a short pause before each response.*

Leader: Let us bring to our caring, loving God, our prayers for all those entrusted with the responsibility of caring and mothering, in whatever capacity that may be, and we give thanks for all those who have cared for and supported us.

All: **Surround them with your love.**

Leader: We pray for mothers the world over awaiting the birth of their child; the anxious, the excited; those who will give birth alone or without medical help; those forced into motherhood against their will.

All: **Surround them with your love.**

Leader: We pray for those who for many reasons are unable or prevented from having the children they long for and those who have had to give up their children.

All: Surround them with your love.

Leader: We pray for parents who have experienced heartbreak – suffering miscarriage or still birth; those whose children have been injured or killed through accident, violence or as a result of terminal illness or suicide; Those whose children have ‘disappeared’ or are no longer in contact with their families.

All: Surround them with your love.

Leader: We pray for single parents who have the responsibility of bringing their families up on their own and for young children who become carers for parents and younger siblings. We give thanks and pray for all those who take on the responsibility of foster care and adoption

All: Surround them with your love:

Leader: We pray for those who find it difficult to love their children; all those whose experience of being mothered has not been a happy one, and for whom Mothers Day brings pain rather than pleasure.

All: Surround them with your love.

Leader: Loving, caring, mothering God, you know what it is to love your children – to watch over them tenderly, anxiously, proudly and constantly. You know what it means, for you have called us as your children, and you care deeply for each one of us. Grant to all mothers and carers, your wisdom, guidance and strength in the nurturing and caring of their children and loved ones. **Amen**

Song: *(Love is the touch of intangible joy - Common Ground 80)*

Closing prayers: *From and Invocation of Love – Annie Heppenstall*

All: **God of our brother Jesus, your love is the love of a mother who adores her children and forgives them everything. Who is devoted to them and accepts them always. We are your children. We go wrong and you put us right. Now, fill our emptiness with your love, replace our brokenness with wholeness, and our weakness with your strength, that we might go out into the world and be of use to you.**

Blessing: **God who gave birth to all creation, bless us,
God who became incarnate by an earthly mother, bless us.
God who broods as a mother over children, bless us.
God bless us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
now and forever. Amen**

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The next Iona Service will be on April 27th 2025 at 5pm