Sunday 22nd March 2020
Luke 1.46-56

*God holds us like a Mother*

This will be an odd Mothering Sunday for most of us.

As Erna explained a moment ago in our audio service, its origins are traced back to those days when servants from the big house returned home to worship with their families, bringing gifts with them for their mothers. Another tradition connected to the origins of this day talks of worshippers gathering at the Cathedral, the Mother Church of the diocese, to hold a service together.

In both cases the day was marked by much ‘being together’, yet for us on Mothering Sunday 2020 it’s a day on which we feel a certain sense of sadness at being apart.

Our reading this morning was that hymn of hope traditionally ascribed to Mary upon hearing she was to be the mother of Jesus.

In the novel: *The Secret Life of Bees,* there is that wonderful line from a member of a Baptist Church in Deep South Alabama that Mary only ever turns up at their church around Christmas!

I suspect we do the mother of Jesus a disservice if we only welcome her once a year to our church.

Mary is a pivotal and consistent presence in the life of Jesus. From day one her faithfulness to God is noted.

At the Annunciation, in learning she is to be the bearer of the Christ Child, she accepts the task as the ‘handmaid of the Lord’. As she presents Jesus at The Temple, along with Joseph, she hears how this child’s future will break her heart. When she loses sight of Jesus whilst En route back to Nazareth after a pilgrimage to Jerusalem she knows what it is to panic, and no doubt feel a certain sense of failure as a parent. At the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee Jesus rebukes her for interfering.

Mary experienced the whole confusing gamut of parenthood, both its ups and downs. Yet perhaps most importantly of all, even though others walked away from Jesus when faced with a cross, she stays close to her son, with him until the end, supervising his burial even as she folds his body into a shroud.

Mary’s faithful love, her constant presence through thick and thin inspires us on a day when we celebrate mothers and fathers, and all who have stood by us with encouragement in our own ups and downs of life.

Although we are not used to thinking about God in feminine images, on a day such as this it’s good to be reminded of those words of Jesus from Matthew 23 when he says: *How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.”*
A picture of God holding us.

I think that’s our prayer for one another, and our community, at this tough time. That we may know the holding of God, and that we in turn will hold each other in our thoughts and prayers.

There’s never been a better time to express that ‘holding’ by staying in touch, be it through phone, email or WhatsApp.

Today, on Lent 4, Mothering Sunday, we hold on to hope and we hold on to love.

*Ian Green, Amersham, 19th March 2020*