

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Mary's story. Good Friday, Cathedral 2012**

Luke 2:25-35 *The presentation of Jesus in the temple.*

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss^[e] your servant in peace.
³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "**This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.**"

Pause

John 19:25-27 *The crucifixion*

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman,^[a] here is your son,"²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

My son, my son! What have they done to you? When will this nightmare end?

These past hours have seemed like a lifetime. First came the pounding feet on the path, the messenger racing to tell me what I feared most had happened. That you had been arrested, had fallen into the vicious and unrelenting hands of the Jewish leaders and Roman politicians. I spent the night in an agony of not knowing- where had they taken you? My tears have been my food day and night. What were they doing to you?

There was a pain inside that tore at my heart, an anguish more than I could ever have believed imaginable. Nothing anyone has said could ever have prepared me for these dreaded days. I will be haunted by the sight of jeering crowds and soldiers beating you through the streets of Jerusalem and now hanging naked on this cross.

I remember so clearly the day the angel of the Lord came to tell me that I had found favour with God and would conceive a child through the power of the Holy Spirit. I was so scared- then so peaceful. In simple faith and trust I said: "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word." What an immense privilege, what an honour, to be blessed by God in this way. To have been chosen to be the bearer of the Son of the Most High. To give birth to you- Jesus, the Saviour, Christ the Lord.

I recall the wonder of your birth- there we were, Joseph and I, in a stable among the animals, for during the census there was no room in any Inn. Your arrival brought with it a heavenly host of angels, shepherds, Magi- how my heart overflowed with joy and gratitude. As I looked at your little head, and gazed deeply into your eyes, the world disappeared for a moment, and only

you and I lived. I was mesmerised by you, overwhelmed with love for you- my firstborn , precious child.

Then there was the old man, Simeon, in the temple who praised God and prophesied over you, then *warned me you were destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and that a sword would pierce my soul too*. I didn't fully understand, but sensed deep within that I was embarking on a journey of motherhood that would be filled with pain and heartache. Even that has not prepared me for this. I was sure that somehow my mother's love would always be there to protect you.

Do you remember the time, when you were a young boy, we lost you in Jerusalem and after three agonising days finally found you in the temple? You seemed surprised, and declared you were "In my Father's house". We were worried sick about you...how insignificant that worry was compared to this.

There has been so much I struggled to understand. The wedding feast when you were so brusque towards me in public. The times when I sent family members to try and fetch you, so you could come home and rest, recuperate and, who knows, perhaps recover some perspective to stop this suicidal course you seemed to have set for yourself. There was the occasion when I went to find you, to speak to you as your mother, yet you abruptly turned me and your brothers away, refusing to acknowledge my claim on you as being stronger than anyone else's.

I know you have always loved me, but I found it puzzling that you never seemed to acknowledge me publically as anyone special to you, as your mother. Instead you deliberately emphasised that you belonged to everyone, and that all those who '*do the will of the Father in heaven*' are your brother

and sister and mother. I have always loved you, and accept that all you have said and done was in obedience to your Father. Who am I to question the will of God? Yet I must admit I have often found it mystifying, confusing, so hard to understand.

Jesus, my beloved son- were you ever really mine? My flesh and blood, yes, but truly mine? Sometimes I almost forgot who you really are, when you came in muddy and wet from playing in the stream. I had to remind myself that you were special, different, and destined for a greater purpose.. On occasion I caught myself wishing, desperately, that you were just an ordinary child, like everyone else's- mine to keep. Yet I suppose I wouldn't have wanted it any other way. You always followed your own path, directed by your heavenly Father. You have always been obedient to His will for you. He is the one who has constantly led and guided you, the one who knows why you need to suffer and to die this cruel death on the cross. Yes, I have to remind myself- You are Christ the Lord, born to be the Saviour of the world.

O God, how I wish there could have been another way! Couldn't you have still saved the world but spared my son? Sigh- your ways are certainly not my ways.

Jesus, I have and always will be your mother. I have never stopped loving you, caring for you and worrying about you. Yesterday, I thought of the days and nights when you were small and we had to flee south. I was so afraid of Herod finding us, and had to keep you from crying out. Those other mothers whose babies were killed...I wondered if maybe it was easier for them- they lost their sons over 30 years ago. I have had to *learn* to lose you. Today I feel as if I

have lost you yet again...lost the son who was never mine to keep. The hardest thing for me to do now, is to let you go.

Father, into your hands I release my son. May His work on earth be accomplished; may your will be done...

As I stand here, supported by your friend disciple John, I receive your words spoken with love: ‘*Mother, here is your son*’. I promise to love him as my own.

I hear your words of compassion: ‘*Here is your mother*’ and I know I will not be alone, for he will surely care for me.

Surely today I have become a mother to all the children of God? We have become a new family- brothers and sister in Christ- bound together with a shared love for Jesus; a community of beloved disciples. Thank you, God!

Acknowledgements:

Carolyn Butler & Isobel de Gruchy 2003. *On the road to the cross*. Pretext, Cape Town. (pages 65-67, 84)

Mary Ellen Ashcroft 1995. *The Magdalene Gospel*. Doubleday, New York.

Prayer Reflection: When we think of Mary, the mother of Jesus, standing at the cross; We pray for our families: *(I will lead several short prayer pointers, allowing time for brief silent prayer after each one)*

We thank God for the gift of family life; for our parents- whether living or departed- for our brothers and sisters, for our children...*silent pause(count slowly to 5!)*

We pray for parents who struggle to ‘let their children go’ as they grow and develop , making their own choices, becoming their own selves...*silent pause*

We pray for parents who have faced the death of a child, and families facing the pain of loss and bereavement... *silent pause*

We pray for children of all ages, who struggle with life’s choices and challenges... *silent pause*

We pray for unhappy homes where there is sadness, heartache and deep disappointment; where relationships are at the point of breaking; where hearts are consumed with anger and bitterness... *silent pause*

We pray for those who have no family; for those who are single or on their own, and those whose parents or children live far away... *silent pause*

We thank God for the family of the church; and for all those who give encouragement, support and love in time of need... *silent pause*

We pray that we, as the Cathedral family, would open our arms and hearts wide to welcome and embrace all who come, and that each of us would do our part in striving to build community and create a sense of belonging for all.

We offer these our thoughts and prayers, in Jesus name. **Amen.**