

Mothering Sunday



Readings: Exodus 2 v 1-10, Colossians 3 v 12-17, Luke 2 v 34-38;

Gather us before you, O God, as a hen gathers her brood to protect them.

Gather your people to you for you are gentle with us as a mother with her children.

As we follow your example, protect us, support us, challenge and feed us with your unconditional love. **Amen.**

Adapted from St Anselm of Canterbury

Today we thank God for the gift of mothers and mothering across the world. The writers of Isaiah knew that God is a mother to us, comforting and carrying us in her arms- God will never forget us and that he knows each one of us just as a mother knows her own children. *As one whom a mother comforts, so I will comfort you – Isaiah 66:13. Can a woman forget her baby at her breast, feel no pity for the child she has borne? Even if these were to forget, I shall not forget you. Isaiah 49:15*

The Psalmists wrote that in God's presence, quiet and peace were found, trusting God like a child safe in its mother's arms. *No I hold myself in quiet and silence, like a child in its mothers' arms. Psalm 131:2*

Jesus spoke of himself as a mother, longing to wrap his arms around us like a mother-hen gathering her chicks under her wings. *How often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings... Matthew 23:37*

And so we thank God. Gentle, patient, mothering God – thank you for your tender care.

As we celebrate the gift of mothering, nurture and care. We give thanks for those who nurtured and cared for us. We remember those who mother in other ways -those in nurturing professions, nursery nurses, teachers, foster and adopted parents, grandmothers, aunts, and young carers. We also remember the 'mothers of faith' whose examples encourage us as we follow in the way of Christ.

A Litany for Mothers from the Mother's Union.

Eve our first mother – thank you for stepping out and being the first to understand the complexities of life.

Sarah, Hannah and Elizabeth – thank you for your patience and courage in waiting for a miracle. May all people longing for children be strengthened by your stories and comforted in their pain.

Hagar – thank you for your resolve in the face of exile. May all mothers who are forced to flee or are forgotten be given hope in you.

Rebecca – thank you for your flexibility. Let us remember all mothers who have to raise their children in a different country or far from their relatives and who feel isolated.

Rachel – you carried the burden of grief and wept for your children. Hold the hands of all those mothers who weep for their children - children who have gone missing, who have died or are lost to them in other ways.

Jochebed – you used wisdom and insight to protect your children. Give to all mothers this wisdom and insight in the bringing up of their children, especially in vulnerable times.

Naomi and Ruth – you showed that love can conquer all trials. Help all who mother to love constantly when life seems impossible and despair weighs hard upon their souls.

Mary – the new Eve whose 'yes' to God changed our world forever. Thank you for sheltering the Holy One all those years ago, for your faithful love and tender care of God's most precious Son.

May we never forget that in your giving is our greatest receiving - of the gift of life wrapped in a manger and in a tomb. May we know the true cost of relationship by holding our faith in Christ deep within our hearts as you once held him deep within your womb. Amen.

HYMN REFLECTION FOR MOTHERING SUNDAY MS

There is an amazing lack of hymns for Mothering Sunday. Even research on the Internet yields nothing one has ever heard of, except *Blessed Assurance* and *How deep the Father's love for us*; both good, but not about mothers. There are, of course, plenty of beautiful Marian hymns. I've challenged Martin Leckebusch to write one about our own mothers; it will be good if and when it appears, but that isn't yet. So, maybe to the relief of some, we turn to an old favourite.



Folliott Sandford Pierpoint (!) was inspired to write *For the beauty of the earth* by the countryside round Bath, where he lived. It was intended as a Communion hymn, hence the use of the word "sacrifice" in the chorus. Some hymn books change this to "grateful hymn" to make it more suitable for general use. The words relate quite well to our Colossians reading. As for Luke, taken literally, there's a pang of guilt that some of our own actions may have pierced our own mothers' hearts.

The problem with this hymn is the tune; there is no tune which has become THE ONE. *Dix (As with gladness)*? No thank you. *England's Lane*? Probably the most widely used, quite cheerful, but it covers too wide a range (like *We plough the fields*). *Lucerna Laudoniae*? Written for the words, and better, but it has not really caught on widely. The versions by John Rutter and Will Todd (former Salisbury Cathedral choirboy) are not congregational. If it were left to me, I think I would encourage congregations to learn *Lucerna Laudoniae*.

For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies,
*Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.*

For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light, *Lord of all ...*

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
pleasures pure and undefiled, *Lord of all ...*

For each perfect gift of thine,
to our race so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven; *Lord of all ...*

For thy church, which evermore
lifteth holy hands above,
offering up on every shore
her pure sacrifice of love, *Lord of all ..*