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Mary the Mother of the Lord 15 August 2010

Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:1-7

'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me in the garment of salvation.' So begins the reading this week from the prophet Isaiah. More than anything this expresses the attitude of Mary, the mother of the Lord. This was given expression in her song which we read as the psalm this morning.

Above all else she is shown in the Scriptures as one who rejoices in what God has done in her, who rejoices in the salvation which God has wrought through the one to whom she gave birth.

Many people within the Christian church are discomforted by the emphasis placed on Mary, but it remains clear that she is an example of rejoicing in the Lord for what God can do in and through her. She is an example of one who is able to run the risk of ostracism for the sake of that to which God calls her. In this sense she is a shining example of faith.

Recently we read part of the epistle to the Hebrews which spoke of faith as the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Mary's faith epitomizes the assurance of things hoped for. She hears of the salvation of her people, and that she will play a central role in that, and has faith in God that God will bring it to pass. Despite the oddness of what is presented to her she accepts and acts because she believes in the faithfulness and power of God.

But what does it mean to speak of exulting with our whole being in God, to have as part of our character a sense of rejoicing towards God? It is perhaps something that could be an infectious joy, that when people see us this joy and exultation radiates from us – from a deep sense of security and peace. When we are really happy about something, others notice, they recognize in our demeanor that we are in a good place, that we are happy in a very deep and real sense. They will share our joy and perhaps even want to join in this joy in some way.

This infectiousness of Mary is a character trait that is very important to reflect on. On what basis would a young teenage girl who finds herself pregnant face life with confidence and joy? For this is what Mary did. Her life was counter-cultural in the best possible way – it pointed clearly to the truth that the social world we create is not ultimate. It is a relative thing of our own creation. God breaks across it and challenges the way we view the world. It is God who gives meaning to our lives, not the world we create, let alone the world which others have created for us. Our future lies with God, our dreams and hopes are tied up with the future to which God calls us.

The challenge to which our remembrance of Mary calls us is the challenge to live joyously out of this truth – to live with rejoicing out of the future to which God calls us and not to be constrained by the social world which we and our fellows have created. If we can hear and respond to this challenge we can then live with an enormous freedom – unencumbered by the weight of past convention. Have we the courage of this young Jewish world, the courage to step out in faith and rejoice in the God who calls us to do this?

If we do this we honour Mary and live as disciples of Christ.