



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Advent 4, 2018 11am Choral Eucharist

As we have journeyed through Advent, we have followed the golden thread of God's love through the tapestry of human history towards Christ's first and second coming, and His coming here and now. This golden thread has gone from Eden, to our Father Abraham and King David and the Patriarchs of old. The golden thread continued to the Prophets, from Isaiah to the last Prophet, St John the Baptist. Today, if we can picture this tapestry across the centuries and follow the golden thread, today, the thread picks out the blue hem of a robe, this figure in our family story doesn't fit amongst all the old men with beards – it is a young girl. She must be terrified by the events that have overtaken her – pregnancy, potential disgrace. Where is it all going to end? It is of course, Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary. The one woman in the whole of human history chosen by God to bear the Saviour.

'Our Lady' is the traditional way of referring to Blessed Mary and it is especially appropriate for us call her *Our Lady*,

because she is quite literally so – she is our patron. St Marylebone being of course, St Mary by the River, Bourne, the Tyburn River that now underground flows past us here. St Mary by the River. Our Lady of Tyburn, as she is in our window here.

But she doesn't belong only to us. On this final Sunday of Advent we are teetering on the edge of eternity. In 36 hours time the eternity of heaven will come to earth. Just as St John's Prologue will tell us at Midnight Mass: Eternity comes to dwell in time.

So, we are teetering on the edge of eternity, and from here, with this perspective, we can see Our Lady, St Mary, is the woman who holds together all of history.

She stands in the footsteps of Eve – but this second Eve is the bearer of our Salvation, not our separation. At the other end of history, Blessed Mary in the last book of the Bible, in the Revelation to St John stands crowned by the stars themselves, Queen of Heaven. In between, she is Isaiah's promised Virgin who will conceive and bear Emmanuel. She is the one who initiates Christ's first miracle at Cana in Galilee. She it is, with St John, who when so many others have fled stands steadfast by the Cross even as her heart is breaking. It is from the Cross that Jesus gives His mother as a mother to us all (John 19.26) – S. John, clearly given, as in other instances in the Gospels, to represent the Church, is told to take Mary as His mother and he takes her into his home.

So we see this golden thread of salvation history: through all those bearded old men it lands on Our Lady. But she is not

an anomaly. It is she that holds the whole thing together. She stands holding all of history, doing what she always does – pointing us towards her Son.

Everyday at Evening Prayer in churches all over the world Magnificat is sung or said, including here. The Song of St Mary in St Luke's Gospel is at the heart of Christian evening prayers. That with her, all her children might look with confident hope, to the coming of her Son's Kingdom. St Mary's Song 19 centuries before the advent of socialism is deeply radical. This woman who holds all of history is not cynical or political, she does not allow for any limitations in her hopeful vision. Even as terrified as she must have been, she is overwhelmed by joy and hope, because this history that she embodies, even the heart-breaking events that would overtake her own life are all hurtling towards one destination. The Kingdom of God in Christ. When human pride and greed, and poverty will be put away and God's love will sit upon the throne.

So it turns out that a relationship with St Mary, love of her as a friend and mother is not simply the preserve of middle-aged Mexican Roman Catholics, or something that 'some' people 'go for'. Her friendship, her prayers, her love with and for us lies at the heart of the Scriptures, at the heart of our local church here, and is quite simply part of what it means to follow Christ. St Maximilian Kolbe died in the torture cells of Auschwitz after volunteering his life in place of a stranger. It was he who said, 'you cannot love Our Lady too much, because you cannot possibly love her more than her Son does.'

Christmas is a time for celebrating our Lord's birth. It is also a time for family. As brothers and sisters of Christ, we know that *our* family is not just those to whom we are related in the flesh – but also our family born of water and the Holy Spirit. The Church – God's Baptized people – throughout the world. And not just them, but our family in heaven too. They are there – just as we see in the apse of St Mary's Church here – surrounding Christ our King – with Blessed Mary, St Maximilian Kolbe and all the rest, cheering us on, praying for us, sharing their love with us as we can with them – they are before the Throne of Grace just as we are in this Eucharist. One Table, one Banquet, One Host, One family, even though we are spread across heaven and earth. Even when we feel alone, or rejected, or not understood – and there can be plenty of all that and more at Christmas time, we know that we are always cherished and supported by our heavenly family.

So let us rejoice in our fellowship, our friendship, with our patron – already she has a special place in history, let's give her a special place in our hearts and lives. And let's take that seriously by asking her prayers, her help with daily things, asking for a share of her determination and faith, and joy. I will leave the last words to another of our heavenly family, S. Mother Teresa, with a prayer that I hope can be useful to you, as it has been for me. 'If you ever feel distressed during your day — call upon our Lady — just say this simple prayer: 'Mary, Mother of Jesus, please be a mother to me now.'