

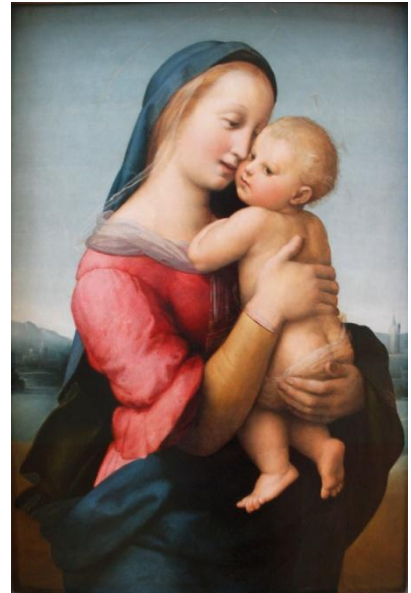
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Dear Reader,

*For Mary Mother of Our Lord*

On Sunday in churches around the world Anglicans will remember Mary, the mother of our Lord. As a woman who has or rather continues to nurture seven children, I often think of Mary. And, if I could be locked in a church with her for 24 hours, I would have a lot of questions to ask her! Now I realise that I am walking on holy ground as I write this and I don't want to offend but I suspect you have some unanswered questions too. What would you like to know? What would you ask her if you had the opportunity?

Surprise, surprise! Mary, please tell me if it is really true you "proclaimed the greatness of the Lord" when you found yourself unexpectedly expecting?. Did you really say "yes" to shame and sorrow and sing the song that Hannah, your ancestor, allegedly sang long long before you when after years of longing, humiliation and heartache she was blessed with a child? I know about shame and embarrassment and I've faced humiliation - how on earth did you believe and celebrate this being part of God's great plan?



Faced with the judgment of friends and family who did you turn to? Was Joseph really your rock through the heartache and tumult of a child born out of wedlock when you were but a teenager? Did he love this child like his own or was your marriage borne out of need? Were there moments of resentment and doubt as he grew up, I wonder?

When an old man took your baby in his arms proclaiming he could at last die in peace having seen salvation, what on earth went through your mind? Joseph, my own father, when cradling our youngest weeks before he died gazed into his eyes poignantly saying, "little children little problems, big children big problems." Oh, the wisdom that comes with the passing of years. When old Simeon suggested a sword would pierce your own soul were you so overwhelmed with tiredness, sore nipples and the hormonal tearfulness of "baby blues" in those early postpartum days that this passed you by; did you fear for the future?

Oh Mary, I try to imagine you nursing your child and seeing him grow with his siblings and I wonder, because the bible only offers me a deafening silence, if your little boy was not just "his Father's Son" but a challenge? I do not believe your boy was "meek and mild" any more than my own five sons. I can well recall being asked by my first born's teacher not to call other children "little b.....s" when he was in reception. But I also recall this very child shushing my attempts to teach him to pray and telling me, "all of life is prayer" when he was but six years old. Mary, I'd so love to know more about your child for I believe he was and I believe you were, perfectly human.



If it's true, Mary, I know your boy gave you the run around when he was a teenager; I've been there too! My own sons gave me many sleepless nights when they hit puberty! I too know what it feels like to wonder where a boy is and what he's up to. I've tried to imagine your feelings when you discovered your 12 year old was missing on the return journey from your home town to Jerusalem. And I know just how rude teenage boys with minds of their own can be. But, really, did you only say, "Child, why have you

treated us like this?...we've been searching for you in great anxiety" when you found him in the temple after three days of searching for a missing child? And how did you feel when he answered you both back saying, "didn't you know I must be in my Father's house?" By then he was too big to take across your knee; tell me, Mary, how did you really feel? The bible leaves me too much room for my imagination. Did you see the writing on the wall and could you but imagine what the future would hold? I doubt it. I'm also struggling to understand; did you really treasure all these things in your heart?

As a mother who has spent months fearing for the life of my first born son, and watching him and his brothers suffer in local hospitals and Great Ormond Street, I want to know how Mary coped. How did you feel and who supported you Mary as you watched your own son put himself in danger by speaking words of truth that others did not want to hear? I want to know who on this earth loved Mary, cared for her and wept with her when her own son died...and did John really take her into his own house and treat her like his own mother ...or is that wishful thinking?

Like you, the reader of this letter, years of doctrinal tradition and pious fellow Christians – not to mention Christmas cards, school nativities and Palm Sunday dramatisations of the passion story – have planted in my mind that I should believe in Mary as a paragon of innocence and virtue. I've even stood in Jerusalem between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, one telling me that she sleeps in the grave like we will one day and another that she was wonderfully assumed into heaven. So many stories, so much for me to wrestle with. Were you really the



perfect virginal mother? Or did you shout and scream and weep and cry not just when you suffered the agony of child birth but in the years that followed? I want to believe this because, if I cannot, then how can you and your beloved first born Son offer me the healing and saving that I so badly need?

For hundreds of years the church has wrestled with the deepest question of all time. Was Jesus just a human who lived on this earth or was he divine and, if the answer is yes to both of those questions, then who was he? In the end the church's credal statements formulated after many fiercely fought battles try to express the inexpressible: Mary's son was more than human, not superhuman, not an other worldly being but a perfect human, He was in fact God's own self. I don't know about you but I need a Saviour and I need him to be as human as I am, because were he not, when I mess up my own life or the lives of others I have no exemplar whom I can follow. If he were not totally human I could excuse my own transgressions saying I cannot aspire to be like him because he was not truly one of us. And because this is what I believe, I also believe although I know only a fragment of her story that Mary was truly human like me.

Surely Mary wept and cried and knew life's highs and lows just as I do. Tomorrow when we celebrate Mary Mother of our Lord I hope she will seem as real to you as the bread we share for, if I'm not mistaken, she was broken for us as much as her child.

Yours in Christ,

Vicki

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