

# ST MARY-LE-TOWER CHURCH IPSWICH

## Patronal Festival Sermon

12<sup>th</sup> September 2021 Rev Canon Roger Pallant

I'm not sure, down through the ages, the church has really appreciated the mother of the lord, the blessed Virgin Mary. True, she was held in great reverence during the Middle Ages. There are at least 5 churches in the Ipswich deanery which are dedicated to her, this being one of them. There was a sixth, St Mary on the Quay, which is no longer functioning as a church. But, I think, in spite of that, she's had a raw deal from the church down through the ages. She was misunderstood as to what her role really was. She became important in the Middle Ages for an appalling reason. She was seen as a gentle barrier between the wrath of God and sinful humanity. She was the pleading other, in one sense, a mother substitute in a male dominated authoritarian church. A barrier between the stern punishing God and humanity. There was at the reformation a reaction against that and, in many ways, she became ignored. Also a wrong thing to do. She became ignored with the protestant view, that really you couldn't intercede to God through the saints and she was one of them. There was an attempt to ignore her. And then there was a sort of revival in the Victorian era when she was seen as an example of appropriate humble, submissive feminine.

She was again a substitute for a particular understanding to God. All these images are wrong. If you look at the New Testament, when Mary is referred to, she is an incredibly strong, definite and important personality. You only have to look at today's gospel, that passage which is sung regularly at evensong song, *The Magnificat*, to see not so much a song of devotion as a call to revolution and a change in attitudes in our world. But there is a more important point about Mary. And this is the thing which is the most important of all. The great mission of reconciliation that God made in Jesus Christ could not have happened without her. She gave Jesus his humanity and that is her central role and she shared, if this record is right, in the work of the early church in proclaiming the gospel. but her humanity gift to Jesus came at a sacrifice of herself. as Old Simeon said in the temple, a sword would pass through her heart too that the redemption could take place. Her destiny was to be the strong enduring mother of Christ giving him her humanity but also to share, in some important way, in that self-giving sacrifice of pain.

It is summed up for me by a poem by W. H. Auden "At the Manger Mary sings". It is a Christmas poem but it will do at this time of year.

*O shut your bright eyes that mine must endanger  
With their watchfulness; protected by its shade  
Escape from my care: what can you discover  
From my tender look but how to be afraid?  
Love can but confirm the more it would deny.  
Close your bright eye.*

*Sleep. What have you learned from the womb that bore you*

*But an anxiety your Father cannot feel?  
Sleep. What will the flesh that I gave do for you,  
Or my mother love, but tempt you from his will?  
Why was I chosen to teach his Son to weep?  
Little One, sleep.*

*Dream. In human dreams earth ascends to Heaven  
Where no one need pray nor ever feel alone.  
In your first few hours of life here, O have you  
Chosen already what death must be your own?  
How soon will you start on the Sorrowful Way?  
Dream while you may.*

**12.09.21**

**RP**