



St Francis High Heaton

Worship - Community – Service

Notices, Readings & Prayers

15th March 2026 *The Fourth Sunday of Lent*

Mothering Sunday

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Mothering Sunday often carries with it gentle, pastel-coloured images laced with daffodils, cute cards, and perhaps a special lunch or a box of chocolates, but for many of us, the reality of "mothering" is far more complex, rugged, and diverse. In our parish life, we see that being a mother isn't just one thing, it is a spectrum of experiences, sometimes biological, but also spiritual and communal, and by looking at these different ways of mothering, we might find fresh insights into understanding the nature of God.

For example, we often think of motherhood as nurturing and sustaining - the one who feeds, comforts, and provides a safe harbour. This is reflected in the "maternal" heart of God described in Isaiah 66:13, who comforts us "*as a mother comforts her child*". When we see a mother (or a mother-figure) providing a steady, quiet presence, we see a reflection of God's unceasing providence. God is not a distant ruler, but the one who "knitted us together" and continues to sustain our every breath with a parent's life-giving instinct.

Of course, motherhood is not always about being soft, sometimes it is a fierce business. Consider the tiger mum who stands between her child and danger. This kind of fierce, protective love helps us understand the righteous passion of God. Hosea 13:8 describes God as a *mother bear*, and in Matthew 23:37 Jesus laments over Jerusalem, wishing to gather its people *like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings to protect them*

from the coming storm. This way of mothering reminds us that God's love is not passive - it is a shielding force that stands against anything that seeks to harm the beloved.

And then there is mothering as a spiritual activity. In our congregation, some of the most profound mothering comes from those who have never given birth. These are like what I've heard described as "*Mothers in Israel*" (for example Deborah in Judges 5) - women who mentor, encourage, and bring faith to birth in others, without themselves having given birth. This generative love shows us that God's creativity isn't limited to biology. God is the source of all new beginnings, constantly "birthing" new hope and wisdom within our community. Spiritual mothering reminds us that God's family is built on grace and choice, not just lineage.

Finally, in this season of Lent there is one other aspect of mothering which gives us insight into the nature of God and that is the grieving mother. The "Pieta" is a motif in art, venerated in the Stations of the Cross - the mother who knows loss. Whether through bereavement, estrangement, or the "empty nest," many mothers carry a heart marked by sorrow. This helps us understand a suffering God who weeps with us. In the cross, we see a God who does not remain detached from human pain but enters into it. The resilience of a mother who continues to love through heartbreak is a powerful testament to the enduring, "never-stopping, never-giving up" love of God.

As we mark Mothering Sunday this weekend, let us look beyond the sentimental expressions to deeper truths. Whether you are a mother, have lost a mother, or have found "mothering" in unexpected friends, remember that these human bonds are signposts of something yet deeper and more expansive, because they point us toward a Creator whose love is more tender, more fierce, and more enduring than we can imagine.

The next Taizé worship will be... Monday 23rd March at 6.30pm, a short meditative service with chants, silence, a reading and prayers – join us if you can!



Lent soup lunches!

The next soup lunch will be on Tuesday 17th March 12.30pm - 1.30pm and then every Tuesday during Lent supporting Christian Aid



Monthly Litter Pick

YOU ARE WARMLY INVITED TO JOIN ST FRANCIS ECO-CHURCH LITTER PICKERS on the first Saturday of each month. The next one will be Saturday 4th April and then Saturday 2nd May 10 - 11.30am, meet at church. All equipment provided, everyone welcome! (*children under 18 to be accompanied by an adult*).



Green Tip

Great British Spring Clean

This Green tip is inspired by the A Rocha Eco Tips 2026 calendar for March.

A Rocha encourages us to have a good Spring Clean-up in March. We have already had our March litter pick but, if are out on a walk or a beach trip, have a bin bag with you and litter picker if you have one, or a rubber glove in your pocket, and pick up litter if you see it, then bin the bag when you get home. Every little helps!

If you have a green tip to share, email jenny_germain@talk21.com

Worship & Prayers for Mothering Sunday

Opening Rite

If you're at home you might wish to light a candle, make sure you are sitting comfortably and take a few deep breaths to still yourself.

Praise God who loves us.

Praise God who cares.

A large candle may be lit.

We light this candle to remind us that the love of God is like a light in our darkness.

Blessed be God for ever.

We praise you, our God, for all mothers who have loved and laughed and laboured as they cared for their children;

Blessed be God for ever.

We praise you, our God, for all mothers who have wept in sorrow and joy for their children:

Blessed be God for ever.

We praise you, our God, for Jesus, born of a woman and nurtured in her love, and for Mary, a reminder of your patient, waiting love.

Blessed be God for ever.

Prayers of Penitence

Let us call to mind our sin, our failure to value the love of others and our failure to love as Christ has loved us.

Silence for reflection

Your love gives us life from the moment of conception.
We fail to live as your children.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

You call us to do good. We seek our own good.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

You hear us when we cry for help. We ignore the cries of others.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

May the Father of all mercies
cleans us from our sins,
and restore us in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

The Collect

Praise God who loves us.

Praise God who cares.

You might like to keep a few moments of silence

God of compassion,
whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary,
shared the life of a home in Nazareth,
and on the cross drew the whole human family
to himself:

strengthen us in our daily living
that in joy and in sorrow
we may know the power of your presence
to bind together and to heal;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

1 Samuel 1:20-end

In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked him of the Lord.' The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, 'As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and remain there for ever; I will offer him as a nazirite for all time.' Her husband Elkanah said to her, 'Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only—may the Lord establish his word.' So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him. When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, 'Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.' She left him there for the Lord.

Psalm 34:11-20



Come, my children, and listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
Who is there who delights in life
and longs for days to enjoy good things?
Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from lying words.
Turn from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous
and his ears are open to their cry.
The face of the Lord is against those who do evil,
to root out the remembrance of them from the earth.

The righteous cry and the Lord hears them
and delivers them out of all their troubles.
The Lord is near to the broken-hearted
and will save those who are crushed in spirit.

Many are the troubles of the righteous;
from them all will the Lord deliver them.
He keeps all their bones,
so that not one of them is broken.

Colossians 3:12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Gospel Acclamation



Praise to you, O Christ our Sav-our, Word of the Fa - ther, call-ing us to life;
Son of God who leads us to free- dom; glo-ry to you, Lord Je-sus Christ.

The Gospel according to John

Chapter 19:25b-27

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

This is the Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you O Christ

Reflection

These verses immediately follow the crucifixion. This Gospel writer (but not others) envisages the possibility of friends and family being close enough to speak with Jesus. While all the Gospels agree that some of the women who followed Jesus were eyewitnesses to both the crucifixion and the resurrection, only John's Gospel includes Jesus' mother among them and only John's Gospel has 'the beloved disciple' also present. Some commentators have seen in the words of Jesus to his mother (unnamed in this Gospel) and to his disciple a deeply symbolic episode (representing the new Church in relationship to Israel, or Jew and Gentile meeting in the Church). Others concentrate on the simplicity and tenderness of a scene in which grieving people are given to each

other's care to begin a new family, which can be seen as the beginnings of the Church, but which remains here at the level of a personal encounter. Though this episode may allude to the duty of a son in providing for his mother, it is the new relationship which is the focus, not the relationship between Jesus and his mother. What might have been a formula of adoption ('I take you as...') is here spoken not by Jesus' mother and disciple but by Jesus. It is one more example, for the writer of John's Gospel, of Jesus being in control of what happens to him, to the very end.

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Prayers

Spend a few moments praying for the people you know and love, for the world, for peace and for the relief of refugees everywhere.

On Mothering Sunday

God of love,
passionate and strong,
tender and careful:
watch over us and hold us
all the days of our life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Praying for the Earth

Air pollution

We give thanks that life depends upon the air we breathe. Help us to see the atmosphere as a precious resource, and forgive us when we use it as a dumping ground. As the wind blows where it wills, grant all nations wisdom in dealing with the effects of air pollution, for the health and well-being of all your creatures. **Amen**

From the Diocesan Cycle of Prayer for the Church

Porvoo Communion: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia,
Diocese of Lichfield and Diocese of St David's (Wales)

Anglican Communion:

The Anglican Church of Kenya Primate: The Most Reverend
Jackson Ole Sapit

Diocese of Møre: Outer Nordmøre Deanery, Parishes of Frei,
Kvernes and Bremsnes

Bellingham Deanery: St Cuthbert's Church, Corsenside and
All Saints' Church, West Woodburn

From our Parish Prayer Cycle this week

pray for all residents of Cleveland Gardens, Gretton Place and
Leyburn Drive

For the sick and those being cared for in hospital or at home

Jacqueline Pearson, Brian Smart, Ida Smart, Sheila Sidney-Wilmot,
Lynne Dryden, Liz Clarke, Corinne Harris, Jo Whittam, Veronica
Brown, Alan Trotter, Linda Pallister, Alastair Day, Jenny Freeman,
John Irving, Maureen Webster, Carol Greener, baby Gianna Skye,
and Daniel Hassan

For those in residential care

Doreen Richardson, Deirdré Crowe, Irene Gibson, Tony Bartlett, Pat
Bell and Pat Hindmarsh

For those whose year's minds are this week

Violet Clarke, John Grant Patterson, Ronald James Fisher, Sarah Appleby, William Wilson, James Swan, Mary Ann Todd Fairbairn and Margaret Charlton

You might like to end your prayers with The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father,
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

The Conclusion

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. **Amen**

Let us bless the Lord!
Thanks be to God!

Lent at St Francis Church

Lentscapes Course: There are two more sessions, each one based on a different continent, and each one stands alone so feel free to attend as many or as few as you can, even if it's only one session! We will meet in the upper room at Church at 7.30pm on Monday 16th March and Tuesday 24th March. We have chosen different evenings of the week to try and ensure that everyone who would like to join us will be able to do so. The course will also be run as a hybrid session so people can participate online:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82727461959?pwd=EVaGtLqHfR317lFiwYbRqJvnGansP.1> Meeting ID: 827 2746 1959 Passcode: 848867

The content of the course can be found here:

<https://www.spiritoffrancis.com/lent-course/>

There is an online version of the accompanying book here:

<https://www.spiritoffrancis.com/lentscapes/>

Stations of the Cross: Every Friday during Lent we will walk the stations of the cross in church at 5pm. The service lasts about half-an-hour and we follow Christ's passion with fourteen brief meditations, prayers and silence.

Lent Soup Lunches: Don't forget our Lent soup lunches every Tuesday during lent 12.30-1.30pm, supporting Christian Aid.

St Francis
HIGH HEATON



FRENCH FUN NIGHT

6.30 - 9.00pm

GAMES/SONGS/SKETCHES

and a RAFFLE

French Cafe with Bistro menu
(bring your own drinks)

Tickets: Adult £10, Child £5, Family £25
Available from Marion Murray phone:07497696258 or
email: murrayowen198@gmail.com

Mothers' UNION

Christian care for families

Thinking about Jesus's 'other' father!

The next meeting of the Mothers' Union will be on Thursday 19th March at 7.30pm in the church hall. It is the feast day of Saint Joseph and Gloria Bryant will lead us in a reflection on his life. We will be able to spend some time together, to chat and enjoy refreshments.

Lady Day Eucharist

Wednesday 25th March is The Feast of the Annunciation when the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she was to be the mother of our Lord and there will be a Eucharist in Church at 10am followed by fellowship and refreshments.

Simnel Cake

Traditions and History

Mothering Sunday: Historically, the cake was associated with the fourth Sunday of Lent (*Laetare Sunday*), also known as "Simnel Sunday". It was a traditional gift for domestic servants and apprentices to take to their mothers when they were given their only day off of the year to visit their home church.

Origin of the Name: The word "simnel" likely comes from the Latin *simila*, meaning fine wheat flour.

The Legend of Simon and Nell: A popular (but probably mythical) folk tale suggests the cake was invented by a couple named Simon and Nell. Simon wanted to boil the cake and Nell wanted to bake it; they compromised by doing both, naming the result "Sim-Nell"

*The
Durham
Singers*

ST MARK PASSION

by Oliver Tarney

Conductor Tom Edney

Soloists Julian Close, Alessandro Fisher, Paul Grant,
Nicholas Morris, Beth Moxon, Darwin Prakash & Katy Thomson

Saturday
28 March 2026
7.30pm

St Cuthbert's Chapel
Ushaw Historic House
& Chapels, Durham



Tickets £20

Students £10

Under 16s free

Available from choir members

www.ticketsource.co.uk/durhamsingers

www.durham-singers.org

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PLACES OF WELCOME

We're open every Wednesday from 2 – 4pm for visitors of all ages, some from the congregation, others from further afield. Whether you're regular or it's your first time you'll be welcomed with friendly conversation and free refreshments!

We are also very grateful to our team of volunteers who run the sessions and would welcome anyone who would like to offer help, whether that be in the form of helping to set up the hall, making and serving drinks, welcoming new people or just being there to engage and interact with people – whatever your strengths might

be, they will be highly valued! Contact Helen Swann
placesofwelcomehighheaton@gmail.com or 07487 842 820