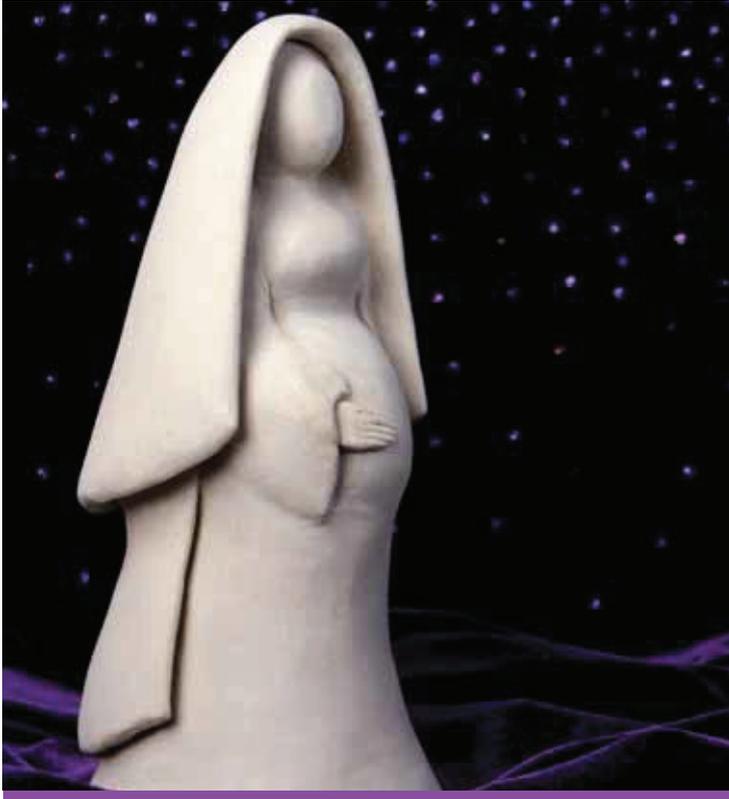


Mothers and sons



Katharine Smith *reflects on* Luke 1:39-45

Our Gospel reading today is a beautiful story in which many other stories are woven together against the backdrop of the great story of God's people Israel. There's the story of Elizabeth, about to bear a child despite her age and earlier inability to conceive; the story of the youthful Mary, whose unborn child is also unexpected and unplanned by his mother. Then there are the stories of John, born to be the messenger who prepares the Lord's way, and of Jesus, whose coming has long been foretold. Just out of sight are Zechariah and Joseph, men and fathers who fade into the background as their sons follow their own destiny.

Central today, though, are the two mothers – women who have

such different experiences of bearing sons, but who both know that those sons are destined in some way to fulfil God's purposes. We don't know if Elizabeth lived to hear John's voice crying out in the wilderness or to suffer the terrible loss of her son, murdered on Herod's orders. We do know that Mary would live to see Jesus dying on the cross, to feel the sword pierce her heart, but then again to know the joy of his new resurrection life.

Today is only about the joy, the excitement and the awe of two women whose children, it seems, already know one another and whose faith led them to say "yes" to God.

All generations will call them both blessed. ☺

Heavenly Father, as Mary and Elizabeth share their joy in the fulfilment of your promises to them, help us to look forward to the fulfilment of your promises to us, as once again we prepare to greet the birth of your Son into our lives this Christmas. Amen.

Keeping Christ in Christmas

Part 7 – Christmas tree

by Heather Cooke

If you have an artificial Christmas tree, you may have decorated it some time ago. If you prefer a natural one, you may be collecting it this week.

Many people prefer an artificial tree to one that drops needles all over the carpet, while others wouldn't be without the special smell of a real Christmas tree, part of God's creation.

Whatever our preference, when we look at our tree this week, we can keep the Christ in Christmas by thinking of a very special Christmas tree... the family tree of Jesus. Both Luke and Matthew tell us of generations of his family, like baubles and lights on the tree, reminding us vividly that Jesus was both human and divine, born of Mary, yet Son of God.

"Joy, joy, for Christ is born; the babe, the son of Mary". ☺

“Christmas is fast approaching. And now that Christ has aroused our seasonal expectations, he'll soon fulfil them all!”

St Augustine (AD 354-430), theologian, philosopher and bishop

International Human Solidarity Day

by Caroline Hodgson

Tomorrow is designated International Human Solidarity Day by the United Nations. Solidarity is identified in the UN's Millennium Declaration as one of the fundamental values of international relations in the twenty-first century, "wherein those, who either suffer or benefit least deserve help from those who benefit most".

With this in mind, the day exists: to celebrate our unity in diversity; to remind governments to respect their commitments to international agreements; to raise public awareness of the importance of solidarity; to encourage debate on the ways to promote solidarity for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty eradication; and as a day of action to encourage new initiatives for poverty eradication.

The UN sees the concept of solidarity as "crucial in the fight against poverty". So why not make solidarity the focus of your prayer this week?

www.un.org/en/observances/human-solidarity-day ☺