



**A sermon for the Cathedral Eucharist at Wells Cathedral, preached on Sunday 15 March by the Very Reverend Toby Wright, Dean of Wells.**

---

## Jesus the sign

In today's Gospel, we hear Simeon speak words that must have hung in the air like a trembling hand folding a tuning fork: *"This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel... a sign...so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."*<sup>1</sup>

Here, at barely forty days old, Jesus is revealed as a sign—one who draws out truth, who vibrates the hidden places of the human heart until what is false falls away. Jesus is the One who exposes what lies beneath the surfaces of our lives, our faith, our loyalties, our fears. A sign that reveals the inner thoughts of many.

Simeon sees clearly what most of us spend our lives trying to avoid: that love and suffering are not opposites. Not competitors. Not enemies. But interwoven realities.

What Mary is to bear, she bears *because she loves*. As C. S. Lewis once said of Mary, she bears "the utmost depth of maternal anguish" because she also bears the utmost depth of maternal love.

For us on this Mothering Sunday during this season of Lent this is crucial. The longer I am in ministry, the more painful I am aware this Sunday is for so many.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Church Fathers, such as Origen, Basil the Great and Ambrose often interpreted the sword as the temptation of doubt, or 'wavering' of faith which Mary experienced at the crucifixion. Later, Augustine shifted the idea of the sword to the physical and emotional grief Mary felt during the passion.

<sup>1</sup> Frank Gavin's *Addresses on the Words from the Cross*: "Think of His Blessed Mother, for example. Did her intimate said: "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also" (St. Luke 2: 35). God's every relation to our Lady tells the same story: the favored one of all mankind was to be privileged? Yes--if privilege mean increasing suffering, and a sharing of the Passion before the Crucifixion. Consider: the Annunciation--coupled with St. Joseph's suspicions: "although he was a righteous man, still he did not want to hold her up to public excoriation, and so thought to put her away privily" (St. Matthew 1: 19); the Nativity--the Holy Birth in a stable at Bethlehem, away from home, "because there was no room for them in the inn" (St. Luke 2:7); the Flight into Egypt--(St. Matthew 2: 13-14); the Presentation; the Finding in the Temple--the First Miracle at Cana--every reported incident in our Lady's life in the gospels tells us of a new suffering, separation, and sorrow which came to her who was the Mother of the Saviour. Lastly, here is that Blessed Mother and the Beloved Disciple at the foot of His Cross. Jesus looks down at the sea of faces--puzzled, hostile, amused; kindly, embittered, compassionate; and lastly at her who bore Him and him who suffered Him to love him so dearly--and dissolving one He creates a new family, baptizing the new relationship with the blood from His sacred wounds. Does sanctity mean privilege? Does it involve exemptions from the usual trials of life?"

Both for those who have lost something they prize so much, and for the many others whose mirroring of motherhood is not what would be hoped and longed for, or for those who grieve not becoming mothers themselves.

It is also a time to acknowledge the mothering we receive in the Church where we each find an equal home. And the failures that we see in this area too. So more importantly, we also acknowledge the mothering of God's love, nurturing and sustaining us, and all creation.

And if we look to the guidance of family-systems work, Bert Hellinger says the mother represents something foundational:

- Our first experience of unconditional love
- The root of our self-acceptance
- The capacity to receive—love, success, abundance

Whether or not that maps onto every life, we can at least recognise this: the maternal bond—its beauty, its loss, its complexity—shapes us deeply. And Mary's story, from cradle to cross, gathers all these truths into the heart of God.

For God in Jesus becomes not only the One who gives love, but the One who receives it: from the arms of a mother, the touch of human hands, the vulnerability of a family. God knows the cost of love from the inside.<sup>3</sup>

Which means this, perhaps: the only way we could truly disappoint God is by believing we are beyond the reach of God's love.

Because the moment we think the journey back is too long, that we've gone too far, that we've failed too much— we have misunderstood everything about the God who comes among us.

Even when we refuse the path home, even when we avoid the truth that rises in us, God still finds us.

And when God does, the hands we see are open. Always open.

Not condemning, but caring.

Not punishing, but persistent in mercy.

Harry Williams warned, in his book *True Wilderness*, that Lent becomes a tragedy when we treat it as a chance to perform—when we do, as he says, “a good orthodox grovel to a pseudo-Lord, the Pharisee in each of us we call God.” Imagine that: the God we grovel to is not the real God at all, but a stern voice in our heads that despises the parts of us still becoming.

But that is not the God Simeon held in his arms.  
Jesus reveals us to ourselves not to shame us, but to free us.

And here Thomas Merton's mystical insight of *le pointe vierge* becomes crucial. Merton describes that hidden point within us—the untouched, unspoiled centre where we are held in God before we ever knew ourselves. A point of pure truth, pure orientation, pure belonging.<sup>4</sup>

That point is like the tuning fork of the soul.

If Simeon says that a sword will pierce Mary's soul, Merton suggests that sometimes what feels like a sword is actually a tuning fork touching that innermost point—bringing us back into resonance with God.

This is echoed beautifully in the words of Swedish poet Ylva Elisabet Eggehorn:

**Stand still in the pain,  
Rooted in that in you which is light.  
Let the sword go through you.  
Maybe it is not a sword at all.  
Maybe it is a tuning fork.  
You become a note.  
You become the music you always longed to hear.  
You did not know you were a song.**

Perhaps this is the invitation of this season of Lent.  
To stand still— even in the pain, even in the uncertainty— and allow Christ to tune us.

To let Christ touch that hidden point in us that vibrates with the truth of who we are.

To become a note in God's great music.

To discover that beneath all our fears, our performances, our shame, we had been a song all along.

And once we hear that note—once we recognise the God whose hands are always open—we begin to rise. We rise with the Child who rises. We rise with the truth that calls us by name. We rise with the one who is the true sign. We rise with the love that reveals us, pierces us, and finally frees us.

**Maybe it is not a sword at all.  
Maybe it is a tuning fork.  
You become a note.**

**You become the music you always longed to hear.  
You did not know you were a song.**

Amen.

The Very Reverend Toby Wright

15 March 2026

Dean of Wells

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 5.2 "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"

<sup>4</sup> "At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth... which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will." Thomas Merton.