

MONDAY
15 MARCH
Isaiah 65:17-21
Psalm 30:1-5. 8.
11-end
John 4:43-end

TUESDAY
16 MARCH
Ezekiel 47:1-9. 12
Psalm 46:1-8
John 5:1-3. 5-16

WEDNESDAY
17 MARCH
Isaiah 49:8-15
Psalm 145:8-18
John 5:17-30

THURSDAY
18 MARCH
Exodus 32:7-14
Psalm 106:19-23
John 5:31-end

FRIDAY
19 MARCH
Joseph of Nazareth
2 Samuel 7:4-16
Psalm 89:26-36
Romans 4:13-18
Matthew 1:18-end

SATURDAY
20 MARCH
Jeremiah 11:18-20
Psalm 7:1-2. 8-10
John 7:40-52

REFLECTION

As we step closer to Holy Week the Gospel readings shift from the synoptic Gospels to a semi-continuous run through of John 4 to 7. Whatever Jesus does or says he comes into conflict with religious leaders who are unable to cope with his unbridled demonstrations of God's glory.



Whether healing on the sabbath or declaring his relationship to the Father, he is breaking their rules, offending their theologies and prising God from their control. With their authority threatened, they resort to ungodly methods as plots to kill him foment.

Mirroring Jesus' persecution, in the week's first readings Jeremiah finds himself facing the ire of his peers for prophesying God's hard words of desolation to rebellious Jerusalem, while Moses must turn back divine wrath when the Hebrew nation prefers the domesticity of a golden calf to the awesome, ineffable power of God. In Monday's reading from Isaiah the Lord's glorious, magnificent generosity restores Jerusalem, creating new heavens and a new earth; a secure, peaceful home. On Tuesday Ezekiel is caught up in God's vision for a rebuilt Temple, from which flows a life-giving, sustaining river. In these passages hints of resurrection glory begin to shine, even as the cross draws nigh.

PRAYER

Holy God,
 may narrowness of vision never cloud our passion for you,
 or hold us back from sharing the overwhelming generosity
 of your love with every person and all creation.
 Setting the sacrifice of the cross as our guide,
 lead us into the life-changing hope of the resurrection.

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MOTHERHOOD IN THE BIBLE

PART III – TWO BLESSED MOTHERS

Becky Mynett concludes her series about motherhood in the Bible.

In the previous two articles in this series we saw how God worked through some of the most unlikely women. Firstly we looked at the seven barren matriarchs of Jewish tradition and how they can be seen to lead to Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist. Then we looked at the mothers in Jesus' genealogy at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, and how these foreign women with somewhat dubious pasts paved the way for Mary.

Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah, "had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years". The couple are faithful and blameless, but Elizabeth has been unable to become a "real woman" through motherhood, as was expected in biblical times. When she becomes pregnant she is grateful to God, saying that he "looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people".

When Mary wonders how, as a virgin, she can have a child, Gabriel reassures her with the news that her cousin Elizabeth, who was said to be barren, is six months pregnant, "for nothing will be impossible with God". This prompts Mary to accept what will happen to her, and straight away she rushes off to visit Elizabeth. When she arrives and greets Elizabeth, the child in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy and Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaims with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Mary joyfully responds with the Magnificat.

Both these women, who weren't expecting to become mothers, are blessed with children as a result of divine intervention. At this time of year we tend to see motherhood as a sugar-coated ideal of maternal tenderness yet, as we have seen, the biblical reality was far from this romantic ideal. Yet each of the mothers we have looked at, the barren, scandalous, or dysfunctional, had an important role to play in God's plan for the world.

LIVE
 the WORD

SUSTAINING YOU
 THROUGH THE WEEK

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 and
 Heather Smith



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Fourth week of Lent

Monday 15 March to
 Saturday 20 March
 2021

WEEK