

Patronal Service 2025 - Exodus 3

In our first reading [Exodus 3:1-6] we heard about Moses.

I wonder if anyone can remember what happened to Moses when he was a baby? – He was placed in a basket by his mother to protect him from the Pharaoh who wanted to harm all the male babies. He was found by the Pharaoh's daughter who took him back to the palace where he grew up.

He got a great education as a prince, but deep down he knew that he was a Hebrew and not an Egyptian. One day when he had grown up, he killed a guard who was beating a Hebrew slave and so he ran away into the desert.

Years have gone by, but Moses is still in the wilderness and looking after sheep. (Do any of you want to help with looking after our sheep?)

There he was caring for the flock when he noticed something rather strange – it was a bush and the bush was on fire, but was not actually being burnt up as you would expect.

(Here is our bush which looks as though it is burning but is not actually burnt up – I think I might be in trouble with the churchwardens if I set light to a bush in church....)

How do you think Moses felt when he saw the bush and then heard a voice coming out of the bush? Surprised, shocked, frightened, scared, curious.

A voice spoke to Moses and told him to come closer. Moses had the most amazing experience of meeting with God who went on to tell him that he was going to lead God's people out of Egypt, although Moses wasn't sure he was the right person for the job.

But God wanted to get Moses to pay attention and the burning bush definitely did that. It caused Moses to turn aside and to look at the bush really carefully to see what was happening.

In the Orthodox tradition the idea of the burning bush is said to be a bit like Mary, Jesus' mother who we are celebrating and giving thanks for today.

She is sometimes called the Theotokos, the Mother of God or the God bearer.

Mary carried Jesus, God's son around in her tummy for nine months and then she gave birth to him. Mary was a human and like the bush that was not consumed by fire she was not fundamentally changed by what happened to her although of course the birth of Jesus who is both fully human and fully divine at the same time, turned her world upside and has changed many lives since then.

So back to the burning bush – when Moses approached the bush there was a voice which told Moses to come nearer and to do something – what was it?– he had to take his shoes off as this was Holy ground – it was a special place.

I wonder when do you take your shoes off?

People might take off their shoes to keep from tracking dirt inside. And in some places, people always take off their shoes and leave them at the door when they enter a house as a sign of respect. If you respect someone it means you show someone you think that person is important in some way.

Moses took his shoes off to show respect that this was an important place where he met God

In the Bible there are a number of stories where individuals meet with God in the form of a flame – later after Moses had led the people out of Egypt God was in the pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night leading the people remaining with them.

In church there are a number of candles which help us to remember that this is a special place where we can meet with God – on the alter, the Easter candle we light at Easter and at baptisms, the red light in the sanctuary which remains alight all the time and reminds us that God is present. You might want to have a look at them later.

The church is a special place a holy place, holy ground where we come and meet with God- you could take your shoes off but that might not be a good idea, your feet might get cold, or you might slip especially if the stones are wet and become slippery – but our church is a special place where people have come to spend time with God and worship God for hundreds of years.

I always think that it is amazing that this place has been here for so long and has seen people coming and going, baptisms, weddings and funerals for people in this community for generations.

Of course, we can meet with and talk to God wherever we are, when we are doing the washing up or walking to school or even in the shower. God is everywhere but there are some special places, and this church is one of them.

Today we remember Mary after whom this church is named and we are thankful that Mary said yes, to being Jesus' mother. It was an important job to do. She would have taught Jesus as a child growing up as all human mothers do. She saw him as he went about healing people, performing miracles and teaching and she

was there when he died on the cross. She didn't give up on him when some of Jesus' disciples ran away.

We are thankful that we can come to this building, this special place to spend time with God, to pray, to sing, to listen to God's word and to come to the communion table as God's people. We are thankful for all the people who have worshipped here over the years and for all the people who have helped to look after the building and care for it.

Sometimes we forget to say thank you to God for all the good things we have. We say thank you when we come to church but our challenge is to say thank you everyday and perhaps that is one thing we can all aim to do – to say thank you to God each day this coming week for all that we have, not just on a Sunday.