

**Installation**  
**Chester Cathedral**

**8 September 2018**

*Mary BVM (Is 6:10; Gal 4:4)*

**‘God in small things’**

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*As we reflect on your word O God, help us to walk in your ways.*

Hello, it is good to be here. I have been looking forward to this day for so long, and looking forward to getting to know so many of you who are here, and looking forward to what God is going to do among us in the years to come, whatever it is.

And, it's really lovely to see so many of you here from other places that have meant so much to me. I have been given a little opportunity to say some more over nibbles and drinks so I'll save my more personal thoughts for then.

Over the summer I gave a little thought to what I might say to you from the pulpit on the first occasion I get to speak here as Dean. A couple of weeks ago the Canon Precentor walked me through the way he envisaged this service, and when we got to the sermon and I looked for the pulpit, I learned there wasn't one!

An eleven year old girl once taught me that whenever you visit a church you should look for three things: The Altar, because that is where Communion is celebrated and Jesus told us to do that in remembrance of him. The Font, because it is the place of baptism - Jesus told us to go and baptize people from everywhere; and The Pulpit, because that is where the stories of Jesus are told from.

Well of course this Cathedral has one or two other things of interest to add to that list. The Bishop might remind us that it houses his seat – his Cathedra, after which the building is named; a place of teaching. But the eleven year old was right about altar, font and pulpit. But here – no pulpit!

Maybe, what is important is not that the pulpit is missing - but that it is mobile. More of a tent that is pitched where people are gathered than an edifice to be climbed that would set me above you. I like this mobility and proximity. And there is a great lectern in the Quire that focuses our reading of the Bible.

So, here we are gathered on a day when Mary is remembered. Mary the mother of Jesus. Jesus whose story we do not merely read and tell, but whose story we live. In some of our church's traditions and cultures Mary is the central figure. Perhaps it is easier for us to imagine ourselves as her than to put ourselves in her Son's shoes. She was, after all, a simple human being like us. He was a man like no other; somebody in whose life God touched our world as never before and never since. Where he walked, heaven and earth met.

But Mary was an ordinary girl at first, exceptional as a teenager in that she said yes to God and it had such extraordinary consequences. A model for us? Somebody we can identify with perhaps. Well I have grown up in a church culture that has not celebrated Mary in the same way. She is undoubtedly a central figure but, in the church tradition that has formed me, the Bible shapes our mind set more than relational identity and human experience. Mary was a massive figure whose motherhood formed the humanity of Jesus, if not his divinity. Yet in the story of the church that the Bible describes, emerging after the resurrection, Mary is all but invisible.

“Mary the mother of Jesus” is mentioned only once in the Book of Acts; perhaps twice if “Mary the mother of John” is her also. There is not a word about her in any of the letters of Paul or

Peter or John or the others. Outside of the Gospels she is forgotten it seems. Whatever happened to Mary in the first century church? Why, in all of the New Testament is there so little recognition of the way this woman, and her love and faithfulness, formed the man through whose life heaven touched our world. She was there at his birth, throughout his childhood, perhaps a widow for much of it - a single mother. She is present in his adulthood, and she is at the foot of the cross when he dies. But we hear no more about her.

The continuity of Jesus story is told only through the eyes of his male companions, and their followers. Well perhaps this tells us everything we need to know about the Mary who said yes to God with such great consequences. You see – it was not all about Mary. The story is God's story. She never gets in the way of that. It does not become Mary's story. Perhaps it should. Maybe it would be much easier for us if it did. But Mary just points us to what it is that God can do when we don't get in the way, and when we say yes. Whether the decision that this should not become Mary's story was hers or the male church leaders we will never know. The focus is where it should be nevertheless. On what God was doing.

So I find myself today as a new Dean without a big fine pulpit to speak to you from, in a church dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus, on a day in the church's calendar set aside to remember her. And I see myself being invited to live with eyes and ears open and attentive to what it is that God is doing, ready to join in, not to get in the way, to say yes, expecting great things and wanting only to point to the creator of all things as the power behind it all.

It is good to be here. I am looking forward to being a disciple alongside others of you who find this Cathedral a place of nurture and challenge. But it is not about me. What will matter is what God will do among us. I pray that we might keep attentive to that which matters most. And the story that matters here is God's story.

For this reason shortly there will be an opportunity for as many of you as would like to commit yourselves along with me to the mission of the church. We are using the Church of England's words of *Thanksgiving for the Mission of the Church*. Please don't feel compelled to join in if this is not for you. But if it is, here is an opportunity for us to commit ourselves to be attentive to God together.

**Amen.**