

Jesus says: 'I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly' are the best words to express the wonderful privilege for us as Mothers' Union members, as we gathered together lifting our hearts and voices in worship at a Mothers' Union Diocesan Lady Day Service. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven were the opening words of the processional hymn as the colourful banners from across the diocese were carried up the central aisle at the beginning of the service.

Our Diocesan Chaplain, the Revd Ruth Fitter provided a challenging and inspirational message about Mary's faith and commitment, opening with the words: 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord'. The 'yes' of Mary in response to the message of an angel would ultimately lead to 'the joy of the resurrection'; but what a journey she would undertake for this to happen! Life would never be the same again – the shock, disbelief, the inability to totally grasp what was about to take place – and through all this to hold on to the promise given by the angel: 'Do not be afraid, for you have found favour with God'.

She then provided further illustrations of how this account from the Gospel according to Luke can also relate to us as Mothers' Union members today. The importance of the older woman in the life of this young mother to be, and how Elizabeth and Mary related to each other as they both came to terms with all that was about to happen. Every man and every woman plays a part in the story of life, and has the potential to translate into daily life the fullness of God and what he has intended as our creator and redeemer. Life, in all its fullness is part of the divine mystery. Mary and Elizabeth were connected and totally obedient to the call of God in their lives, and responded by worshipping God with these words: 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour'.

This song still echoes in our ears as Mothers' Union members – praying and hoping; as we respond and say 'yes' to God's call on our lives today. As we say 'yes' with the willingness to provide empowerment within the lives of women, men and children – having an impact on communities around the world; 'For nothing will be impossible with God'. Has anything changed since the time Mary Sumner saw a need and responded by calling the Mothers' Union? Today Mothers' Union members are being empowered across the globe to help people facing issues relating to domestic violence? And for us to remember that it is as much a problem in this country as it is abroad. Mothers' Union members are still being called to say 'yes' to God's call everywhere.



Diocese of Gloucester Mothers' Union Chaplain, the Revd Ruth Fitter

To walk alongside and empower those who have been subjected to the trauma of rape or sex trafficking. For them to hear the good news that they are cherished by God for who they are, to be released from the oppression, shame and fear and being brought into a relationship they never dreamed of – finding comfort in Christ; for Jesus says: 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest'.

And as we say 'yes' to God's call to help a neighbour whose life has met with adversity, for us also to remember that the world rejected Jesus. They fail to see or hear his words, or the message of the angel. And as a consequence of this rejection Mary's heart was pierced. And yet amidst the anxiety and fear 'had it all been for nothing?'; she was then able to celebrate the joy of resurrection. With her willingness to say 'yes' to God's call, she had obtained a joy, love and of blessing – the renewal of life.

In the same way as Mary, God is calling each one of us – for us to gather together and be bearers of his light, his hope and his love – in a dark and suffering world. To remember the many promises that 'God is with us' and 'dwells amongst us'; and whatever our age and experience, as Mothers' Union members, we are needed. Through prayer, policy and practical action we can make a difference to the lives of our neighbours in need. We are needed to campaign for and support those who feel helpless as their daughters are mutilated; as children continue to die from preventable diseases; and as the people with so much already, who abuse resources by using cheap labour and providing cheap food for our consumption. To say 'yes' to God's call to 'loose the bonds of injustice', to rejoice in the coming of Christ; for families to be set free and to campaign for those bowed down. Around the world today the Mothers' Union is rising to these challenges with the huge amount of work being undertaken, and alongside other members we can continue to be a presence to fight for moral, social and economic justice for all – to lift our voices for those who have no voice or who are too weak to fight for themselves.

Ruth also reminded us to never let anyone tell you that Mothers' Union is something of the past, because today we are all called to be bearers of the light and hope and love of Christ. Mary Sumner had a vision, and we must continue to hold on to that vision, to sing out like Mary – loud and clear – 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord'. The Lady Day Service concluded with the hymn 'Shine, Jesus, shine **may our lives tell your story** send forth your word, Lord and let there be light'.