

St Luke's in the City  
Feast of Mary: Mother of Our Lord  
19 August 2007  
Celebrating at the Crossroads

Dear Friends,

*The Sundays after Pentecost are interrupted today by the Feast of Mary: Mother of our Lord. Mary is the Theo-tokos – the God-bearer – known in English speaking tradition as 'Mother of God'. We are blessed in this church of St Luke with a Mary chapel, a statue carved from Linden wood, four stained glass windows featuring Mary, an embroidered Mary banner, and at the centre of our Peace Sanctuary the icon of the Mother of Lovingkindness. The most ancient representation of Mary, the Virgin of the Sign is reckoned to have originated in the fifth century CE. Mary prays in the 'orans' posture, showing forth to the world the new Lord, the new sovereign. Throughout the centuries Mary has continued to inspire Christians. Just as there are African and European and Asian Christs, representations of the one Lord with the distinctive features and colour of different races of people, so there are many Marys - designations of the Mother of the Lord associated with particular encounters in particular places. The black crucifix of Nigeria and the white crucifix of Sweden are quite plainly one and the same Redeemer. So too, our Lady of Guadalupe and our Lady of Walsingham are one and the same Virgin Mary. Our Lady Captive Daughter of Zion shows Mary the Jewish girl of Nazareth with her Jewish son, dressed in the 'tallith' or prayer shawl, and holding the Torah scrolls. Our Lady Mother of the Streets is over the entrance to Saint Boniface Church in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco. Franciscan friars who staff that church leave the doors open all day and all night so that homeless street people can shelter from the elements. God is for them, Mary is for them, the church is for them. In other words, those at risk are especially close to the divine heart, with a special call on Christian compassion. These invisible ones are visible to us, for the real presence of Christ in word and sacrament opens our eyes to Christ's real presence in all sorts and conditions of people and places. We should not be surprised that in times of violence and places of injustice, when male power and weaponry run rampant, visions of Mary abound.*

*All these different Christs and Marys show that God is for us, that God is on our side, champion of the poor, friend of sinners, lover of the unloved. They show that there is no place where God is not. Christ comes to meet us in religious settings and secular settings alike, for there is no place where God is not, no place beyond God's passionate and patient love. The incarnation once upon a time at Bethlehem happens endlessly and everywhere, for the Christlike God is always found in human flesh – embracing, forgiving, healing, blessing. God is the same yesterday, today and forever, always embodied in matter, in time and place, flesh and blood. Christ's Mother is everyone's Mother, tender and compassionate, for the whole suffering humanity. Christ's Mother is always pointing to her Son. What do we hear the Mother of Our Lord saying to us at this time and this place, at these crossroads? Surely, Mary says what she has always been saying to the church: 'Do whatever he tells you'.*

With my love,  
David