ANGLICAN-LUTHERAN SOCIETY

Conference in Trondheim, Norway, 25th-29th July 2022

ANGLICAN EUCHARIST

Preacher : The Rt Rev Jana Jeruma-Grinberga (Lutheran President)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today, as the Church of England calendar decrees, we are celebrating Saints Anne and Joachim, parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This might be less familiar to Lutherans, especially those from the US and Germany, as these extra-canonical saints don't always make it into our calendars, so here's a brief reminder. Jesus' mother Mary's parents are nowhere mentioned, let alone named, in the canonical Gospels. The source for their names and for some quite extensive details about their lives is, first and foremost, the *Proto-Evangelium of James*, a third or fourth century document, which sets out Mary's birth, childhood and betrothal to Joseph in a way that is both lyrical and Biblical (magnified souls are something of a refrain in the text), but simultaneously quite earthy and even gynaecological. In brief, Mary's birth to Anne, or Anna, is reminiscent of that much earlier Hannah and her son, Samuel. Mary, too, is dedicated to God: "Mary was in the temple of the Lord as if she were a dove that dwelt there, and she received food from the hand of an angel."

If you have a moment to spare, you should try to look up this text of the *Proto-Evangelium* (https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0847.htm). It's quite short and rather charming, but as a good Lutheran I have to say that it is more akin to a beautiful story which provides us with fascinating detail about the lives of people of that time, and less to Biblical truth - which is not to say that stories and myths are not true, just not factual!

In any case, Mary clearly did have parents, and Jesus equally obviously did have grandparents, whether or no they were called Joachim and Anna. Today's Collect in the Roman Catholic tradition is rather different to ours, and begins thus:

> "O Lord, God of our Fathers, who bestowed on Saints Joachim and Anne this grace, that of them should be born the Mother of your incarnate Son…"

Whoever that couple were, hidden now from us by the veil of millennia, we can truly be thankful for the grace that was bestowed on them, that they were parents to Mary, and grandparents to our Lord Jesus.

I wonder what it was like – being a grandpa or nanny to Jesus? Was he really always gentle Jesus, meek and mild, or did he suffer the terrible twos alongside the other toddlers of his generation? We don't know, of course, for there is this lacuna between the infancy narratives and the sudden emergence of Jesus at the

Jordan – except for the incident at the Temple, when Jesus was found by Mary and Joseph in theological discussions with the teachers there – certainly very suggestive of a twelve-year-old with a mind of his own.

We have a grandson, my husband and I – he's three and a half years old, and his name is Lars, appropriately for this Nordic setting. He is, obviously enough, the apple of our eye. One of our favourite occupations is going for a walk together; but the manner of our walking is somewhat analogous both to pilgrimage and to our ecumenical journey. My idea of a walk is that we have an aim in mind – the park, for instance, and feeding the ducks or playing on the swings; or perhaps a visit to the lovely shop called EXPA, which sells everything from Turkish yoghurt to lightbulbs by way of kidneys and watermelons. So my vision is of something linear – setting out from home, reaching our goal and then coming back. Not so Lars. His aim is to climb every wall on the way, sniff most of the roses, chat to random strangers and sit down by the birch tree to watch the ants marching up and down. Sometimes he runs ahead and comes back; sometimes he hides behind lamp posts and leaps out at me.

And actually, this is something like our ecumenical endeavours. We might agree, mostly, that our eventual aim is to arrive back at the home of complete Christian unity – full visible unity as it's often expressed; that early oneness before schisms and wounds old and new split us into a thousand fragments. Some of us would like to head back there in a very linear fashion, ignoring all the fascinating diversions that the doctrinal equivalent of a walk in the park offers us. Quite often some of us, some Churches or denominations, run far ahead on the journey, and either have to wait for the rest of us to catch up, or end up coming back to join the slower of gait and thought. Often, too, whatever process we are following, whatever joint walk we are taking, the walk and the talk are more important than achieving an end quickly; by stopping on the way to watch each other, and to listen, we learn a great deal more about this complex journey that we are on than if we simply ploughed on, regardless. In other words, we find fellowship and friendship by walking together, even if we don't necessarily think we are heading to the same place or that our route is entirely clear. That, of course, is one of the great strengths of the Anglican Lutheran Society. We find companionship in one another without setting complex, difficult targets: instead we simply savour the exploration of our common faith and values, taking sustenance together on the way and affirming that that which unites us is far greater than that which divides.

Today's Epistle began with words that are of great comfort to us, whether we are thinking of our ecumenical journey, our pilgrimage here or our walk in life.

> "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love God, who have been called according to God's purpose."

Accepting this truth and absorbing it into our lives will help us to deal with difficulties and diversions. It holds before us the hope of a pilgrimage that has as its end, or its purpose, the vision of eternal splendour for which we have been created, and towards which we are walking – stumblingly, sometimes, boldly sometimes, but always walking with and in Christ.

Amen.