



Whilst the sculpture represents Mary and teenage Jesus, it is also a sculpture about a teenage boy and his mother. Thus it is a sculpture that speaks to all about the relationship between Mary and Jesus and all mothers and sons.

Jesus in the sculpture seems to be about fifteen or sixteen years old. Boys of that age would then have been expected to make their own living. Jesus like his father was a labourer and carpenter; his apron carries the tools symbolic of his trade. No doubt he would have been earning the money to help support himself and his family. It would have been a happy life. Jesus would work in his shop during the day; perhaps Mary was a frequent visitor, admiring and taking interest in his work.

Mary was very young when she gave birth to Jesus, and here we see her as a woman in her early thirties. Mary had always known that her son was special. Here was the son she had conceived and born, nurtured and loved as babe and boy. How much did she know of what lay ahead? What did she ponder in her heart?

And how far was Jesus aware of his role he was to play? He was very much flesh and blood, of human personality, brought up in a loving family. A growing sense of his own identity must have also been accompanied by a deepening awareness of the will of his Father.

He stands, healthy, strong, looking beyond Mary, eager to face his future, to start his public life. His love and respect for his mother is seen in the gentle right hand on Mary's shoulder however his attention and eagerness and concentration are drawn away from his mother and the present to the world beyond. Like any teenager, he has a life to make, a destiny to fulfil. With him he will take the love and the values built into his life by those who have cared for him.

As for Mary? See how still she is. The time is near for Jesus, Mary, like all mothers, is aware of his distance from the present and an impending change. She has done all she can, over the years she has tried to love her son into ever fuller life, encouraging, admonishing, trying to give her own strength, values, vision, and spirit to him. Soon however, it will be time, time to let him go to do his Father's work. As with all mothers there comes a time when the need for more words, more admonition, and more physical presence stops. Enough has been said. It is a time for a blessing and a gradual backing away to leave the child both free and empowered.

Mary recognises this need in her stillness. With her hands resting on her lap, she does not touch Jesus. She is at peace, and yet how strong is the love she bears her son. She lifts her head towards him. She



looks at him with such love – a gentle gaze, full of confidence in him, eyes open to the truth and promise of the boy she has helped to mould. Her mouth, too, is gentle; there is almost a smile; she approves of what she sees.

Perhaps now at the moment of her son's leaving, does Mary realise what all loving mothers come to realise in time, that birth is given twice, once biologically and once in faith, once to an infant and once to an adult. Mary gave birth to a baby, but she had to spend years nurturing, coaxing, and cajoling that infant into adulthood. As a child grows, matures, and takes on a personality and destiny of its own, so a mother must let herself be painfully stretched in understanding, in not knowing, in carrying tension, in letting go. She must set free her son to be itself something that was once so fiercely hers. The pains of childbirth are often gentle compared to this second wrenching of letting go.

The sculpture is a symbol of our faith in Jesus, who, like each pupil in our school, moves through adolescence into manhood. It is a symbol of our faith in Mary, who, whilst unique in her trust in God, was a loving mother, like each mother of our pupils. So whilst the sculpture has both religious and spiritual meaning, it is also very much about us, about all mothers and sons as they grow in love and understanding of themselves and each other; and about the pain and glory found in their final letting go.

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1863

*Mary
and
Jesus*



*Mother
and
Son*

In recognition of 150 years of Parent Support
Artist: Hannah Stewart