

MARY, LOYAL MOTHER

“It’s so much bigger and more beautiful than the pictures show,” Ryan said to his mother as he slowly flipped through images. “We kept coming back to the Sea of Galilee, and a few of our group even did some fishing. Look at the sunset there!”

As Carla glanced at her son, she noticed how much older and more grown up he seemed after returning from a trip to Israel. She didn’t try to hide how jealous she was that he had walked in many of the same places and eaten the kinds of food that Jesus would have eaten two thousand years ago. But she was even happier that he had these experiences.

“I mean, there’s something about being right where Jesus could have given the Sermon on the Mount that made me feel closer to God than I’ve ever felt before,” he continued.

“I see what an impression it made,” she noted. “I can’t begin to describe how proud I am of you. Look how far you have come.”

With a grin, he said, “Well I never would have gone if you didn’t encourage me to try. I’ve got a lot of people at the church to thank for helping me raise the funds.”

“I mean it, Ryan. I feel like you’ve come back with all these new things to teach me.”

1 In what ways do relationships change as children grow?

2 When is a time you have been shocked to notice how grown up a person seems, all of the sudden?

¹⁵ And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

¹⁶ And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

A King for the Lowly

Today’s readings follow one important character in the Gospels and the life of Jesus: His mother, Mary. Like all mothers, Mary had the opportunity to know her child longer than any other person. Mary’s enduring faith and the variety of her experiences have something to teach anyone who wants to know Jesus.

Scene One (Luke 2)—The first Gospel reading comes from Luke, who tells us more about Jesus’ birth than any other evangelist. Luke tells how God used poor shepherds as the Messiah’s welcome party.

But, of course, the birth of a special son did not surprise Mary, who had first been visited by the angel Gabriel. The angel had said, “The Lord God will give [Jesus] the throne of his father David, . . . his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:32–33). Later, perhaps Mary and Joseph were taken aback to face unexpected responsibilities in the weeks before the heavenly king’s arrival. The current king in those days, Caesar Augustus, required the engaged couple to journey to Bethlehem—unwittingly fulfilling the prophecy of Micah 5:2.

Once in Bethlehem, the couple would seek a place to stay with

Joseph's extended family. But because they were displaced and unable to find a private room, Mary faced the uncomfortable reality of giving birth out in the open, beside an animal feeding trough (Luke 2:7). Thus the eternal king was born in the most humble of circumstances.

Shortly after this event is when the reading starts, just after a myriad of angels has appeared to nearby shepherds, urging them to seek a baby lying in a manger (Luke 2:12). Shepherds of the first-century were typically uneducated, lower-class working men who spent a lifetime outdoors. Their arrival brings another unexpected twist for Jesus' young mother. But once they find the newborn king exactly as the angel announced, they go forth announcing His birth. The text says, "All who heard it were amazed" (Luke 2:18).

Yet Mary's response is slightly different. She "treasured" and "pondered" this memory as a mother would (Luke 2:19). The situation may have been inconvenient and surprising, but Mary began her role as Jesus' mother by accepting that she is God's servant (Luke 1:38). Whatever twists and turns may come after, whoever shows up to praise her son, Mary knows that God's plan of salvation is being accomplished through Him. And at Jesus' arrival, words spoken by the angel become true in a new way: "The Lord is with [her]" (Luke 1:28).

1 When Mary first heard that she would give birth to the Messiah, how much of what happened next would she have been able to predict?

2 What message does it send for a king to be placed in a feeding trough and announced by shepherds?

3 What sort of emotions do you expect were part of Mary's memory of this occasion?

¹ And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: ² And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. ³ And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.

⁴ Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.

⁵ His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

...

²⁵ Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! ²⁷ Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

¹ On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴ "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

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²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," ²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

A Mother Knows Her Son

Scene Two (John 2)—The occasion is a Galilean wedding celebration, perhaps extended family of Jesus' mother, which would be why they are both in attendance. In Scripture, wine is a frequent sign of God's blessing and abundance (see Deut. 7:13; 11:14; 33:28). At weddings, which could last as long as seven days, running short of wine would be a disaster for the hosting family.

When Mary makes a simple observation to Jesus, "They have no more wine" (John 2:3), she may already have some inkling of her son's power and authority. But in response, Jesus distances Himself from obligations to His mother—calling her simply "woman"—and to anything that distracts attention from the coming "hour"—which

is when Jesus' full identity and role is revealed (John 2:4). Yet Mary isn't perturbed. She knows her son's heart and has the faith to say to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you to do" (John 2:5).

The resulting miracle demonstrates the abundant life made possible through Jesus. God is turning water into wine through the ongoing blessings of creation, and Jesus can turn water into fine wine in an instant (John 2:7–10). It becomes a sign of His glory and of the restoration of God's people through their connection to "the true vine" (John 2:11; 15:1).

Scene 3 (John 19)—Mary's love for her son has not wavered, even when the religious authorities mobilized to oppose Him. If the death of a child is the hardest thing a parent can endure, the unjust execution of Jesus means unimaginable pain for Mary. Once Jesus is sentenced to death and is in the hands of the Roman executioners, most of His disciples are nowhere to be found.

But Mary, together with a few other women and Jesus' beloved disciple, is committed to staying near to Jesus, even while He hangs on the cross (John 19:25). While Jesus is enduring the horrific torture, He has enough breath in His lungs to speak. And what Jesus asks is that His disciple would look after His mother—presumably widowed by this point (John 19:27). By welcoming Mary into his home, the disciple is accepting a role of caring for Mary as if she were his own family.

1 What do you suspect that Mary wanted Jesus to do about the wine running short?

2 What do you think was running through Mary's mind as she was asked to treat another man as her replacement son?

3 Why do you think Jesus distanced Himself from His mother, even as He looked after her?

Family of Faith

In our own walk of faith, we will face some of the same kinds of interactions with God as Mary faced. None of us will be asked to be a parent to Jesus, but we will face moments of profound calling and treasured contemplation, or joy and blessing beyond wildest expectations. We will also have moments when our mundane needs go unmet, and we plead with our beloved Lord. And—true enough—we face moments at the foot of the cross, when questions of “Why” and “How” sear our souls and when grief feels overwhelming. We might feel like we are losing all that we hold dear.

Yet God will always be with us; Mary experienced this truth too. She treasured God’s words and the promises she received. She endured to see the glory of resurrection. Mary’s insight and understanding of Jesus also grew over time. The longer that she was with Jesus, the better she was able to understand what God was doing through Him.

Perhaps you have experienced something like this. You might start out thinking that God’s solution to a problem is so obvious, only to find yourself waiting and wondering. Over time, we can find a new understanding of the depths of God’s love. You might find yourself relating to different parts of Mary’s story:

- Joyful at words of salvation and a message from God
- Curious about ways that God configures the details of your life
- Expectant for God to act to do great and miraculous things
- Grief-stricken by injustice or pain and struggling to comprehend what God is doing

Like Mary, we should be prepared to be with Jesus through all of these times. Mary welcomed the invitation to be God’s servant before she knew all that would be required. She would tell us to make the same choice.

1 What part of Mary’s story draws your attention, perhaps because you relate to the emotions she was experiencing?

2 How has your understanding of Jesus stayed consistent over time?

3 How have you come to know Jesus better?

Trusting God to See Me Through

Mary was present for Christ's birth, His first public signs, and His crucifixion. We have the advantage of hindsight to know the miraculous outcome of each of these scenes, but Mary only had her trust in God to give her hope. In what area of your life are you relying on God's power to see you through? Share with a partner what it means to be with Jesus and trust Him at this time.

I choose to trust that God will provide in _____.

Key Text

But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.
—Luke 2:19 KJV

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.
—Luke 2:19 NIV

Quiet Hour[®] and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of July 27 through August 1

- Mon.** Isaiah 55:6–11—Seek the Lord.
- Tue.** Jude 20–25—Wait for Christ's Mercy.
- Wed.** John 14:1–7—Jesus is the Way.
- Thu.** Psalm 50:7–15—Call on the Lord.
- Fri.** Deuteronomy 4:27–31—God is Merciful.
- Sat.** John 20:19–23—Jesus Appears to the Disciples.

Next Week: John 11:14–16; 14:5–8; 20:24–29; 21:1–2

You might be surprised to find that Thomas appears in three chapters of John's Gospel. What do you know about his character and faith?