

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS
Luke 1-2
Baraca Radio Sunday School Class
First Baptist Church, Anderson, South Carolina
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INTRODUCTION

Mary, the mother of Jesus is highly revered by Roman Catholics. They speak of her as the Mother of God, and they pray to her. On the other hand, most Protestants practically ignore Mary once we get past Christmas. But on this Mothers Day 2012, I would like for us to find a happy medium. If we look at several passages in the New Testament in which Mary appears, I believe we can gain a deeper appreciation for this woman whom God chose to be the mother of Jesus.

Unquestionably, Mary's most prominent appearance in the Gospels comes in the stories of Jesus's birth. But she is on the scene from time to time throughout His ministry and at His death. So we will look at several of these biblical passages with Mary in today's study.

BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN

As Protestants, we get a little edgy when we hear Catholics saying, "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." But if we were better students of the Bible, we would know most of those words are direct quotes from two verses in the King James Version of the first chapter of Luke.

The angel Gabriel appears to Mary to tell her that she is to be the mother of Jesus. In verse 28, he says, *Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.*

Later, when Mary goes to stay with her older cousin Elizabeth, we hear more of those words from Elizabeth. In verse 42, Elizabeth echoes the words of the angel, *Blessed art thou among women.* Then she adds, *and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.*

So, when Catholics say, *the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women* and *blessed is the fruit of thy womb*, they are quoting directly from the Gospel of Luke in the King James Version. Even if we acknowledge that, we may still get nervous when we hear Catholics praying the rest of that Hail Mary prayer: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death." We don't think we need anyone else to intercede for us in order for us to make contact with God, either "now" or "at the hour of our death."

If you are an avid football fan, you know the term "Hail Mary" has slipped into the vocabulary of that sport. Football has what is known as a "Hail Mary pass." This play occurs in the last seconds of the first half or the last few seconds of the game. The quarterback throws a long forward pass into the endzone. A pass that would need a miracle to succeed, thrown at a time when there is no chance of any other play being successful (infoplease.com).

The term apparently was first brought over from the rosary in a game between the Dallas Cowboys and the Minnesota Vikings in 1975. With Dallas trailing in the final seconds, Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach threw a fifty-yard pass which Drew Pearson caught in the endzone. That near miraculous turn-around got dubbed as a "Hail Mary" (Tyree). It obviously borrows from the seemingly impossible idea of a young woman having a baby without a human father.

But the apparent impossibility of a virgin birth, as we understand biology, is presented both in Luke and Matthew as the circumstance of the birth of Jesus. We may question or doubt the report, but a story which has been around for nearly two thousand years can hardly be proved or disproved by scientific research. But whatever you make of that story, it is our introduction to Mary, the mother of Jesus. We see her in this account as a young woman who is sensitive to the work of God in her life.

Though she is uneasy and uncertain at first, she comes to understand that a miracle is being wrought. So she offers herself as a servant to God:

Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her (Luke 1:38).

As she is coming to terms with what is happening to her, spiritually as well as physically, Mary goes to spend three months with Elizabeth, apparently staying until Elizabeth, in her advanced age, gives birth to the baby who will be known as John the Baptist.

When Mary arrives at the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah and receives the words of acknowledgment and blessing from Elizabeth, Mary sings a song of praise to God, for what God is doing in her life and in the lives of all who fear God:

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation (Luke 1:48-50).

A REFLECTIVE NEW MOTHER

After she reaches understanding of how God is working in her life, Mary shows no further sign of doubt. Luke continues the story as Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem for the census:

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn (Luke 2:6-7).

This is the heart of our Christmas story. Angels tell shepherds about the wondrous Baby who has been born. The grubby workmen hurry to the manger and are amazed at what they see. Then, as they go back to their sheep, they tell everyone in sight about what they have seen.

When [the shepherds] saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them (Luke 2:17-20).

At this point, we see another characteristic of Mary: *Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.*

After the visit of the shepherds, Mary's next episode comes eight days later when she and Joseph take Jesus to the Temple for the rituals of circumcision and dedication. She has further reason to ponder as the elderly Simeon blesses the child. Simeon offers two words of prophecy regarding her Son. He identifies Jesus as one who will bring salvation to all people, gentiles as well as their fellow Jews. He will be *a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel (Luke 2:32).*

But Simeon also sees difficulties in Jesus's life which will trouble Mary: *'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too' (Luke 2:34-35).*

Those words must have been troubling to Mary. And, as we think of motherhood in general on this Mother's Day, the hearts of many young mothers would be darkened if they could look down the future years and learn what their children would face and what they as parents would face because of their children.

Not every new mother sees the miracles Mary saw when Jesus was born. But every new mother has occasion to treasure and ponder what she sees and hears with the birth of her son or daughter.

On this Baraca broadcast, I've mentioned the newest birth in my extended family out in Texas. I have a little niece -- actually a great, great niece who was born prematurely. Her name is Bailey Suggs. Little Bailey had quite a struggle getting started in life because she came earlier than normal.

She was in and out and in and out of the hospital. Pansy and I kept up with our little niece's difficulties mainly through things her mother Rachel writes on Facebook. Rachael is a sincere Christian and devoted mother, but she was also struggling. Like Mary, Rachael does a lot of treasuring and pondering. She treasures the fact that her little daughter is here, but she pondered how long it would take Bailey to be able to breath normally and to take nourishment normally.

The baby now is home with Daddy Joe and Mama Rachael after many weeks in the hospital. They are grateful for God's provision and appreciative of the many people who prayed for their little daughter Bailey. Again, like Mary, Rachael has so much to ponder in her heart as a young mother.

HER BOY IS GROWING

After the visit with Simeon in the Temple, the next thing we see in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is in the Temple again. This time, He's twelve years old. He has been schooled in Jewish teachings, both at home and at the synagogue. The family has gone up from Nazareth to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

They made the trip in the company of other families from their area, and Jesus has had considerable freedom of movement along with other boys His age. So much so that, on the return trip, Joseph and Mary have gone a day's journey before they realize Jesus isn't with them.

When they miss Him, they retrace their steps, in a panic mode, no doubt. They probably ask people all along the way back to Jerusalem about any signs of a boy by himself. In time, they get all the way back to Jerusalem and eventually find Him in the Temple, in conversation with some of the teachers. Everyone is impressed

with His understanding of things spiritual (v. 47). Everyone but His parents. Mary calls Him to task, but He says He must be about His Father's business. They don't understand. So they take Him home. Luke tells us, from then on, Jesus was obedient to them (v. 51).

Remember, Jesus is twelve years old at this point. Luke says He grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and with people (2:52). Thirteen is the age when a Jewish boy is recognized as a man, a Son of the Law. So Jesus is a year away from that milestone.

Every son or daughter reaches the point of wanting and needing to declare a measure of independence. That's a rough time for parent and child. It must have been for Mary and Joseph.

Every father, every mother watches with mixed feelings at that son or daughter begins to pull away. At the mall yesterday, I saw a boy of ten or eleven with his dad. The boy was hanging on to his dad's arm or waist and then, alternately, poking at his dad or elbowing his dad in the ribs. No longer the docile child who clung to the parent. The child no longer a child. No longer wants to be hugged and cuddled. Mary must have gone through that stage with Jesus. After they got back home to Nazareth, we're told once more, His mother treasured all these things in her heart (v. 51).

HER ADULT SON

There's nothing more in the Gospel records until Jesus is a grown man. Joseph drops out of the picture after Jesus is twelve. The general assumption among Bible scholars is that Joseph is dead. Many think he was a great deal older than Mary, but there's nothing in the Scriptures to indicate the age of either Joseph or Mary. We only know there is no sign of Joseph after Jesus begins His ministry.

On the other hand, we have indications that things weren't always peaceful between Mary and her adult Son. And with Jesus and His brothers and sisters. Let's consider an example or two:

In the Fourth Gospel, at the wedding feast in Cana, there's a bit of tension between Jesus and Mary when the wine runs out. She tells Him about the shortage, with the clear expectation that He will do something about it. His immediate response is not clear, depending on what translation you read. Is He saying, "What does that have to do with me?" Or is He saying, "Don't worry about it?" Either way, Jesus soon takes action. Mary believes He *will* do something, so she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them. The upshot is that we see the first miracle which John's Gospel records: Jesus turns water into wine.

That incident at the wedding may be subject to differing interpretations, but Matthew (12:46-50) tells of a time when Jesus plays down the significance of the family circle He was born into:

While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, 'Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.' But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' And pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'

These words stung. Mary must have pondered those words too. But Jesus was saying, there are times when the things of God are more important than our traditional family relationships. He was also saying, We must broaden our understanding of life relationships. We have to reach out in loving acceptance to those beyond the family we grew up in. There are lots of other people who need to feel included in God's family.

As we go along, I'm bringing in present-day examples which may offer some parallels that can help us see how Mary may have felt at various stages in relation to her firstborn Son.

A modern songwriter put words into the mouth of a woman who assumed legal guardianship of her nephew. This is from the Broadway musical, *Mame*. Mame did the best she knew in raising Patrick. But, one day, he asserted his independence and left his aunt who had filled the role of his mother. As she looked back, she wondered what she might have done differently:

Did he need a stronger hand?
Did he need a lighter touch?
Was I soft or was I tough?
Did I give enough?
Did I give too much?
At the moment when he needed me,
Did I ever turn away?
Would I be there when he called,
If he walked into my life today. . . .
And there must have been a million things.

That my heart forgot to say.
Would I think of one or two,
If he walked into my life today.
Should I blame the times I pampered him,
Or blame the times I bossed him;
What a shame!
I never really found the boy,
Before I lost him . . .
So I'd ask myself my whole life long,
What went wrong along the way?
Would I make the same mistakes,
If he walked into my life today (Jerry Herman).

Every conscientious parent surely asks himself or herself those questions, looking back at missed opportunities as sons and daughters leave the nest and find their own places in life. I'm sure Mary was no exception in the matter of looking back and asking.

ROLE REVERSAL

From the manger in Bethlehem to the wedding in Cana, Mary was close at hand, caring for her Son. Even when He seemed to care more for strangers than for her and her other children, Mary was as close-by as she could get -- even to the end of His earthly life. The Fourth Gospel pictures her standing near the cross as her Son was hanging there near death.

At that point, we see a kind of role reversal. As His life blood is draining from His body, one of His last cries from the cross is a word of caring for His mother. He showed concern for others in His earlier words, For those who were driving the nails, He cries, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." For the repentant thief hanging nearby, Jesus promises, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23). Now, shortly before He declares, "It is finished," He assigns the care for Mary to the man known only as "the Beloved Disciple":

[S]tanding near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home (John 19:25-27).

Her heart was broken as she watched Him die. Still, there was a spark of thankfulness as she saw the love she had poured into Him for thirty years coming back to her. What more could a loving mother ask from her child!

Never Enough

On this Mothers Day, as we think of mothers such as Mary who give so much to their children, let me read part of a poem by LaBrashia B. Kelley, called "Never Enough":

Sometimes I know the words to say to give thanks for all you've done,
But then they fly up and away as quickly as they come.

How could I possibly thank you enough, the one who makes me whole,
the one to whom I owe my life, the forming of my soul.

The one who tucked me in at night, the one who stopped my crying,
the one who was the expert, at picking up when I was lying.

The one who saw me off to school and spent sad days alone,
yet magically produced a smile, as soon as I came home.

The one who makes such sacrifices to always put me first,
who lets me test my broken wings, in spite of how it hurts.

Who paints the world a rainbow when it's filled with broken dreams,
who explains it all so clearly when nothing is what it seems.

Are there really any words for this, I find this question tough,
anything I want to say just doesn't seem enough.

What way is there to thank you for your heart, your sweat, your tears,
for ten thousand things you've done for oh so many years.

For changing with me as I changed, accepting all my flaws,
not loving cause you had to, but loving just because . . . (Kelley).

BENEDICTION

Now this final word for this weekø Baraca Radio Sunday School Class from Andersonø First Baptist Church:

If you want to share the kind of self-giving love weøve seen today in the mother of Jesus, claim these promises:

Godø love that will never let you go.

Godø grace that is greater than all your sin.

Godø peace that passes all understanding.

These are yours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS---SOURCES

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<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204301404577173301728098714.html>

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Never Enough

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For never giving up on me when your wits had reached its end, for always being proud of me, for being my best friend.

And so I come to realize, the only way to say, the only thank you that's enough is clear in just one way.

Look at me before you see what I've become, do you see yourself in me, the job that you have done?

All your hopes and all your dreams, the strength that no one sees, A transfer over many years, your best was to pass me.

Thank you for the gifts you give for everything you do, but thank you mommy most of all for making dreams come true.

Source: [Never Enough, Mother Child Poem http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/never-enough-2#ixzz1tvI9roLI](http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/never-enough-2#ixzz1tvI9roLI)
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