

Mary, the mother of Jesus

There are many characters involved in any Christmas pageant: Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, the shepherds, the Wisemen, the innkeeper and the vicious King Herod. Out of all the names of the characters, we have a very special place for Mary in our hearts.

Whenever we hear the name Mary from the stories of the Bible, we automatically think of Mary, the mother of Jesus our Savior and Lord. Rightly so. No other person in human history had the responsibility of raising the Savior God Himself.

What amazes me is that Mary was only a teenager herself. Can you imagine a girl of fourteen to sixteen years old who was visited by an angel to be told that she would be pregnant and the Child is the Son of the Highest?

If Mary was an American teenager she might have said this:

"Check this out. Last night I had an angel come by my room. He was totally cool. His clothes were shining. I am sure that he was wearing designer clothes, probably Tommy Hilfiger or Guess. Anyway, he told me that the Holy Spirit is going to come upon me and I will be pregnant with a boy. And get this, His name is Jesus and will be called the Son of the Highest. And I am gonna be His mommy. Isn't that cool?"

This Christmas morning, we are going to have a brief review of the life of Mary – how she handled this special event of her life as the one favored by God.

A. YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE A BABY, MARY

Luke 1:26-38 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, (1) highly favored one, (2) the Lord is with you; (3) blessed are you among women!" 29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. 30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." 34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" 35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing will be impossible." 38 Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Nazareth was a village seventy miles northeast of Jerusalem. It was a tough town, known for its corruption and low morals.

Mary is to be betrothed to Joseph. That means that she is about to have a wedding soon with Joseph. When a couple was betrothed, they were under the obligation of faithfulness, and a divorce was required to break the betrothal. This was not a casual promise.

The angel Gabriel has three things to say to Mary: First, that she is highly favored. Second, that the Lord is with her. Third, that she is blessed. All this was certainly true of Mary, who has a unique privilege among any person to ever live.

The Roman Catholic prayer that begins "Hail Mary, full of grace" is accurate. Mary was full of grace, and so are all believers. But Mary's grace was a received grace from God, not grace to hand out to others.

Mary knew exactly what the angel was talking about because she was a woman of the Word of God. When he said she will conceive in her womb and bring forth a Son, she knew he was quoting from Isaiah 7:14.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

Mary's question is logical. She asks basically the same question Zacharias asked, but his question was asked in skeptical unbelief, her question was asked in wonder-filled faith.

The angel answers that the power of the Highest, the Holy Spirit, will overshadow her. The word 'overshadow' means "to cover with a cloud," like the cloud of Shekinah glory.

Mary then responds with an affirmation of faith. "Let it be to me according to Your word" is the proper response of every believer of Jesus.

All this took more trust in the Lord than we might think. Mary agreed to receive a pregnancy. She completely understood unavoidable false accusations and stares from the neighbors and most of all from Joseph. They would talk about her as having an illegitimate child out of wedlock from a Roman soldier like many young girls did in her hometown Nazareth. It would bring an embarrassment to her family, not to mention a death penalty for adultery to her. But her faith in God overcomes all these instantly. Mary was obedient to the Lord.

B. THE BIRTH OF CHRIST OUR LORD

Luke 2:6-7 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Many people collect the Nativity scene pictures and figurines. I haven't found any Nativity scene image that really portrays the true picture. All the stables I have visited so far wouldn't be considered sanitary, attractive or fit for the King of kings and the Lord of the lords. Yet, God the Father chose this humble stable to bring forth the Savior of the world.

In that stinky and dirty stable, the brand new mom and dad couldn't even offer a clean and fancy crib for the Baby to lie down in or a pair of warm jammies to put on Him. They wrapped the Baby in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger the animals used to eat from.

While Mary was nursing the Baby that seemed-so-helpless, she couldn't stop thinking about the fact that she was holding the Almighty God who held back the water of the Red Sea so that the Israelites could go across on the bottom of the sea floor.

While Mary was touching the Baby's rosy cheeks, she couldn't stop thinking about the fact that she was looking at the face of God which even Moses was not allowed to see.

While Mary was holding the Baby's tiny hands, she couldn't stop thinking about the fact that these are the hands which flung all the stars into the universe and can measure the universe with a span of His hand.

C. A SWORD WILL PIERCE THROUGH YOUR OWN SOUL ALSO

Luke 2:33-35 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35 (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Joseph and Mary brought Baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to dedicate Him to the Lord. There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ the Messiah.

Led by the Holy Spirit, he encountered Joseph, Mary and the Baby Messiah in the flesh. He prophesied and also gave the word of knowledge to Mary as the Spirit of God gave it to him.

Mary didn't know how her Baby Jesus' life would unfold until now. Somehow the last sentence that came out from the lips of Simeon was ringing in her ears as they were leaving the temple, "Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also."

Mary received God's will over her desire for her Son's safety.

D. MARY CAME TO TAKE JESUS HOME

Ever since Jesus, the first born of Mary, the Son of the Most High, started His earthly ministry, Mary has been hearing bits and pieces of news about him. The news told her that he had been healing many, many people from their sickness, casting out demons out of demon-possessed people and feeding thousands people with a mere five loaves of bread and two fish.

But at the same time He was making many enemies whom she doesn't want her Son to go against. They were Pharisees and scribes with authority. After all, they said, "Jesus is just a carpenter's son." But it seems that it didn't bother Jesus to go toe to toe with these powerful people.

Now, even some of His own brothers like Judas and James were telling her that they heard Jesus was losing His mind and going crazy and claiming that He is the Son of Man.

She had to do something to protect Him, so she came to Jesus at the Sea of Galilee.
Matt 12:46-50 While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. 47 Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." 48 But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" 49 And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! 50

For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

The answer she got from Jesus was a quick wake-up call for her soul. She almost forgot that He was the One who came from heaven above. This was something He must do and endure everything to get His job done on this earth.

Mary quietly backed off from the presence of her Son never to bother Him again with her doubt. Did she love Him? A thousand times yes. Was she concerned about His safety? Many times yes. But she somehow knew that the comment by the old man Simeon whom she and her husband, Joseph, met at the temple over thirty years ago will soon come true.

E. WATCHING HER SON THE KING DYING ON THE CROSS

John 19:25-27 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" 27 Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

The comment by the old man Simeon came true. Mary was standing at the foot of the cross of her Son Jesus. I am sure that the joy and laughter they had together became fleeing scenes in front of her teary eyes.

The crucifixion was capital punishment for common criminals by the Roman government. She knew that Jesus was not a common criminal. As a matter of fact, she could not remember one single incident where He did anything wrong in His life since He was a Baby. He'd never disobeyed her, never fought with His siblings. Her neighbors always mentioned what a wonderful Son she had, until now.

Even in the midst of His excruciating pain, Jesus looked at her and He assigned His disciple John to take care of her.

Mary didn't have the knowledge of the doctrine of the incarnation – God becoming flesh to save the spiritually and physically dying human race, nor did she understand how God was going to orchestrate the whole thing after her Son's crucifixion. But there was one thing clear in her mind: it is that Mary herself needed the Savior Jesus Christ to redeem her own sins just like everyone in the world.

That was why she stood at the bottom of the cross watching her Son the Savior of the world die as the Lamb of God.

If she could, she would tell us not to worship her like some do, but to worship the Savior Jesus Christ alone. There is nothing wrong with respecting Mary for her courage and devotion to Jesus, but we should not put her on a pedestal.

F. INCARNATION - GOD IN FLESH

Some people have a hard time believing in the Virgin Birth. If you believe the Bible, you need to believe in the Virgin Birth. The Bible teaches that God Almighty Jesus was supernaturally conceived in the womb of a virgin. Actually, this makes sense if you think about it.

If God had chosen to, He could have sent Jesus to this earth as a fully grown, yet sinless human being. A shaft of light could have come out from heaven with Jesus descending to the ground as an adult man. But if Jesus came to us in that way, who could have related to Him as a person, as a part of the human race?

God also could have had Jesus come into the world through two ordinary human beings – but still with a divine nature. But then most of us would have doubted His divinity. That's why the Incarnation makes sense.

Philippians 2:5-11 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The event of the incarnation is the reason for the Christmas season. Christmas is the opportunity to worship God, to bow down and pay homage to Him for humbling Himself and appearing in human form. That stands as the true mystery of the Incarnation and the reason we celebrate Christmas.