

Mary, Mother of our Lord

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Luke 1:39-55

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Once upon a time Jesus went out to take a good look around at heaven, to make sure that it was still a city that worked:

*As he walked, he saw that everything was fine—the hedges were trimmed, the green grass was cut, the fountains were clean and flowing, the gold and silver and the ivory all polished.

*He stopped by to hear the angel choir in rehearsal, and they were in great form

*Then, on one of the side streets, he ran into some people who had no business being in heaven at all!

*Some of them should have been somewhere else; others wouldn't get in until the Last Judgement; others would only make it into heaven on a very special appeal

*So, he went to complain to St. Peter: "Hey, you've let me down again. And you with the keys to the kingdom of heaven."

* "I have not," said Peter. "Well, how did they get in, then?" asked Jesus.

* "I didn't let them in." "Well, who did?!"

* "You won't like it..." "Come on, now, I have a right to know what happened."

* "Well," said Peter, "they came to the front gate and I turned them all down, every single one. And wouldn't you know it? Didn't they go around to the back door, and didn't your mother let them in!"

Now, theologically this story is nonsense—but it does reflect a common view of Mary, especially if you grew up Catholic: the idea that no one is more sympathetic than the Blessed Mother—and no one has better connections!

A strong devotion to Mary is a part of the faith-life of many Christian believers around the world. My daughter's grandma, who was a devout Catholic, went on pilgrimages to all the places in the world where apparitions of Mary are said to have appeared: Lourdes, France; Fatima in Portugal; Mexico City, for the Virgin of Guadalupe; and Medjugorje in Bosnia. Mary's role in her personal faith was huge.

For some of us, this devotion can seem strange. Do you think of Mary except at Advent and Christmas-time? We picture her in a blue robe, a beautiful smile on her face, certainly not looking like a woman who has just given birth!

If you grew up in the Protestant church, this may be the only time you've ever heard a sermon about her *except at Christmas*.

So, think with me for a minute about what else we know about Mary of Nazareth, particularly from the scriptures:

--She was young when she gave birth to Jesus, perhaps 14, 15, 16 years old, usual that once a girl could bear children, she was betrothed

--Despite all those childhood pictures we have of a Mary who looks like she's from the midwest, she was from the middle east, from a town that was nothing, no place—"Podunk" Nazareth

--Extraordinary things happened to her before and after Jesus' birth: angels spoke to her, wise men visited, prophets in the Temple told her the baby was the Messiah

--She dealt with a teenage Jesus, who disappeared on a trip to Jerusalem when he was 12. When she found him, she said "Why did you do that? Don't you know how worried your father and I were?" (sound familiar to some?)

--At one point in Jesus' ministry, she sent his brothers to try and bring him home, because people were saying he was demon-possessed

--She was at the foot of the cross and she watched her son die.

--And...the Bible tells us that she was with the group of disciples who received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost--she was a disciple, a follower

This is no "holier than thou" Mother of God, removed from the work and the joys and worries and pain of the real world—she is flesh and blood, human just like we are, chosen to be part of the salvation story, but not chosen because she was somehow perfect.

So what do we gain from knowing her, and from celebrating her life today?

I think the answer to that lies in today's Gospel reading.

Prior to the verses we heard today, the angel Gabriel comes and tells Mary that she will be the mother of the Son of God—in an instant, her life would be changed

Like anyone, she asks “How can this be?” Gabriel replies: “Nothing is impossible with God.”

And that’s enough. Enough for Mary to be able to reply “Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it happen just as you say.”

That trust is continued as she goes to visit Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. There, she proclaims this beautiful poem we heard today, not about herself, but about God’s graciousness. She *magnifies* the Lord--witnesses to God’s greatness--because:

God has lifted up the lowly and forgotten, people who think they are nothing. And God is keeping all God’s promises in this coming Messiah. Jesus’ life will embody God’s love and grace that is for all people. All. Unconditionally.

Imagine—God hasn’t given Mary the whole script! She isn’t thinking to herself “Okay, so Joseph will still marry me, then it’s off to Bethlehem, Herod will almost kill the new baby but we’ll escape, then back to Nazareth, eventually my son will be crucified but it’s okay because he’ll rise again and the world will be changed...”

No way!—she is just walking by faith in what God has said so far...she is just **living by faith**, like....us

Like us...We struggle; we long to believe—events in the world and in our own lives test and squeeze our trust in God’s promises; we even turn our back on God’s love and grace. We don’t know all that will happen in our lives. We don’t have a script for the future--if we did, we all would have asked for a re-write for the last year, right?

No script, no ability to see the future, to see the outcomes of all the choices we make, the paths we follow.

Each day, you and I simply walk by faith, as Mary did: Day by day, holding onto the promises we have in Jesus: love and grace and forgiveness that is unending and reaches every person; love and grace and forgiveness that we can taste and touch in this meal, bread for our journey in and with Christ.

