

## MARY AND THE CELEBRATION OF MOTHERHOOD

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Imagine a situation similar to what our friends at Allyfe and First Choice, the Las Vegas prolife pregnancy centers, often encounter. A young, teenage gal shows up for counseling. She just discovered that she is pregnant. Her boyfriend does not yet know, although the two of them are engaged. The expectation is that religious parents on both sides will be upset by the news. This girl comes from a small town and will likely face disapproval from the people around her. Her economic circumstances are poor.

What kind of advice do you suppose that she would get? It would depend upon the world view of the counselor, wouldn't it? The prolife pregnancy centers would have an entirely different perspective than a representative of Planned Parenthood. Some counselors would recommend an abortion. Some counselors would encourage that the young woman consider giving up the child for adoption. Most would probably try to prepare the girl for a difficult road ahead.

The scenario that I have presented is a description of the circumstances which faced Mary, the mother of Jesus. Given her external circumstances, many would regard her as an unlikely candidate to be the mother of the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. Yet of all of the women in the world, she is the one that the Lord God of heaven picked to be the mother of Jesus. So on this Mother's Day I would like to conduct a brief survey of her life to see what things we can learn from her which might be of some benefit to us.

This holiday brings out strong emotions in many people. Some women among us have never had the opportunity to be a mother. Some mothers have experienced the tragedy of losing a child. Many of us have lost our mothers. This is the first Mother's Day that I have had in several decades in which I do not have the mother of my children around to honor.

All of us have had a mom. As a result of our study today, hopefully we will be reminded of the things about them that we should appreciate, especially in a world that tends to under appreciate motherhood. Hopefully we will also have a greater appreciation of the God who created them.

I.

The first thing that I find is that MARY'S EXAMPLE SHOWS THAT MOTHERHOOD SHOULD BRING GREAT JOY. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. MARY'S EXAMPLE SHOWS...) The New Testament Gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us that the angel Gabriel showed up in the Galilean village of Nazareth and told Mary that she was going to be the mother of the Messiah. Although Mary was engaged to Joseph, she did not understand how

this could be, since she was a virgin. The angel explained that the Holy Spirit would impregnate her. Gabriel also encouraged her to visit her cousin Elizabeth.

Mary did get pregnant. Apparently she did not tell anyone about it at first. She realized that no one would believe her story. So she went to visit Elizabeth. Elizabeth was pregnant with John the Baptist. She somehow knew that Mary was the mother of the Messiah, and she gave support to Mary. She told Mary that she was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Mary was realizing some of the difficulties that she was facing. She had not told Joseph yet about her pregnancy. Initially he would set out to divorce her. She was aware that her family and her fellow villagers might not believe her story. In the face of all of this, she made an inspired declaration in the presence of her cousin Elizabeth.

In Luke #1 (LUKE 1:46-47) beginning in v. 46, we read, **“And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, (LUKE 1:48) for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed...’”** In the face of the obstacles that she faced, Mary experienced great joy in her motherhood.

Certainly Mary's motherhood was unique. But the manner in which the Godhead chose to have the Son of God enter our world points to the important role of motherhood. (PROJECTOR OFF) Sarah Ockwell-Smith is a British psychologist and parenting expert. She writes in her book, *The Gentle Parenting Book*, **“Mothers today are the least valued when compared with mothers at any other time in history. Motherhood is increasingly ill respected and ill regarded. Mothers lack support and their contribution to society is seen as lacking... In particular, mothers who choose to stay at home and raise their children are seen as an unnecessary drain on society's resources.”** This attitude which has come to permeate our society has resulted in a birth rate among American women of an average of a little over 1.6 kids per woman. Society cannot ultimately sustain itself with such a low birth rate.

This attitude toward motherhood is certainly not God's perspective. The first four of the Ten Commandments focus upon man's responsibility to God. The last six of the Commandments focus upon the responsibility of human beings toward one another. First on that second part of the list is the Fifth Commandment (PROJECTOR ON--- EXODUS 20:12), which declares, **“Honor your father and mother...”** Our responsibility is to honor moms, partly for the purpose that they can experience the joy that is rightfully theirs.

II.

Next, MARY'S EXAMPLE SHOWS THAT MOTHERHOOD REQUIRES TRUST IN GOD IN THE MIDST OF A HOSTILE WORLD. (III. MARY'S EXAMPLE SHOWS...) There are four incidents in the life of Mary that demonstrate the challenges that she faced in parenting. Some of them were unique in regard to the special child that she raised. But they are also representative of the challenges that we parents face in raising children in

a world that is increasingly hostile toward the values we seek to instill in our kids and the safety that we try to provide them.

The **first** incident occurs shortly after the birth of Jesus. After three months with Elizabeth, Mary returned to Nazareth. It became obvious that she was pregnant. Joseph was going to divorce her until the angel Gabriel appeared to him. So Joseph took Mary as his wife. An empire-wide census that required men to show up at their ancestral home town provided the excuse for Joseph and Mary to leave the judgmentalism that they probably faced in Nazareth. So it was in Bethlehem, a few miles south of Jerusalem, that Jesus was born.

The Old Testament law said that a mother was ceremonially unclean after the birth of a child. A boy was to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. After an additional 33 days, the mom was to offer a sacrifice at the temple for her cleansing. Also the son was to be presented to the Lord, with an additional offering.

So Joseph and Mary brought Jesus with them to the temple in Jerusalem to fulfill these religious obligations. While they were there, they encountered Simeon. He is described as being righteous and devout. It had been revealed to him that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. Somehow he met up with the family of Jesus in the temple. He took Jesus in his arms and pronounced a blessing. He describes Jesus as a light to the Gentiles and a glory to the Jews.

Then in Luke #2 vv. 34 & 35 (LUKE 2:34) we find this: **“And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (LUKE 2:35) (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.’”**

A sword was going to pierce through Mary’s soul. How do you suppose that this prophecy played on Mary’s mind? Jesus was going to turn out to be someone great. Yet she was going to experience great sadness. I wonder how often during the course of her life that prophecy would come to Mary’s mind. So in this first scene Mary is warned that she will experience some kind of great sadness in regard to what happens with her son. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The **second** scene played out a year or two later. Joseph and Mary chose to remain in Bethlehem. The shepherds based in that village had received a visit from angels and had been informed that the son of Joseph and Mary would be someone special. So the atmosphere for raising a baby was probably much more positive than would have been the case in Nazareth in Galilee. The villagers here probably did not know the whole story about Joseph not being the actual father of Jesus.

A year or so later the magi showed up in Bethlehem. These wise men were top government advisors from somewhere in the east who dabbled in astrology and other mystical arts. Somehow they figured out that a Jewish king had been born. They came

to Jerusalem, asking about the birth of this king. Herod the Great received these foreign dignitaries. He asked the chief priests and scribes what they knew about the birthplace of a promised Jewish king. They were aware of the prophecy in the Old Testament book of Micah about Bethlehem being the birthplace of Israel's Messiah. So Herod sent them to Bethlehem with instructions to let him know what they found.

They followed a star to Bethlehem and found the special family. They provided Joseph and Mary with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh and gave special honor to the baby Jesus. Because of a dream they received, they did not return home via Jerusalem. It was then that Joseph had another visit from an angel. (PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 2:13) According to #2 v. 13 in the Gospel of Matthew, **"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.'"**

So it was that Joseph and Mary and Jesus became refugees and immigrants. The generous material gift from the magi now became a lifeline. They had money to support themselves for a time in Egypt. Joseph had carpentry skills that may also have sustained them. It would be a year or two or more before they would get word that Herod had died and that it was safe to return to their homeland. It would also have been a while before they heard what had happened in Bethlehem.

King Herod the Great was known to be paranoid and bloodthirsty. He had killed several of his own wives and kids. In Matthew #2 v. 16 (MATTHEW 2:16) we are told, **"Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem, and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men."** By this time, it became clear to Mary that she was living in a hostile world and that there were forces who were out to kill her son. In order to be a successful mother, she was going to have to maintain a strong trust in the Lord.

Jennifer Nicole Reindl learned something about the dangerous world in which she was raising her son. Several years ago her son Trenton (TRENTON MCKINLEY) was riding in a utility trailer that was being pulled by a dune buggy. When the driver put on the brakes, the trailer flipped and landed on Trenton's head. Trenton was rushed to a Mobile, Alabama, hospital. But his heart stopped. It was fifteen minutes before he was revived. He had seven skull fractures, and his heart stopped three more times.

Trenton was put on life support, but he showed no brain activity. The doctors warned that if he somehow pulled through, he would be nothing more than a vegetable because of the lack of oxygen that he had experienced in his brain. According to Jennifer the doctors **"said the next time his heart stopped they had to let him die... or I could sign a paper to donate his organs to save five other kids. So I signed it..."**

The day before the doctors were scheduled to pull the plug, Trenton's brain began working. Soon he was walking with the assistance of a walker and shooting baskets in

the gym. He still has seizures and still had a long recovery process ahead of him. But he made it. Jennifer told a reporter for *USA Today*, **“God did for my son what he did for his own... And I am so honored to have him back. This is my testimony... God is good.”** (USA Today, 5/6/2018) It is an often hostile world in which we live. There are many dangers we face in raising kids. Jennifer learned through her experience, as did Mary, that we need to trust in God. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Consider a **third** incident in the child raising experience of Mary. Most of Jesus’ public ministry took place in Galilee, in the northern part of what we call Israel today. When Joseph and Mary returned from Egypt to Israel, Jesus was still a young child. The family at that time moved back to Nazareth. When Jesus began His public ministry, He made Capernaum on the north shore of Galilee His home base. During this time, He made a visit to Nazareth. No mention is made of Joseph, once Jesus’ public ministry begins. It appears that he has died, and Mary is now a widow. This is another situation in which Mary is learning trust in God.

Jesus has by this time developed a reputation for performing miraculous deeds. Mary had to be proud of her son. Jesus showed up at the synagogue in Nazareth. Probably Mary was present to hear Him speak. What happened is described in Luke #4 vv. 16-21. (If you would like to follow along as I read the story, you can look in the black Bibles on p. 859.) Beginning in v. 16, we read, **“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ‘The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”** Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah prophesied in Isaiah.

Jesus knows the hearts of these fellow Jews in his home town. He knows that they do not buy His claim to be the Messiah. They know Him and His family. How can He claim to be the Messiah? They want to see Him do one of the miracles that they have heard about. But Jesus goes on to say that prophets are never accepted in their own hometown. He tells two stories from the Bible where prophets went to Gentiles and received a much more favorable reception than from Jews. This really ticks off the people in the Nazareth congregation.

Thus we read (PROJECTOR ON--- LUKE 4:28), beginning in v. 28 of Luke 4, **“When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. (LUKE 4:29) And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. (LUKE 4:30) But passing through their midst, he went away.”** Perhaps the only

miracle that the Nazareth Jews got was the escape of Jesus from their murderous intentions.

But imagine the effect that this must have had on Mary. It is very likely that she witnessed this incident. This was her son, of which she was proud. But this was also her own congregation (PROJECTOR OFF). These were her friends and probably extended family members. They were trying to kill her son. How could this be? Imagine the pain that this must have caused her. It was another sword piercing her soul. It was a hostile world, and it required trust in God.

Consider a **fourth** incident, which demonstrated the hostility of the world to the maximum extent. It was the crucifixion of Jesus. Mary was a part of a group of Jesus followers who came to Jerusalem with Jesus for the Passover week that preceded the death of Jesus. In Mark #15 v. 41 (PROJECTOR ON--- MARK 15:41) we are told, **“When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.”**

So Mary must have had some awareness of the arrest of Jesus by the religious leaders and His trial before the Sanhedrin. The Gospels indicate that she was present for the crucifixion of Jesus. The Apostle John writes in #19 of his Gospel (JOHN 19:25) in v. 25, **“...but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”** All of the apostles were absent from this scene, except for John. They were afraid. But the mother of Jesus was there.

Imagine the emotions that Mary must have experienced during the six hours when Jesus hung on the cross. She saw the torture that he endured. I suspect that she remembered the prophecy that Simeon had made so many years earlier. Her soul experienced piercing as she watched her son. She endured the agony that every mother experiences in losing a child. But this was worse than almost every other such tragedy. She saw people intentionally killing her son in a long, drawn-out process. She was helpless to stop it. She also probably could not figure out how the promises that this son would do great things could ever be fulfilled. She was left only with trust in God. (PROJECTOR OFF)

There are dangers that every mother and father faces in raising a child in this world. There are sicknesses and electric sockets and gas stoves and stairs and cars. But there are some things about our world that make it especially hostile to children. Today there is abortion. According to the Guttmacher Institute 19% of every pregnancy ends in abortion. At the beginning of life there is a one in five chance that a mother will do in her own child.

Then there are the new gender identity challenges. There are forces in the world that try to tell our children that their gender is not dependent upon their biology. There are teachers and leaders and media who undermine Biblical values. There are laws that allow girls to get an abortion without telling their parents. There are temptations from drugs and alcohol. Now we live in a state that has legalized recreational marijuana. Also

in our state there is the temptation from gambling. Our kids are exposed to stuff on cell phones and computers about which we are not too happy. Then there is a recent suicide epidemic among our youth. It is an often hostile world in which we live which requires mothers--- and fathers--- to trust in God.

III.

MARY'S EXAMPLE also SHOWS THAT MOTHERHOOD CAN LEAD TO SATISFACTION. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. MARY'S EXAMPLE SHOWS THAT...) Acts #1 describes the last meeting of Jesus with His followers after His resurrection. He tells them that they need to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is then that they will receive power. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that will enable them to carry out their mandate to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth.

(ACTS 1:9) According to Acts #1 v. 9, **“And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”** So it was that Jesus ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives to the east of Jerusalem. Then two angels appeared and told these followers that Jesus would some day return to earth in the same manner.

(ACTS 1:12) In Acts 1:12 we are told, **“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.”** Who is the “they”? Who was present at this event, and who returned to Jerusalem? The next verse lists the eleven remaining apostles. Then in v. 14 (ACTS 1:14) we read, **“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”** It would appear that Mary was part of this group that witnessed the ascension of Jesus. She saw her son alive from the dead. She saw Him ascend into heaven. (PROJECTOR OFF)

How do you suppose that Mary felt now? “That’s my Son. Did you hear what He said? Did you see what happened to Him?” All of this must have been sweet vindication for Mary. What satisfaction she must have experienced! Is there anything that makes moms happier than to see their kids turn out well?

There are many reasons why we should strive to do well in life--- to excel in a field of work, to walk closely with God, to develop virtuous character, and to raise our own families. But one reason that should not be overlooked is to make our moms proud. That provides great satisfaction to the moms who raised us. Indeed a 2022 survey called the American Family Survey found that women with children are considerably more happy than women who fall into other categories, like single women and unmarried moms.

IV.

Finally, MARY'S EXAMPLE SHOWS THAT MOTHERHOOD CAN LEAD TO SALVATION. (PROJECTOR ON--- V. MARY'S EXAMPLE SHOWS...) All four of the Gospels mention that there were various women who were present at the scene of the Crucifixion. But it is only John who mentions one particular scene involving Mary.

In #19 v. 26 (JOHN 19:26) the apostle writes, **“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’”** (JOHN 19:27) Verse 27: **“Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.”**

Why did Jesus do this, and why did He do it now? Certainly He was concerned for the well-being of His mom. (PROJECTOR OFF) He was the oldest son in the family. With Joseph gone, it was His primary responsibility to make sure that provision was made for His mother. Why He called upon John to be responsible, rather than one of His earthly siblings, is not clear.

As to the timing of this transfer of responsibility, just after these words John describes the actual death of Jesus. At that point the relationship between Jesus and Mary is forever changed. The primary relationship is no longer son to mother. It is Savior to redeemed sinner. The Catholic Church has tried to make Mary out as a perfect person. They have come up with doctrines like the immaculate conception. Some within the church have described her as a co-redemptrix with Jesus. But the truth is that she was a sinner. She was a godly person and a great mother. But she was not perfect, and she was still infected with a sin nature. She needed to be saved. The death of Jesus provided that salvation.

We heard earlier the words of Luke #1 where Mary uttered a poem of praise to God. This is commonly known as the Magnificat. (PROJECTOR ON--- LUKE 1: 46-47) In vv. 46 and 47 we read, **“And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.’”** From the beginning of the story, Mary had faith in God and in her Son. But now at the cross, Jesus Christ truly became her Savior. And it was this relationship that was much more important than the relationship of mother to Son. For it was the death of Jesus that provided the foundation for eternal life for Mary. It was her faith in Jesus that made it her possession. (PROJECTOR OFF)

It is the Christian faith of moms which so often has a spiritual impact on their children. A 2019 Barna Group survey found that Christian teenagers who say that their faith is very important to them are 20 points more likely to talk to their moms about religion than their dads.

It is this relationship with Jesus that is the most important relationship that any of us can have. Jesus was God who became a human being through the virgin birth involving Mary. Because the Holy Spirit was involved in this, Jesus did not inherit a sin nature. But because He was God as well as man, His death on the cross provided the satisfaction that God the Father required for the payment of the sins of humanity. The Resurrection gave proof to the claim that Jesus was God. Our responsibility is to make sure that we have put our faith in this Jesus. If we have, then we can be assured that our sins are forgiven and that we have eternal life.