

I Met Jesus: Mary the Mother of Jesus

December 24, 2011

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Our current teaching series at Bethel is entitled, *I Met Jesus* and we are seeing how an encounter with Jesus changed the people of His day. We've seen such a wide variety of people. A highly educated scholar type like Nicodemus. A very sinful woman with a reputation around town for wrecking marriages, including her own. A man on the fringes of society whose blindness forced him into a life of begging. There were many others. Jesus' ministry was to people living their lives with all the drama, joys, and sorrows that we experience as well. Isn't that one reason people all over the world celebrate Jesus' birth? We see in Jesus a love all of us want and need.

This Christmas Eve I'd like us to look at someone who met Jesus in the most personal and intimate way possible. Before she ever met Him, she felt Him within her. Is that a big enough clue? Jesus' mom, Mary.

Who Was Mary?

We know quite a lot about her. She was young by our culture, probably around 14 or 15 years old when she gave birth to Jesus. Fifteen year old girls here, you may be disturbed at the thought, but I guarantee you are not nearly as disturbed as your mothers are right now. In the first century, this was the way it was. She was betrothed or as we would say, engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. Joseph was of the lineage of King David and Mary may have been as well.

They lived in Nazareth, which is notable because Nazareth was so not notable. It was a wide spot in the road – blink and you miss it, even on a donkey. They, like most of Nazareth, were seeking out an existence. They were poor.

So the profile is already shocking, particularly when you consider what is about to happen. They were poor, young, engaged to be married, and about to change the world and eternity forever.

How Did She Meet Jesus?

So what happened with this young girl? What happened is that a messenger from God named Gabriel showed up and told her something unforgettable.

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:30-33)

Mary's response to being told that she will give birth is completely understandable. "How will this be since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34) There's practical reality there. It would be important to add this to the list of what we know about her, but it would be wrong to think that her virginity was intended to be a statement about her character. The fact that she was a virgin was intended by God to be a statement about the character of her Son. If a virgin gives birth, you can know that this child did not come from man. It doesn't necessarily

mean that it came from God, but when God says the boy came from Me, that's a pretty good explanation for a virgin birth, don't you think?

As we have already told the story in this service, you know the words of the angel came true. She became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. An angel appeared to Joseph to explain things to him. Joseph and Mary were married and due to the census they made their way to the town of his heritage, Bethlehem. The very night they arrived, in a most humble setting, Mary gave birth to a child.

Here are some of the descriptions of Mary's experience on that night:

- Labor and delivery in an animal pen Luke 2:7
- Gave birth to her firstborn son Luke 2:7
- Called His name "Jesus" (means "Savior") Matthew 1:21
- Visited by shepherds telling of angelic announcement Luke 2:17
- Treasured and pondered all that occurred that night Luke 2:19

On Christmas Eve we treasure and ponder what all this means too. For Mary, she had to get to the things all moms do, caring for a new baby – a very special baby.

Much of Mary's story with Jesus, the Bible doesn't tell us. There is very little about Jesus' growing up years. When Jesus was around 30 years old, His public ministry began and Mary has a role in it. There was a wedding in Cana that Jesus attended and Mary was there. They ran out of wine. We see Mary displaying an understanding that Jesus was no mere man. She says to the servants, "Do whatever [Jesus] tells you." (John 2:5) Jesus met the need by turning the water into wine. This was a glimpse into Mary's evolving understanding of the unique nature of her son.

Two more glimpses of Mary. Mary is there in Jesus' darkest hour. As Jesus hung on the cross dying, Mary is there watching. Can you imagine the tortured emotions of a mother watching her son die? No one at that time understood fully what His death would mean and no one was expecting a resurrection, including Mary.

The final mention of Mary is in Acts 1:14. Jesus had died on the cross that day. Three days later He rose from the dead. After He ascended to heaven, His disciples and others gathered in the Upper Room. Here's what Scripture says about Mary...

"All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus..." (Acts 1:14)

Some 33 years after the angel spoke to her, after the trek to Bethlehem and the birth in the stall and the angelic announcement and the shepherds visit; 30 years after fleeing to Egypt to save her son from King Herod's sword; years after raising a boy that every day you said His name it was a reminder of who He was; after seeing the miracle at Cana and other displays of His power; after seeing Him become the most loved and hated person in the land; after the horror of watching Him die and perhaps helping to place Him in the tomb; after His resurrection – after all of these things, the last thing we find Mary doing is praying along with the other disciples who are the first Christians and the founding members of the church of Jesus Christ.

The Virgin Mary became the Christian Mary. She came to believe. It wasn't hard for her to believe He was the son of God, but to believe in Him as her Savior dying for her sins, this was the necessary step. It is for all of us. Being a virgin doesn't save you, nor does giving

birth to the Savior of the world. But believing in Him as your Savior and trusting in His death for your sins does.

Friend, may I point out the obvious? If Mary the mother of Jesus needed a Savior, then so do I and so do you. This is the real issue for us, isn't it? As the angels said, "*a Savior has been born to you, he is the Christ the Lord.*" Have you met Jesus in this way? Have you met Jesus like Mary did? Have you met Him as a sinner and He as your Savior?

If you have any questions about who Jesus is and how He can be your Savior, as you leave you will see people wearing this "Ask Me" ribbon. It would be our pleasure to help you on your spiritual journey.

Finally, for all of us, Mary gives us an example to follow on Christmas Eve. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a theologian and a martyr having died at the hands of the Nazis shortly before the end of WWII. He captures how Mary guides us to Christmas joy:

*Who among us will celebrate Christmas right?
Those who finally lay down all their power, honor, and prestige,
all their vanity, pride, and self-will at the manger,
those who stand by the lowly and let God alone be exalted,
those who see in the child in the manger the glory of God precisely in this lowliness.*

Those who say, along with Mary, "The Lord has regarded my low estate. My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

May Mary's joy in Jesus be our joy today. Merry Christmas!

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