

## Lessons from Mary

During this Advent season, I have been thinking about Mary, the mother of Jesus. To appreciate the lessons we can learn from Mary, we need to put her and her life into the historical context in which that whole miracle of the virgin birth took place. Mary was a teenager, probably a fairly young teen. Whereas in our culture we don't think of marriage and children until at least late teen years, in Jesus' day a girl was commonly betrothed, that is promised to a man, at about the age of 12. Marriage generally occurred a year or two after that. Assuming that, she was probably 14 or 15 when she gave birth, which would have been normal for that period of time.

She was not only a teen but a teen from an unimportant family. We are not told anything about her family but that says something. Had she been from an even semi-important family, such as the daughter of a Pharisee or Scribe, we would have been told that. The fact that nothing is said in any of the Gospel records certainly indicates that her heritage was normal with nothing significant to be noted. She was one of us. We must never forget that God has always used the ordinary to accomplish His purposes. God's ability to use us has nothing to do with who we are apart from our belonging to Him and being willing to be used.

The way Mary's family raised her gives us a second important lesson. Mary had an unusual faith in God. Read Luke 1:28. Where did that faith come from? It had to have come from the training she received in her home. In the days of Jesus boys attended the synagogue school where they were taught the basics of their faith along with the Hebrew language. Girls, however, did not attend those schools but were taught at home. It was primarily the responsibility of the mother to prepare her daughters for their roles as wives and mothers. In the process of that training Mary's mother taught her the Word of God and what it meant to be an individual favorable to God.

Mary learned well. The hymn she composed known as Mary's Magnificat and recorded in Luke 1:46-55 includes several allusions to Old Testament passages. Mary was taught the Old Testament so well in the home so that, when she began to praise God, reference after reference flowed from her heart.

That gives us a second lesson from the life of Mary. How well are we doing in instructing our children in the Word of God? As parents and grandparents, even aunts and uncles, we are responsible to train them as Mary's parents did, so the truths of God's Word and the stories found in it, flow from their hearts and lips into everyday life.

Mary asked an interesting question as recorded in Luke 1:24. Read that verse. There are two possible ways to see this question. One is to assume she simply wanted to know how anything like that could possibly happen. The second way to see it is a doubt on her part that it was possible. Judging from the response given in verse 35 it would seem her question was a little of both. No one can fault her for wondering how, if in fact, such a thing was even possible.

*“Would you dare to question God?”* Too often the church has communicated a theology that does not allow us to question God for fear of exposing our lack of faith. The reality is that every time in the Bible that we read of someone coming to God with an honest doubt or question God was more than willing to meet them where they were. God is not afraid of our doubts and certainly not afraid of our inability to understand His ways. Mary was a young teen who was **“highly favored”** by God but she did not have all the answers any more than we do, so she asked for an explanation.

Read Mark 9: 21-23 noting what the father asked of Jesus and the response of Jesus. Then read what the father said.

Mary was asking something of the same thing. God had declared she was going to have a baby. Read in Luke 1:31-33 what He went on to declare.

Every Jew knew the promises of a Messiah and given their situation under Rome just about every Jew prayed regularly for the Messiah to come. But believing in one’s mind that God can or will do something and putting that knowledge to practice in real time is not always easy, especially when the last mention of that promise was over 400 years before. Mary was being called upon to not only believe that God was going to keep His promise but was going to do it through her. She responded by asking God for enough information to help her unbelief.

In this case God gave her an answer. Read Luke 1:35. Well that explains everything. Probably not. It could not have made sense to Mary, but it was at least a partial answer. One of the hardest things we are called upon to do in our Christian walk is to trust God when He opts to either not explain what He is doing or to explain it in a way that makes little sense. Read Isaiah 55:8-9. Mary had to accept that truth and so do we.

God went on to tell Mary something else that was tremendously important and a truth we need to cling to this Christmas and throughout the year ahead. Read Luke 1:37. What God was saying to Mary was that *“if God said it, we can believe it because it is true, and it will happen as He says it will.”*

What a powerful reminder that is to each of us as we celebrate Christmas and move into a new year. God was declaring that every blessing He has made will be fulfilled. We can count on that. He is also saying that every judgment He has promised will be fulfilled also. The emphasis should be on *“every”* because God said, **“no word will ever fail.”** The culture we currently live in says that we can pick and choose what we want to believe is true and what we want to ignore we can ignore or declare not true any longer. No vote by society can altar the Word of God because **“no word will ever fail.”**

It also means we can claim every word as true. Let your mind wander from promise to promise that God has made. He has promised to provide for us. Since that falls under the category of **“no word will ever fail”** we can rest assured that whatever we need He will provide. Do you need strength for today and the days ahead? That also falls under, **“no word will ever fail.”** How

about peace? That too falls under “**no word will ever fail.**” The list could go on and on. He has promised to bless us, to care for our families, to use us as His witnesses etc. etc. All of that falls under “**no word will ever fail.**”

Finally notice how this whole encounter ends. Read Luke 1:38. Literally, “*I fully accept what you ask of me.*” It is easy to think about how special it was to be the mother of Jesus but in accepting that which God was asking of her she was putting her reputation on the line. No one in her hometown would ever believe her story and she would always be known as the girl who got pregnant out of wedlock. That may not be a big deal today but in her day, it was a terrible reputation. But she was willing. Maybe this Christmas we need to ask ourselves what we are willing to do for God that may not make us look great in the eyes of society but will indicate that we too have found favor with God.

Mary, a young girl who is at the heart of the Christmas story but whose life can too easily be overlooked. This Christmas season think again about her testimony. Recommit your family to knowing God’s Word like Mary did. Don’t worry about what the world may think of your chances of being a servant in some way of God. He not only calls all of us to serve, He equips us when He does. It’s OK to have questions and even doubts as Mary did, as long as you are willing to take those questions and doubts to the Lord. God may not answer all your questions but learn as Mary did that every word God has ever uttered will come true and because of that be willing, like Mary to say, “**I am the Lord’s servant, may your word to me be fulfilled.**”