



## **A Contemplative, Biblical Analysis of Mary, Mother of Christ**

### **What did Mary really know?**

By Kathy L. McFarland

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## **A Contemplative, Biblical Analysis of Mary, Mother of Christ**

### **Lesson 4: What did Mary really know from the birth of our Lord, their exile to Egypt, and the prophets at the Temple?**

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This lesson we will consider what Mary really knows concerning the events of the birth of our Lord, the family's exile to Egypt, and the prophets at the Temple. We will examine both Matthew and Luke's accounts of the early life of Jesus, and merge them together in an effort to capture historical events surrounding the early life of the blessed family.

#### **The Savior is born**

Mary and Joseph are required to return to Bethlehem to pay taxes in the place his family originated, in response to a decree issued by Emperor Augustus. While some scholars debate the historical accuracy of this account,<sup>1</sup> the trip to Bethlehem is recorded in Luke 2:2-5, and thus happened exactly as the inerrant Bible states. The town of Bethlehem was filled with journeyers that had come to pay their taxes as well, and there was no room left in the Inn. Joseph and Mary slept in a stall that was used as an enclosure for animals; some suggest this is inside a cave in a natural outcropping of rock.<sup>2</sup>

It must have seen odd to Mary to be preparing for the impending delivery of the Messiah that has brought so much attention from God, the Holy Ghost, and faithful believers, and yet, not have a grand place for her son's birth. Mary apparently learns more and more

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<sup>1</sup> Lange, 295-300.

<sup>2</sup> Elwell, 1391-1392. The Church of Nativity in Jerusalem is erected over a cave manger that is said to be the birthplace of Christ.

about the Messiah to come as events unfold; certainly, she is probably suspecting by this time that He will not be a prominent, rich leader of political might.

Mary labors and gives birth to the baby Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. She wraps the baby in swaddling clothes and holds him close to her breast in the most holy night that has ever been. O Holy Night, filled with the glory and praise to God from the young mother, as the baby Jesus begins his human existence that will one day glorify His Father in Heaven when He complete His Father's will.

*Mary, Did You Know?*

Words by Mark Lowry

Music by Buddy Greene

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy  
Would one day walk on water?  
Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy  
Would save our sons and daughters?  
Did you know that your Baby Boy  
Has come to make you new;  
This Child that you delivered  
Will soon deliver you!

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy  
Will give sight to a blind man?  
Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy  
Will calm the storm with His hand?  
Did you know that your Baby Boy  
Has walked where Angels trod?  
When you kiss your Little Baby,  
You kiss the Face of God!

Oh, Mary, did you know?  
Oh, Mary, did you know?

The blind will see, the deaf will hear,  
The dead will live again.  
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak

The praises of the lamb!

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy  
Is Lord of all creation?  
Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy  
Will one day rule the nations?  
Did you know that your Baby Boy  
Is Heaven's Perfect Lamb?  
This sleeping Child you're holding  
Is the Great I Am!

### **Birth Announcement**

There are some shepherds in the field, watching their flocks in the night, when suddenly the bright glory of the Lord lit up their area, and the appearance of an angel announces the birth of the Lord:

*“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”*

Luke 2:13-14 says that after this announcement, a host of angels from heaven praise God: *“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, Good will toward men.”* A star in the East shines brightly to point towards the birth of the King of Jews (Matthew 2:2).

### **Seeks Jesus**

The Shepherds hurry to the town of Bethlehem, locate the Christ child, Mary and Joseph in the manger, and announce to all that could hear the arrival of the Christ the Lord (Luke 2:15-18). They offer praise to God for all they are told about Jesus concerning his identity and his future (Luke 2:20).

Once again, Mary keeps all these things, and ponders them in her heart (Luke 2:20). By this time, it is clear that Mary has advanced knowledge of the Messiah's coming, and the role she and her son plays in the unfolding drama. Yet, she remains quiet, and does not share her thoughts or knowledge with anyone.

### **Political Threat**

King Herod first learns of the baby Jesus' birth from three wise men from the east that travel to Jerusalem and inquire of the location of the King of Jews after sighting his star in the East. Their intentions are noble and their plans are to worship Christ when they locate him (Matthew 2:2-1) But their search disturbs King Herod; he gathers his chief priests and scribes together and demands that they find this reported Christ child. His trusted advisers tell him that it has been written by the prophets that the "Governor" will come out of Bethlehem to rule God's people in Israel. When Herod spots the star in the East, he commands the wise men to search diligently for the child. Though his intentions are not good, he pretends that he only seeks the young child Jesus in order to worship him, and they believe the king (Matthew 2:3-8).

The wise men soon locate the young child by following the star in the east to Bethlehem, where it was focused upon the location of Jesus. When they see the star they are extremely happy and rejoiced at their discovery. And when they come to the house of Mary and find her and the young child, they fell to their knees and worship him (Matthew 2:9-11). They bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, to offer their thanks to God with these typologically significant treasures that might hold greater meaning later in Christ's life. That night, God warns them in a dream that Herod is up to no good, and they depart into their country by taking a different route (Matthew 2:12).

God warns Joseph of the danger that Herod was seeking to destroy his young child, and he sends the family to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15). Joseph, Mary, and Jesus flee their homeland, just before Herod slays all of the Bethlehem children under two years old. It is not difficult to know what Mary knew during this terrible time; though certainly relieved for God's providence during the fulfilling of prophesy spoken by the Prophet Jeremiah about the great mourning of Rachel that prophesizes the killing of the young (Matthew 2:16), her heart must be breaking at the loss of so many children in her hometown.

When Herod finally dies, Joseph is instructed by God to return to the land of Israel. Joseph settles in the city of Nazareth, rather than Bethlehem to avoid ruler Archelaus, another bad king. This actually fulfills another prophesy by the prophets at old that state the Messiah will be called a Nazarene (Matthew 2:19-22).

### **Temple Blessings and Prophecy after Christ's birth**

Luke 2:25-38 speaks of two very special prophets of God that wait by the Temple to see the young Messiah. Simeon was a devout and just Jew waiting for the Messiah when the Holy Ghost reveals to him that he will see the Messiah before he dies. When Joseph and Mary brought the child Jesus to the Temple, he recognized the Lord immediately, blessed God and said:

*"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou has prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).*

It is the first time recorded in Scripture that Mary hears about the participation of Gentiles in the future ministry of Christ. How could it be that both the Gentiles and the people

of Israel will both be saved by Jesus, when the idea of Messiah most usually represents the salvation of Israel alone? It is another bit of information revealed to Joseph and Mary, and caused them to marvel at the prophecy. Then Simeon spoke some prophesy that must have shook Mary greatly:

‘Behold this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.)’ (Luke 2:34-35)

Now Mary first receives the first warnings to prepare the tumultuous times that will bring soul-numbing sorrow as the crucifixion and Resurrection is accounted; the traditional view advanced by John Damascene is that the sorrow in this prophesy speaks on Mary’s soul destiny filled with maternal grief as she stands at the foot of the crucified Son of God (John 19:25-27).<sup>3</sup> It is quite possible that Mary did not equate that prophesy with the mysteries of the death of her son; but, one can imagine that there was a pause and a coldness that surely permeated that one moment. Up to that point, Mary had heard glorious details of Christ bringing salvation to God’s people. Now Simeon offers visions of future trials and tribulations and confusing mysteries of Christ that will break Mary’s heart for the good of many.

That old woman Anna, a widow for 84 years from a marriage that lasted over 107 years, survives long enough to see the young Christ speaks of some of the quiet miracles and mysteries of God during this important time. That Anna survives long enough to see the Messiah wither her own eyes, speaks greatly of her faith. She has served God with fastings and prayers day and night, and is allowed to live to see the Savior of Israel. When she sees Christ in

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<sup>3</sup> Gary Culpepper, "A Sword Will Pierce through Your Own Soul Also': The Sanctification, Conversion, and Exemplary Witness of the Blessed Mary," *Pro Ecclesia* 19, no. 1 (2010): 31.

the Temple, she gave thanks to the Lord, and tells all to look for the redemption of Israel because the Messiah has come (Luke 2:36-38).

### **Mary and the child Jesus**

Child Jesus grows strong in spirit and he is filled with wisdom; it is apparent that God's grace is upon him (Luke 2:40) There is one more childhood event recorded in Luke that gives us insight into the thoughts of Mary. The family travels to Jerusalem every year for the feast of the Passover. When their celebration is over, they had back to Nazareth, but the child Jesus tarries behind. Joseph and Mary were not aware that he was still in Jerusalem, and thought he was with their relatives a day's journey ahead of them. When they were unable to locate him, they hurried back to Jerusalem where they found him in the Temple.

Child Jesus was sitting in the midst of the doctors, listening to them and asking questions. When his parents rebuke him for his lagging behind, he explains, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49) This confuses Mary and Joseph which makes no sense when evaluated with the knowledge Mary has by this time concerning the things of Christ. Perhaps it is the timing that seems off to her with the idea that Christ's ministry for God would not begin at such a young age. Joseph and Mary's growing apprehension with their son's safety in the three-day separation is a sharp contrast to the attitude of Jesus who is preoccupied by the things of His Father.<sup>4</sup> It seems likely that the parents of Jesus feel a larger obligation toward dutiful parenting to raise the Son of God in the best way they can, since God places Jesus in their human care. Certainly, they had their hands full in raising the Son of God, who increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man

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<sup>4</sup> Nolland, 130.



(Luke 2:52). All of these things, of course, are kept in Mary's heart and she ponders them quietly as the Son of God grew in to assume his ministry (Luke 2:51) in God's time.

### **Conclusion**

Mary, Joseph and Jesus are delivered first in the setting of natural birth. Mary is the first disciple of Jesus Christ, because she accepts him as the Son of God before He was placed within her womb. Joseph, in his support, shows strength of faith in God in a situation that would bring most men doubt of faith. The family is delivered from evil intentions through an escape route that leads to the center of the carnal world. It is not in the Temple of the Jews nor in the Court of Romans that God sends the family for protection. Rather, they go to a place of unfamiliar life, trusting that God will look after them, and summon them in His time when it is safe. When they return to safety once again in Palestine, they are amazed to hear the blessings and prophecy from Simeon and Anna. Though their time with the busy crowded, worldly affairs in Egypt protect them, their place is in the land of Palestine, and where the Son of God can fulfill prophesy and do the things of His Father. Child Jesus grows strong, wise and favored by His Father and men, as His mother ponders His unique life from the beginning to the foretold future, with full acceptance of God's unfolding plans.

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