

Women in the Lineage of Christ

Week 9 — Mary — 1

Prepare...

As you begin, take a moment to pray and focus on the Lord as you come into his presence and study his word.

You may want to use this prayer, based on Hebrews 4:12

God, your Word is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing my soul and spirit, my joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of my heart. I want to hear you through your word now.

Begin...

Read through the text twice. First read to gain a general understanding of the passage. Read a second time slowly, looking at each verse in detail.

To make sure you have understood the story in Luke, answer the following questions (in your head or on paper).

Luke 1:26-56 and 2:1-20

1. Who is the unexpected visitor in 1:26?
2. What is his message?
3. How will God bring His promise to Mary about? (1:35-37)
4. Which sign of God's power is pointed out to Mary? (1:36)
5. What is Mary's response to the angel's message? (1:38)
6. What is the first thing Mary does after the angel leaves? (1:39)
7. How is the message of the angel confirmed? (1:44)
8. How long does Mary stay with Elisabeth?
9. How does Mary cope with everything that happened? (2:19)

Memory Verse for the Week...

Psalm 37:4

“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

Some scriptures for contemplation...

Isaiah 7:14

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

Luke 1:46-49

"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name."

Background...

Mary's Betrothal

Jesus' conception took place when Mary was "betrothed to Joseph." In Jewish law betrothal, which lasted about one year, was much more than our engagement. It was a binding contract, terminable only by death (which left the betrothed a "widow") or by divorce as for a full marriage. The man was already the husband (v19), but the woman remained in her father's house.

Zechariah

Zechariah was a priest from the country. There were many priests, but only one Temple. So they took turns serving there (1. Ch. 24:1-6). Zechariah was on his annual two-week spell of duty in Jerusalem. This year came the honour of a lifetime. He was chosen to offer the incense alone in the temple. And this is the moment God chooses to tell him that the long years of prayer for a son are over. He will remove the stigma of childlessness—but more than that. As he answers the deep inner longing of this couple God at the same time fulfills far wider purposes—for the nation, and for the world. John will be the link between the Old Testament and the New. He will be the new Elijah (17; Malachi 4:5), herald of the long-promised, long-awaited Messiah.

Study Questions

1. The way Mary reacts to the challenges she is facing says a lot about her character. Note the verses and phrases concerning Mary that you find most intriguing.

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2. In Luke 1:28 the angel calls Mary "highly favored." In what ways do you think Mary was favored among all other women? (Isaiah 7:14, Luke 1:46-49)

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3. What must have made it difficult for her to accept this "high favor"? (See v 34 and Matthew 1:18-25)

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4. Having heard the news, Mary sets out on the four/five-day journey to her cousin Elizabeth, Zachariah's wife. (Luke 1:39-56) It is a meeting of special joy and significance for the two women. Describe their relationship.

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5. Who are the people you can share the highs and lows of life with?

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6. In Luke 1:45 Elizabeth calls Mary "blessed." For what reason? (Also compare with Luke 1:38) How does Mary's reaction differ from the one of Zachariah in Luke 1:5-25?

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7. Read Mary's song from Luke 1:46-55 one more time. Mary is overwhelmed by God's display of grace in her life and is reminded of another woman's praise for God. (See 1. Samuel 2:1-10). What does this song say about her knowledge of scripture / her faith?

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8. God appeared to Mary when she was just going about her ordinary life. It was the same with Zechariah (Luke 1:11), Joseph (Matth. 1:20) and the shepherds (Luke 2:9). What does that imply about what it means to be "spiritual"?

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9. In what ways is Mary's faith an example to you? The angel reassures Mary that "nothing is impossible with God" (1:37). In what area of your life would you need reassurance of this?

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10. "May it be to me as you have said," Mary answered. (1:38) Is there anything that keeps you from believing the promises God has given to you?

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11. What did God do for you lately that you "treasure in your heart"?

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More background...

Mary's Song

Mary's song of praise is mainly in Old Testament language. In a Bible showing cross references one can find out how many Psalms and other books of the Old Testament Mary is actually quoting here (Psalms 34:2f, 35:9, 138:6, 103:17, 98:1, 118:15,107:9, 132:11, 1. Samuel 2:1-10, Habakkuk 3:18, Job 5:11, Genesis 17:7+19). She must have been meditating over Scripture a lot on her long journey! This must have been a habit of hers. Twice we read in these chapters that Mary "treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." (Luke 2:19, 51) She had already given room to God and His Word in her heart. It is no wonder that God chose a woman like her to be "indwelt" by the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ.

Treasures of the heart...

The prayers of the psalmists were heart-felt and sincere because their hearts were filled with the things of God. Read what they say:

Ps. 16:7

I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.

Ps. 19:14

May the word of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Ps. 27:8

My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek.

Ps. 37:31

The law of his [the righteous man] God is in his heart; his feet do not slip.

Ps. 119:11

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.