

## Seeing Christmas Through the Eyes of Mary

As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, to receive and worship the King and Savior born two thousand years ago, and reflect on all Christmas means for us, I thought it might prove beneficial to see Christmas through the eyes of someone who was not only there, but at the very center of the exciting happenings! The title of the message is *Seeing Christmas through the eyes of Mary*.

Let's take a moment to consider who Mary was. Some religious traditions elevate Mary to a very high place, claiming she was born sinless, that she's the queen of heaven and the mother of God, even praying to her, because the thinking goes, when you really want God to do something, who better to ask Him on your behalf than His mother?

These traditions stray from scripture and leave us with an unbiblical view of Mary. Who was Mary, really? She wasn't sinless – the Bible tells us that only Jesus was without sin. The teaching of Mary being the queen of heaven has no biblical basis, and as for praying to Mary, we are told in scripture to pray to God and God only. Finally, while God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus, the Son of God, the title Mother of God is theologically inaccurate and misleading.

Who was Mary, really? She wouldn't want to be put on a religious pedestal – she was an ordinary young Jewish girl, probably only 15 or 16 years old when she gave birth to Jesus. She wasn't sinless, she wasn't perfect, as a mother she struggled at times to know how to relate to her son Jesus, the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

To understand who Mary really was, we need to remove the religious aura built around her, get rid of the halo and all the unbiblical claims until what we're left with is a truly amazing young woman. Mary had an extraordinary love for God and faith in God. Mary was a godly young woman with a depth of character that is truly impressive. And Mary knew her Bible and was no theological slouch. Mary's Magnificat is one of the most beautiful songs in the Bible.

Seeing Christmas through Mary's eyes begins with a totally unexpected, mind-blowing visit by an angel. Let's read about it in Luke 1 beginning in verse 26.

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> 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, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

<sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

<sup>35</sup> And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will

*overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.” <sup>38</sup> And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her. Luke 1:26-38*

In some of the older classic movies, for close up scenes with the female stars they would sometimes rub Vaseline on the camera lens to produce a softened, glowing effect. If we are to see the moment captured in Luke through the eyes of Mary, we need to remove the religiously sentimental Vaseline from our lens and see it as it really happened.

Mary is a teenager living in the small town of Nazareth. She’s pledged to be married to a good man named Joseph. She wakes up expecting this day to be just another day in her life. And she has good reason to expect that.

Because for 400 years there has been silence from God. 400 hundred long years, silence. No prophets. No words of the Lord. No miracles. Silence. 400 years of silence.

To give us an idea of how long that is, 400 years ago the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock in Mass. It would be another 200 years before the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence. 400 years is a long time.

What Mary didn’t know is that on that day, in heaven, God called the angel Gabriel and said, “it’s time.” Gabriel said, “where do you want me to go?” God said, “a little town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin who is betrothed to be married.”

And so the angel Gabriel, who stands in the very presence of God, entered the room where Mary was, and broke 400 years of silence with a promise. It was the promise that thousands of years of promises from God were about to be fulfilled. It was the promise that God was about to impact history by entering history.

“You will bear a son”, the angel promises, “and you are to name him Jesus, for he will be the Son of the Most High and will sit on David’s throne and rule forever.”

This is so familiar to us that it really doesn’t surprise us in the slightest bit. We’ve heard hundreds of messages, sung hundreds of Christmas carols, and sent thousands of Christmas cards with this message on it. It’s so familiar, so expected, that we have to work just to keep a sense of wonder in it.

Mary didn’t have to work up a sense of wonder. She was frightened, shocked, and confused. All she can think to ask is, how can this promise be fulfilled, how is it even possible, since I am a virgin? The angel tells her that the power of the Holy Spirit will overshadow her, so that the son she will bear will literally be the Son of God. For nothing is impossible with God!

And then this teenage girl, brought up in an ordinary, humble family, in an ordinary, small town, does something extraordinary: she believes God’s promises! She submits herself to God’s will and says I am the

servant of the Lord, let God do all that He has said He will do. The amazing thing about Mary isn't that she was sinless, or the Queen of heaven, or the Mother of God – all these religiously stilted ideas that dehumanize her.

What's amazing about Mary is that when God spoke promises that were too big, too impossible, too far-fetched to believe, Mary believed them! She took God at His word!

The road wouldn't be easy. God had favored her, the angel said. She would proclaim in her song that all generations would call her blessed, but God's favor and God's blessing doesn't always mean things come easy and things didn't come easy for Mary.

We know the story: Joseph almost ended their betrothal. People whispered that Mary got pregnant out of wedlock. Weeks before the baby was to come, Caesar Augustus gets it in his head to conduct a census and she and Joseph had to leave their hometown and travel to Bethlehem where they were told there was no room for them in the inn. She's about to have a baby and they don't have a place to stay.

Finally, in a stable, she gives birth to Jesus. And all heaven breaks out! Angels appear to shepherds who come rushing over to the stable to see Jesus. Wise men travel long distances to worship the newborn king.

As we see Christmas through the eyes of Mary, there are some things I want to learn from this amazing young lady.

### **1. Mary treasured *and* pondered**

Luke 2 drops us into a moment shortly after the birth of Jesus, when angels suddenly appear to some shepherds keeping watch in the fields telling them that a Savior has been born and the sign shall be a baby in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes.

*<sup>15</sup> When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.*

Then Luke zeros in on the teenage girl who just gave birth in verse 19:

*<sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.*

Mary treasured and pondered. She didn't just turn it over in her head, she treasured it in her heart. In the midst of so many inexplicable, incomprehensible things swirling all around her, she processed it internally by treasuring and pondering.

There are truths that are more than the sum of facts and information. I came across an article titled "How

to Understand Love as a Chemical Reaction". It was informative but I suspect that if all we understand about love are the chemical reactions involved, we don't really understand love at all.

As we reflect on the meaning of Christmas, we want to do more than gather information. We not only want to think about what Jesus did for us with our heads, we want to treasure all that Jesus did for us in our hearts.

King Herod wanted information about Jesus, but no one was more blind to the meaning of Jesus' birth than Herod. The wise men followed the star, not to get information about Jesus, but to treasure him with worship and costly gifts.

Let's not be Herods, let's be like the wise men, let's be like Mary, treasuring and pondering in our hearts all that he is and all that he means to us.

## **2. Mary believed God's promises**

Christmas is all about God keeping His promises. Jesus is the Promise of God, kept. And again, we can't learn from Mary if we look at her story through lens's that are smeared with Vaseline.

It wasn't easy for Mary.

After centuries of silence, when the promise finally came to Mary, that promise also promised to disrupt her life, threaten her betrothal, ruin her reputation, and change pretty much every plan she had for her life.

There was pain in the promise. There usually is.

A few days after Jesus was born, they took him to be circumcised and an old man named Simeon took Jesus in his arms and said, "Lord, you promised me that I would see your salvation with my own eyes before I died. I can die in peace now, for You have kept your promise."

Then Simeon turned to Mary and said, this boy will be the cause of the rise and fall of many in Israel. Then he looked Mary in the eyes and said, *And a sword will pierce your own soul too.*

There was pain in the promise for Mary, but she believed God at His word. Not perfectly. She faltered a bit in her faith, she struggled at times to believe Jesus was who God said he was. At one point she joined Jesus' brothers in thinking Jesus was out of his mind.

Mary faltered, but she never stopped believing God's promises.

The promise of Christmas is that nothing is impossible with God. Jesus came to do the impossible – save us. And the Bible tells us Jesus did it because he loved us that much. God loved us that much.

I know we hear that a lot, but we should pause and treasure that, ponder that, in our hearts. God loves

you so much He sent His Son, gave His Son over to death, punished him for our sin, so that He could adopt you and me as His children. He says, "don't just call me God, call me Father. And don't be afraid, it is My good pleasure to give you the kingdom. And I've proved that by giving you My Son, the Promised One."

I don't know about you, but sometimes I have struggles with doubt. I look at the promises of God to all who believe and then I look at how far short I fall, I look at my sin and weakness, and I feel like Mary: how can this be? Maybe you do too. But brothers and sisters, let's not stop there. Mary didn't stop there. Let's grab ahold of God's promises and believe them! God's promises are true – let's believe them!

Christmas is about God's promises, let's believe them! God loves you, He is your heavenly Father, He has saved you by the Savior born on that Christmas morning two thousand years ago. Let's put away doubt, let's put away negativity, let's put away cynicism and let's believe our Faithful God at His word!