

## Encounter with Jesus – Mary, the mother of Jesus

In these services we are looking at people who have had an encounter with Jesus and the effect the encounter had on them. As we are approaching Advent we are going to look tonight at Mary, the mother of Jesus and take a broader view than just one encounter, looking at her relationship with Jesus throughout his life.

There are numerous mentions of Mary in the gospels. I have chosen 3 sets of readings to look at different aspects of Mary's experiences and character.

**Part 1 – Annunciation and birth.** Hilary is going to read us the first part of her story. [Lk 1:26-38, 2:4-7, 2:15-19](#)

We are told she was “a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David” living in Nazareth in Galilee. In Judaism, “virgins” were young maidens, so she was almost certainly a teenager, probably twelve to fourteen, that being the customary age for betrothals (the first stage of a Jewish marriage) at the time. Joseph was a carpenter, a trade normally passed down from father to son (Jesus is referred to as “the carpenter” in Mark 6:3), so neither of them were wealthy or had much status in the community.

God often encouraged his servants that he was “with” them (e.g., [Jer 1:8](#)). Greetings (like “hail”) were normal, but rank and status within society determined whom one should greet and with what words. As both a woman and a young person not yet married, Mary had virtually no social status. Neither the title (“highly favoured”) nor the promise (“The Lord is with you”) were traditional in greetings, even had she been a person of status. Mary here joins the list of those in the Bible who found favour before God. The angel also identifies Mary's future son with the “Mighty God” Messiah of [Isa 9:6-7](#) and Jewish tradition used the language of “overshadowing” for God's presence with his people. Mary expresses her submission to the Lord's will in regular Old Testament terms for obedience. She had the faith and courage to accept what the angel told her would happen, even though it could have led to her rejection by family and friends and even possible stoning.

Betrothal provided most of the legal rights of marriage, but intercourse was forbidden; so Joseph is courageous to take his pregnant betrothed with him back to Bethlehem where he would have had relatives, even if (as is quite possible) she is also a Bethlehemite who has to return to that town. Although tax laws in most of the empire required only the head of a household to appear, the province of Syria (then including Palestine) also taxed women. But Joseph may simply have wished to avoid leaving her alone this late in her pregnancy, especially if the circumstances had deprived her of other friends.

The shepherds probably checked the animal stables till they found the one with the baby; Bethlehem was not a large town. What I found interesting as I read through this very familiar story again is the amount of detail given to the shepherds by the angels and recorded in Luke's gospel - the baby in the manger because there was no room, the swaddling clothes, the declaration to the shepherds that the baby is the expected Christ. “All who heard it were amazed – but Mary treasured up these things and pondered them in her heart.” I've said before that at the time the heart was were thinking and reason was done, the stomach was for emotions unlike today. So Mary was remembering all the events, as we will see later this is important for our faith.

Hilary is going to read the second part of her story.

**Part 2 – In the Temple.** [Lk 2:21-35, 2:46-52.](#)

Joseph and Mary fulfil the requirements for her purification after 33 days in Lev 12. The particular sacrifice they offer indicates that they are poor, they could not afford a lamb for the burnt offering, bringing instead two pigeons ([Lev 12:8](#)). Simeon's praise reflects the previous words Mary and the shepherds had received, so this is the third time Mary has been told Jesus will be the Messiah.

Prophecies in Jewish tradition were often obscure, easier understood in hindsight than at the moment they were given. Simeon's words probably allude to the stumbling stone of [Isa 8:14-15](#) (which Jesus quoted in his encounter with the Chief Priests and Teachers of the Law if you remember from October) and the anticipated resurrection. The "sword" reflects either Mary suffering over Jesus' pain or her heart (thoughts) being exposed, probably the former. Note how there has already been a lot of fulfilment of prophesy in the first month or so of Jesus' life.

The second event recorded here is when Jesus is 12, the age at which he became a man in Jewish society. The verses just before these say that Joseph and Mary went every year to the Feast of Passover and they took their children. This year Jesus stays behind in the Temple when they leave, but they don't notice he is not with the party until the evening. They return to search for him and it says they found him after 3 days, probably very frantic and frightening days. He was amazing everyone with his understanding, but when Mary asks him why he treated them like this he replies "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" Then for the second time we are told "his mother treasured all these things in her heart."

Hilary is going to read the third part of her story.

### **Part 3 –Mary's legacy. Jn 2:12, Lk 8:19, Jn 19:25-27, Acts 1:14.**

The first two passages show Mary and Jesus' brothers were around during his ministry and the third that Mary was in Jerusalem during Holy Week. A primary responsibility in the Jewish custom in "honouring one's father and mother" was providing for them in their old age. Mary is probably in her mid to late forties, probably a widow and lives in a society where women rarely earned much income. She is therefore officially especially dependent on her eldest son, Jesus, for support, although after his death her younger sons would support her. Jesus, from the cross, makes an oral testament in front of witnesses, which makes it binding, and formally places his mother under John's protection, providing for her after his death. Dying fathers could exhort sons to take care of surviving mothers (which they normally would do); for a disciple to be accorded a role in his teacher's family was a great honour to the disciple.

[Act 1:14](#). Given the culture's usual downplaying of women's public roles, the equal participation of women in this verse in Acts is particularly noteworthy, especially their apparent mixing with the men. (However, women were not necessarily segregated from men in synagogue services.) The point I want to draw from it though is that Mary (and Jesus' brothers) were in the early church in Jerusalem, just after the Ascension and presumably at Whitsun. His brother James is recorded in Galatians 1 as being in the church there when Paul visited Jerusalem 3 years after his conversion.

We only have the record of the nativity in Luke and Matthew's gospels, Luke specifically opens his gospel with the statement "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus." So who were the eyewitnesses to the nativity that Luke carefully checked with? I believe it had to be Mary, who had treasured, or remembered, all the details, because we have no record of Joseph being around during Jesus' ministry. It is therefore due to Mary remembering and sharing the story of the nativity (Matthew would have met her as well in Jerusalem) that we have it recorded and the reason we celebrate Christmas, instead of Jesus just appearing on the scene after John the Baptist as in Mark or John's gospels.

Discussion – There are some questions for us here which I would like you to discuss in your groups and we'll then have a short feedback from each group:

When has God done something special in your life and what effect did it have on you?

Have you remembered or recorded it so you can share it with others to encourage them or help them through a similar situation?