

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Pastor Glen Weber's Message of December 14, 2008
"Mary – Mother of God"**

[Sermon presented as the apostle John in character, discussing Mary and her life as the mother of God.]

[Topics: Mary, Mother of God, Joseph, Birth of Jesus, Apostle John]

Excerpt: Hello. My name is John. My brother, James, and I were the sons of Zebedee. All of us were fishermen residing near Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. We were also a little on the impulsive side. Jesus nicknamed us the "Sons of Thunder" probably because we asked him for permission to call fire down from heaven and zap the Samaritan village because of their lack of hospitality toward Jesus.

But, today, I want to talk to you about "Mary, Mother of God." And I want to start my story on that very traumatic day in Jerusalem as Jesus was arrested and is now hanging on the cross. It was a very emotional watching Jesus suffer, and seeing people mock him and make fun of him.

Late in the afternoon, as Jesus was about to die, he looked down at Mary, his mother, and said, "**Dear woman, here is your son**" as he pointed to me. Jesus then said to me, John, "**Here is your mother**" (**John 19:25-27**). So Jesus gave me responsibility to take care of Mary for the remainder of her life. And I took that responsibility very seriously as we spent many years together.

To the nation of Israel, the history of birth was very important. Obviously Adam and Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel. These were the first births from created beings. Later on we come to Sarah, who was barren for many, many years. Yet God wanted to bless Sarah and Abraham to create the nation of Israel. When God told them that Sarah would become pregnant, Sarah laughs because she was not only barren but she was also an old lady. Yet, sure enough, Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

And later on, there was a woman called Hannah, who was barren. She had gone up to the Temple many times, crying out to God to have a baby. After many years of barrenness, God answered her prayer and she gave birth to a son, named Samuel.

Rachel, the wife of Isaac, was barren also and she had to watch her sister and handmaidens have babies. Eventually, Rachel becomes pregnant and has Joseph, who becomes the favorite of the family and a great man of God.

We also read in Scripture about Jochebed who gives birth to Moses but has to hide him in a basket and float him down the river, because Pharaoh is trying to kill all the Hebrew babies. And of course, we know that Pharaoh's daughter finds him.

Now all of these births were unique and produced a great person, whom God used in a powerful way. Now coming down to our time, we have a young lady named Mary. She was probably 14 or 15 years old. The custom of our day was that a young lady

would marry a man who was 40 to 50 years old. So Mary has now become engaged to Joseph. She will spend about one year engaged before she is married and have a child. However, an angel, named Gabriel comes and talks with Mary and tells her she is going to have a baby. And she is to name him Jesus.

Gabriel also tells Mary that she is graced or highly favored of God. But when Mary hears this, she is troubled in her heart. She wonders why God has chosen her. Of all the women in Israel, she asked herself, why me? She obviously became afraid, because Gabriel told her not to be afraid (**Luke 1:26-33**).

He then told her that she was going to give birth to the Son of the Most High, whose kingdom will reign forever. **"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:34-35).** Mary was concerned.

Gabriel went on to tell her that her cousin Elizabeth, who has been barren, is now in her sixth month of pregnancy. He encouraged Mary by telling her, **"For nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).**

So Mary wrestles with all that Gabriel has said and then comes to the conclusion that she can live with and accept what is going to happen to her. She then said, **"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38).**

It's the same in our lives. God can do many great things; if we are willing. We need to tell God, just like Mary did, "I'm available." We need to tell Jesus, "Do with me as you wish."

So now Mary goes up to visit her cousin Elizabeth. And Scripture tells us, **"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:41).** It was obvious that God was working with Mary in a very powerful way.

And then Elizabeth said to Mary, **"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" (Luke 1:42)** So Elizabeth already knows through the Holy Spirit that Mary is pregnant. But she is amazed that Mary would visit her and says, **"But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43)** She is also trying to help Mary understand the tremendous importance of whose child she is carrying.

Then Mary goes back to the man she's engaged to – Joseph to tell him that she's pregnant. And when she does, he's thunderstruck. He doesn't know what to do. His life collapses before his very eyes. He asks her, "Who was it? How did this happen? Did it occur while you were staying with Elizabeth?"

Now at that time, the village could have taken Mary out and stoned her. So could have Joseph. But Joseph was a man of integrity. **Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly (Matt. 1:19).**

As Joseph is working all this out an angel appears to him in a dream. The angel tells Joseph that he's not to divorce her, because she's pregnant by the Holy Spirit. God did this. Her baby is going to be the Son of God. And you are going to name him Jesus. Jesus means Savior. And Joseph did what the angel told him to do and he took Mary home as his wife. **(Matt. 1:20-25).**

Now we move ahead a few months and all the families get called back home to pay their taxes. So Joseph and Mary had to go down from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This is no picnic for Mary who is just about to deliver. She probably rode in a cart pulled by a donkey – a cart without any springs or soft seat. And once there, Mary gives birth to this baby.

This baby is like any other child. But now she's holding in her arms the Son of God. Mary is nursing him and nurturing him and taking care of him in every way she can. She's trying to understand everything. And she even asked herself – how is it that I would give birth to the one who will save me from my sins?

After she gives birth, shepherds visit Jesus and talk about how angels had shown up and told them that a Savior was born in Bethlehem, and they should go and find him. And these shepherds are now giving glory to Jesus, her child. The shepherds represented the lowest people in society. And God wanted people to know that Jesus comes to everyone. Jesus comes to people who consider themselves as nobodies.

Eight days later, Jesus is taken up to Jerusalem to be circumcised. There, Mary meets Simeon, the great old prophet. And Simeon said that now he could die because he has seen the child that God has promised. Mary also meets the prophetess Anna. And she declares some great things about Jesus and how he will make a difference in Israel and the whole world **(Luke 2:21-28).**

Then the Magi, great men or kings from the Far East, come to visit and bow before Jesus. They bring gifts of gold and incense and myrrh to honor him **(Matt. 2:1-11).**

And then one night another angel comes to Mary and Joseph and says that they are to leave immediately that night and go to Egypt, because Herod is plotting to kill Jesus. So they leave right away to go to Egypt to be safe from Herod. After a period of time they came back to Palestine and returned to Nazareth. They settled in as a family and Joseph worked as a carpenter there **(Matt. 2:13-15).**

Now when Jesus was 12, the whole family, including others from Nazareth, went up to the Temple in Jerusalem. At the end of the spring feast days, Joseph and Mary left to go back home, but Jesus stayed and was talking with the religious leaders there. When they found him, Jesus told Mary that he was doing his Father's business. And Mary didn't quite understand what he meant **(Luke 2:41-49).**

Later on, at a wedding in Galilee, Jesus is asked to perform a miracle and at first said no. But his mother Mary talked him into it and Jesus did turn water into wine. And that was the beginning of his ministry **(John 2:1-11).**

When Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth, he is unable to do miracles there, because the people didn't have faith in him. They said – Oh, he's just the carpenter's kid. He's not important. And then they said something that was a slam to his mother

Mary, which hurt her feelings. They said – Isn't this Mary's son? Now in the Bible, any time people talked about a son, they always talked about the father. Isn't this Abraham's son, etc? This was a put down of both Mary and Jesus. It was like saying Jesus had no legitimate father (**Mark 6:1-6**).

Does this sound familiar. Maybe some of you have been called names at school, or have put you down or have been made fun of. Well, Jesus experienced those things just like we do.

Now, for time, we want to come to the final days of Jesus, where he and his disciples go up to Jerusalem for the Passover. And Jesus gets arrested. And Mary's watching this unfold and is struggling with that. As parents, we hate to see bad things happen to our kids. And Mary was no different. It was difficult for her to have her son arrested, beaten up, and called names. It was hard for her to hear the crowd yell out, "Crucify him, crucify him." She knew he was innocent. She knew he was the Son of God. She knew how he was conceived.

She experienced a broken heart over this. And especially to see the soldiers drive nails into his hands and feet and to see him hanging there on the cross. And this brings us back to where I, John, started by relating to you how Jesus told me to take care of his mother Mary.

And so I took that very seriously and began to spend time with her. And we all went to the upper room together after Jesus had died. And there we prayed and prayed. And I can tell you that Mary prayed fervently because this was her son. She wanted to know what this all meant, because Jesus hadn't established his kingdom like we thought he would. She was asking God, how they were to carry on without Jesus

And then all of a sudden word comes that Jesus has been resurrected. And so we went up to the tomb, and the angels said he was gone. And Mary's heart skipped a beat because she was told Jesus was alive.

Eventually we got to see him, and touched his hand, felt his side and experienced him once again. But then he told us that he was going away again. And so after 40 days, we all went up to the Mount of Olives and saw him ascended into heaven.

Jesus told us that he was going to ascend to his Father's throne and sit at his right hand and that eventually we would join him. So after he was gone, we went back to the upper room for prayer. And for ten days we were seeking God and asking him what's going to happen. We poured our hearts out to God during that time (**Acts 1:12-14**).

Then one morning on Pentecost, suddenly things began to happen. It was really unusual. Tongues of fire came down and a great wind began to blow. And then the Holy Spirit came upon the people assembled there including Mary. And then we began to be moved by God in a really powerful way. And it changed our lives forever (**Acts 2:1-4**).

And so, we went out as a group and began to impact the world to make a difference. And Mary became one of the great pillars of the church. She was the mother of Jesus.

And people began to call her “Mary, the mother of God” or “Mary, the mother of the Lord.”

Now over the centuries, people began to emphasize the Mary part and began to worship her. But that was not the original intent. She was called “Mary, mother of God” so that people would understand that Mary gave birth to the Son of Man, Son of God – that Jesus was born of a virgin, whose name was Mary. And that’s because so many people were saying that he was really wasn’t human at all.

And even today, people venerate Mary. Now some consider that they are not worshipping Mary, but are just giving honor to her. But it’s important that we know that she was, indeed, the mother of God and that she carried a real baby in her womb. She experienced real labor pains as she was giving birth to Jesus. And that she raised him as a child and taught him many things, including how to speak Aramaic. Jesus had to learn things just like we do. Mary made a permanent impact on his life.

And then Mary came to live with me, John, in Ephesus. And we began to learn together what it meant to be the followers of Jesus, and what it really meant that he was the Son of God. And that he came to reach out to us and give us life.

Now a few years later Mary died just like we all do. She was just a human, but a very important human. That’s because she brought Jesus into the world and because she was a person that God considered very favored and loved. And he wanted us to know about her. And God sent me, John, here today to talk about her and to help us remember that she was a real woman with the same aches and pains that we have.

And as God comes into our heart, we have those same struggles and those times of trouble when we don’t know quite what to do. Mary learned the same way do – through Jesus. Jesus now lives in us and he helps us to understand and helps us to grow and to gain experience even through the hard times of life.

So as we come to this time of advent, we need to focus on the fact that Jesus was really a human being. He really did come to be one of us. As we sang the song this morning, “What Child Is This”, we need to understand that Jesus was a child of Mary, but that he’s also the child of God, the child of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said I was the apostle he loved the most. And I was also the apostle that loved his mother and encouraged her and was there with her during her final days. And God blessed me because she touched me.

Key Scripture: Acts 1:14, "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."

General Group Question: What aspect of Mary’s life touched you the most today?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other’s needs afterwards.

1. How did Mary react to the news that Gabriel told her – with maturity or immaturity? Briefly explain.
2. What did Mary's final statement to the angel Gabriel show about her relationship to God? Is that a relationship we, too, should have with God?
3. Did Elizabeth's response to Mary, encourage her? If so, how?
4. What positive character qualities did Joseph possess?
5. Why is Mary's virginal conception of Jesus important?
6. What is the significance of Mary being called "Mary, the mother of God" or "Mary, the mother of the Lord"?
7. Why is it important for us to understand that Jesus is both the Son of Man and the Son of God?