



PONDERING A
TREASURE

5TH WEEK OF
DEVOTIONS

DAY 1

LUKE 1:35-38

³⁵ 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. ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ 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.

It has been an insightful look at the life of Mary as we have seen her called into service as the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:35) to eventually taking her seat with the disciples (Acts 1:14). This week we want to take a step back and soak in once again this wonderful journey of discipleship.

“Mary, did you know?” asks the popular song. As we have seen over these last few weeks, the answer is yes she did . . . and no she couldn’t have. What she knew is that the angel clearly told her that she would carry the Messiah. What she could not have known is the shape the journey would take. Those “knowings” could only come through experience. What stands out to us about her initial encounter with Gabriel is the willingness to surrender her life to the Lord’s plan: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38)

None of us know where following Jesus will take us or what type of road we will be required to walk. Even today, perhaps at a seemingly advanced stage of life, do we really know what following Jesus will mean? Discipleship, or surrender to Jesus, may mean choosing a career or turning down a promotion that will earn less money. Or following Jesus could have you moving to a different locale, even out of country in service of the Gospel. A journey of faith will mean risk in relationships, entering into difficult conversations, saying hard things. Like Mary, we will need to hold our cultural expectations loosely. At some point, like all Jews, she had hopes that the Messiah would overthrow Rome. When we see her with the disciples in Acts, she knows the Kingdom of God is not coming with might or power but rather is toppling principalities with weakness. Have we learned these cultural lessons? Is our discipleship shaped by kingdom values? Every day holds opportunities to exercise the faith that surrenders. What will that look like for you today? Tomorrow?

The question of surrender is before us because, like Mary, there is no place else we would rather be. If Mary had played it safe or insisted on her own designs for her life, where would she be? No one can say for sure, but the likelihood is that she wouldn't be in prayer with the disciples. Ultimately, the only safe place for us to be is surrendered to the will of God throughout the course of our life. It is only in his will that we will be carried along for a ride which is "safe" for us and pleasing to him.

PRAYER

Father, please open our eyes today to see the areas in which you are inviting us to surrender to you. May we know in our hearts that no matter how difficult the road ahead seems to be, it is ultimately the only "safe" place to be. Holy Spirit, remind us that our journey of discipleship is not alone, for you will never leave us or forsake us. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.

~ Andrew VanderMaas

DAY 2

LUKE 2:15-20

¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Most of Mary’s thoughts about Jesus must have been private. In some ways, all she could do was treasure them in her heart. Who would believe she had a conversation with the angel Gabriel or that shepherds showed up the night Jesus was born? How could she ever talk about her son over the back fence with other wives or at the marketplace detailing his accomplishments? What could the mother of God say to the mothers of mortals? How could she ever adequately explain to her friends what Jesus did in the temple on that trip to Jerusalem when he was young? No doubt, Mary and Joseph had some conversations together about Jesus, but they probably raised questions at a rate equal to the answers they discovered.

So, what Mary saw, she treasured in her heart. She tucked thoughts and memories away only to be pulled out in quiet hours when she thought about God and what he brought about through her. Like the Magnificat says, she was surely most blessed, the first to fully experience the treasure that is Jesus. That which was once a very private experience of a Palestinian peasant girl has become the most valuable treasure in the world, and we all share it through Mary.

Now we have the Scriptures that fully lay out the role of Jesus in God’s plan. We have the creeds that detail and explain Christ’s divine and human natures. We have a Christian calendar that yearly reminds us of the details of Christ’s work in our lives. We sing hymns that marvelously declare his worth and what he has accomplished. What we understand about Jesus is so much more explicit than the thoughts were for Mary. How much do we take all this full knowledge of Jesus into our hearts? Do we really understand what a treasure he is in our lives too?

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for the way that this season brings such great focus to Christ. Help us to minimize all the distractions and bring our thoughts into conformity with the thoughts of Mary, Joseph, and two thousand years' worth of believers' thoughts. May we honor you with those thoughts. May we praise you with those thoughts. Make our minds fruitful in their service to you.

~ Richard Malone

DAY 3

LUKE 2:35

“(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also) . . .”

JOHN 19:25

“but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”

When sin entered the world, grief entered the world. Even the best experiences would be touched with sorrow, for they would be tarnished and temporary. Because God knew his children would not have infinite knowledge with the ability to see to the end of their choices, he asked them to trust him. When Adam and Eve chose instead to trust their own insight, they experienced guilt, shame, and broken relationships. And although Eve never realized the full harvest of her unbelief, she soon tasted its bitter fruit when her firstborn son murdered his brother. Eve, “*the mother of all living*” (Gen. 3:20), saw her family ruptured by death. What mother could ever recover from such grief! Eve and her world needed a Redeemer!

Eve needed a Redeemer, and God needed another mother who, against all appearances, would trust him and become the instrument for the new beginning he had planned. He needed someone who would believe she could become a mother while remaining a virgin, someone who was confident nothing was impossible with God. Mary’s response to the angel, “*I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*” (Luke 1:39), revealed a humble, grateful heart who believed in God’s mission and gave herself to it. Mary’s faith was a higher vision that saw God at work in the ordinary places of life.

The astonishing gift of becoming the mother of the promised Messiah was packaged in grief. First, Mary experienced shame in a community that did not hear the angel’s message. Next, she experienced the inconvenience and humiliation of having to travel in her ninth month and of giving birth in a crude, lonely place—exactly what we would rule out as appropriate for a king. But along with the suffering were treasures, God’s words she received by faith. When she was in the dark, she remembered what she had seen in the light. She took out her treasures—God’s words through Hannah, the angel, Elizabeth, Joseph, and the shepherds. She cherished them, embracing them as she turned them over in her mind and protected them from unbelieving ears. She did not intrude into God’s plan, but waited for his timing, knowing he had battles in the heavenlies and preparations on earth. She patiently waited for her next direction.

The next word came through Simeon, an old man in the temple whose prophecy confirmed all God had already said about this special child. But just as Mary and Joseph were marveling at his words, grief again wrapped itself around them. Simeon prophesied that their child would be opposed by many, and a sword would pierce through her own heart. A sword? Whatever could those words mean? This sweet child opposed by many? Mary could not understand everything, but she did not refuse it. It was another treasure; later she would understand.

All through her life, Mary lived in cognitive dissonance, trying to reconcile God's words with her experience. All her life, she kept remembering, repeating, pondering, and believing God was at work in her waiting. And though Mary submitted, she understood that resignation was never the same as faith; she was active in the waiting, growing in love and trust in her God. Mary finally understood Simeon's words when her long obedience brought her to the cross where she saw the hearts of many revealed in hatred toward her beloved son. At the cross, Mary fully became the mother God needed to bring life to the world. At the beginning of her journey, she had to offer herself; now, she had to offer her son and trust what God would do with him. At the cross, Mary, the mother, fully became Mary, the disciple. Jesus, her son, became Jesus, her Savior. Her mission as mother is complete, but the mission to bring life to the world continues on until Jesus returns. We wait in hope!

PRAYER

Man of Sorrows, surely you have borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Surely you are the Savior of the world! We join believers around the globe to magnify your name. Blessings, honor, riches, and glory are yours, Lord Jesus Christ! We wait for you. Amen

~ Judy Vander Ark

DAY 4

ACTS 1:12-14

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

“And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:7)

As has been mentioned in sermons at Christ Church and in *Magnify: Pondering the Life of Jesus with Mary*, the word translated “inn” could more likely refer to a guest room in a family home than to a room in an unknown hotel. Joseph and Mary had traveled to Bethlehem for the census because it was the ancestral town of Joseph. We can have our guess as to why no doors of welcome from relatives opened to them. (Did they know, or if they knew, did they believe the claim that Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit?) We don't know for sure, but what we do know is that *there was no place for them*.

During Jesus's ministry, he continued in this posture... And Jesus said to him, *“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head”* (Luke 9:58).

Years later, Mary and her other sons tried to get through a crowd to see Jesus near the beginning of his ministry (Mark 3:31-35). However, Jesus didn't give them special treatment. It's a moment that can feel stark until we see how it plays out in the following years. Jesus didn't want to only give his family a place in his heart; he wanted to invite all who do his will to be his. This ultimately became great news for Mary and his brothers, as we see in our verses for today.

This last glimpse we have of Mary shows that she had a place! It was among a diverse and varied group, and the only thing they could have had in common was that they were followers of Jesus. Praying together in a room were the disciples, who even among themselves were not a monolithic group. They included fishermen, a tax collector, a political zealot who had worked to throw off Roman rule, a doubter, etc. Also praying in the room were “the women.” We don't know exactly which women they were, but Luke has mentioned some women who followed Jesus, and they were also extremely diverse:

Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom

seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. (Luke 8:1-3)

Finally, the brothers of Jesus were noted as being part of this group. What kind of journey had they been on? Did some of his brothers believe in him and others not? Did they go from unbelief to belief? Earlier in his ministry, John 7:5 says, “*not even his brothers believed in him.*” Yet Acts 1:14 places the brothers of Jesus in the room with those who “*with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.*”

Mary went from having no place to having a place. Do you know your place among the people at Christ Church? We too are a varied group. We are doubters, zealots, leaders of the community, financial supporters, those healed of terrible infirmities and those who aren't named in lists. But we're all part of this community together. If you can't find your place here, or if you feel the door is being shut against you, would you please let someone know? Jesus paid with his life to make us a family, so we are called to be one.

*In the home of Jesus there's a place for you;
Glorious, bright, and joyous, calm and peaceful, too;
Why then, like a wanderer, roam with weary pace,
If the home of Jesus holds for you a place?*

~ Susan Guerra

DAY 5

ACTS 1:12-14

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

ACTS 28:23-31

²³ When they had appointed a day for [Paul], they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

²⁴ And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved

²⁵ And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet:

²⁶ "Go to this people, and say,
"You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive."

²⁷ For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed;
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.'

²⁸ Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

³⁰ He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

The whole book of Acts is contextualized by its opening event, the ascension of Jesus. It is the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father that opens up the Kingdom of God to the Gentiles. I want to point out two reasons for this.

First, when Jesus ascends, he is given authority not merely over Israel but all the nations and the whole creation. This means that the gospel can go out to all the nations now. During his ministry, his focus was on *“the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matt. 10:6). But Jesus, knowing he was going to ascend and be given authority, instructed his disciples in Acts 1:8 to bring the gospel to even the uttermost parts.

“But you will receive power when the Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

So Acts 1:8 hints at the second important part of the ascension, the coming of the Holy Spirit. For when Jesus ascends, he is able to send the Spirit.

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” John 15:26

We see these two new realities bear fruit as the ragtag group of disciples, including Mary and Jesus’s brothers in Acts 1:12-14, moves into Pentecost, where the Spirit is poured out on the disciples and the nations hear the gospel through the diaspora of Israel.

“And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” Acts 2:8-11

The Spirit and the witness of the disciples follow the pattern from Acts 1:8, moving from Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. It wasn’t too long until the church recognized that the Gentiles too had received the good news and the Spirit.

“While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.” Acts 10:44-45

Finally, we see Paul near the end of his ministry still proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles and helping to expand God’s kingdom to the nations. But what does this have to do with us? This happened nearly two thousand years ago. Yes, but the mission is open-ended. We are called to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth, to the uttermost parts, or to anyone that has not heard the good news. We are identified with that ragtag group of disciples at the beginning. We have the same mission, the same Holy Spirit, and the same message. Jesus has ascended, so let us go forth to all the nations and peoples empowered by the Spirit and make disciples.

PRAYER

Dear Father, help us in this season to see the good news that has come to us in your Son. Let your Word and Spirit fill our hearts and move us toward the work to which you have called us. Help us to see those that need to hear the good news and let our lives be signs of your kingdom.

~ Jerry Stutzman