

Week Four Living in the Savior's Love

4A

Mary: Surrendering to the Savior

Pray

*Wondrously show Your [marvelous and amazing] lovingkindness,
O Savior of those who take refuge at Your right hand. (Psalm 17:7 Amplified)*

Today we are reading about Mary, a woman who experienced the unthinkable. She gave birth to God.

- Read Luke 1:26-38.

How did Mary react to this very startling experience? In all the artistic portrayals I've seen of this event, Mary looks peaceful and calm—wholly surrendered to God. But let's examine her first reaction.

*[Gabriel came to her and said,]“Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”
But she was much perplexed by his words
and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. (Luke 1:28-29)*

“Much perplexed.” (What does your version of the Bible use for this phrase? The Greek words in the original text say that she was “deeply agitated,” and “wondered,” and the verb tense implies ongoing action. Mary was agitated for more than a brief moment.¹ This was a normal human reaction to a very startling visitor. So how did she move from feeling “much perplexed” to her beautiful surrendering phrase, “let it be to me according to your word”?)

The angel told Mary several things that must have given her peace in the situation. First, the angel said that God was with her and saw her as “favored.”

Secondly, the angel gave her the information that her relative Elizabeth was pregnant. I think the angel was reassuring her that she could have fellowship with a friend, even as her unplanned pregnancy turned her world upside down. Because Mary set off so quickly to see Elizabeth, I presume the two women already had a close relationship.

In addition to these two facts brought by the angel, Mary also knew her own identity. She saw herself as the Lord's servant. This humble attitude let her rest in God's plan for her life.

- Read Luke 1:39-55.

This is a glimpse of Mary's prayer life. Notice that Mary did not pour out this beautiful prayer of praise the moment she heard the startling message. She was “much perplexed,” she surrendered to the plan, and she went to find fellowship with her trusted relative. Then, when Elizabeth welcomed her, she bubbled over with joy and praise. Look back at the prayer and notice how much of it focuses on Mary's own blessings and how much of it focuses on God himself.

How did Mary describe God?

*My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. (Luke 1:46-47)*

I was interested in the word “Savior.” The Greek word is *soter*, and it means “a deliverer, a God, or Christ.” Ancient people gave this name to their gods, princes, and kings. It was also a common Greek description of the gods who they believed were active in world events.²

Here are a few other Scriptures that include this word.

Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 1:10-11)

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

(Titus 3:3-5)

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever.

Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

Pray

Choose one of the verses above and use it as you pray.

4B

Joseph: Love in Action

Pray

*Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love. (Psalm 33:18)*

- Read Matthew 1:18-25 and Matthew 2:1-15.
- Read Luke 2:21-24 and Luke 2:41.

These are the only scriptures that show Joseph in action. The Bible simply records his actions and none of his words. Mark pondered what Joseph might have said after Mary told him about her baby.

Joseph.
Carpenter.
Worker of wood.
Wood is predictable.
People – not so much.
I thought I knew her.
We were engaged.
Troth plighted and all that.
Now I find she's...
Pregnant.
Not mine.
Having visions.
Never did that before.
Angels.
Spouting poetry.
"My soul doth magnify..."
Don't remember that before either.
No one else knows.
Yet.
Not the sort of thing you talk about.
I have a case.
If I wanted.
Ironclad.
No.
Just make a quiet split.
Easier.
That was yesterday.
Are visions contagious?
Now I'm seeing angels.
OK, just the one.
"Don't be afraid" he says.
"Take Mary to be your wife."
"Conceived of the Holy Spirit..."
OK.
Divorce canceled, wedding back on.
Marry Mary, raise the Son of God.
Not sure I understand it all.
Not quite what I'd pictured.
Not my plan, but...
I trust Him.
Just as long as I don't start with the poetry...

–Mark J. Leamy

I called this day “love in action” because I think Joseph’s love for God and for his family is evident. Every time we meet Joseph in Scripture, he is obeying God (by marrying Mary, taking his family to Egypt, and following various Jewish religious laws.)

*They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me,
and those who love me will be loved by my Father. (John 14:31)
Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.
(1 John 4:11)*

God knows and loves each of us. We can respond by loving him and loving each other. God knows our dark times, our celebrations, our strengths, and our weaknesses. God didn’t ask Joseph to proclaim poetic praises. God didn’t wake up John the Baptist to make a middle-of-the-night departure for Egypt. God didn’t require Mary to take a life-long temperance pledge. He asked each of them to serve him in challenging circumstances in their own unique ways.

I find this encouraging and inspiring during the last weeks of the year. There are so many celebrations, so many demands on my time, so many expectations—but God knows me and loves me. He knows what I can do and what I can’t do.

*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and
you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with
me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or
ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.
(Matthew 11:28-30 Message)
O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.
(Psalm 139:1-6)*

Pray

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. (John 15:9)

4C

St. Thomas: Loved by the Savior

Pray

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. (Psalm 36:5)

Love came down at Christmas,
love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas;
star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
worship we our Jesus,
but wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token;
love be yours and love be mine;
love to God and others,
love for plea and gift and sign.
--Christina Rosetti³

I was intrigued to see St. Thomas' Feast Day on December 21. Here we are in the darkest week of the year, remembering a disciple who was a bit doubtful at times.

- Read John 14:1-6 and John 20:24-29. How would you describe Thomas from what you read here?

According to church tradition, Thomas did not remain doubtful. He took the gospel to India, where he was martyred for his faith. Thomas's example speaks to me so deeply during this dark and hectic week. Moments of doubt and seasons of weakness do not tell the whole story.

In this season where we may try (and fail) to make everything magical and sparkly and wonderful, I am encouraged when I think of Thomas. He seems like a down-to-earth guy who just wanted everything to be real and touchable. If I am feeling disappointed in the season, I can think about what I know to be real (the love of God) and the blessings around me that I can feel and touch and taste (coffee, my crazy cats, my husband cooking Christmas dinner, etc.)

A Prayer for St. Thomas's Feast Day

*Everliving God, who strengthened your apostle Thomas
with firm and certain faith in your Son's resurrection:
Grant us so perfectly and without doubt to believe in Jesus Christ,
our Lord and our God, that our faith may never be found wanting in your sight; through
him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Book of Common Prayer, 1979)*

Pray

*How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. (Psalm 36:7)*

Notes

1. The Meaning is in the Waiting, by Paula Gooder
2. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4990/kjv/tr/0-1/>
3. Poem Source: https://hymnary.org/text/love_came_down_at_christmas