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August 15, 2010 • Mary, Mother of Our Lord

Isaiah 61:7-11  
Galatians 4:4-7  
Luke 1:46-55

## **God's servant, Mary**

Mary was nothing special, compared to the people around her. Like the cover of our bulletin shows, she was a normal teenager. She was unmarried, so she was on the outside of that patriarchal society. She was relatively poor, but those folks were everywhere, too. She was waiting for life to begin, as all of us do at some point in our lives.

When God chose Mary to receive Jesus, it was an act that embodied all the Hebrew scripture. The grace she experienced – well, that was about as overwhelming as God's grace gets. She did nothing special except that God chose her – and she answered the call.

The consequences of God's grace must have been overwhelming, as well. Mary's life became totally different. She became pregnant while unmarried, and probably suffered scorn from people around her. She was a mother, as many of us are. Yet motherhood for her had to be a bizarre thing. After Jesus' birth, she and Joseph had to flee to Egypt for fear that their newborn would be killed by the king, who was on a fearful rampage of slaughtering infant boys. She cared for her son, as she watched him grow and develop. You've got to wonder how often she thought about who he was. When was he acting as a child who needed correction, and when was he acting as the teacher? As Jesus grew, Mary watched God's Word come to its fullness. Her observations rolled around in her heart, as she pondered God, over and over.

I bet Mary was proud when Jesus began his ministry of teaching and healing and forgiving. Whatever their ages, kids can reach in and rip your heart out. Mary and his siblings came to talk to Jesus at one point. They heard him say to the crowd, “Who are my mother and brothers? And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” (*Mk 3:33-35*) Another time, he said that he came to divide people, “father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” (*Lk 12:53*) Who was this man? It couldn't be Mary's son, showing such disrespect to her and his family members. Is it possible he was really teaching God's word?

The heartache did not end there. Mary saw when her son, God's own, celebrated – and then scorned, arrested, beaten, and killed by the state in an excruciatingly slow and humiliating way. Only days later, Mary heard about the empty tomb, and Jesus' appearances to his disciples. She was there when the Holy Spirit was unleashed on the people gathered at Pentecost.

Mary was the closest, and the first, disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ. We don't hear every little thought of hers, when God first calls or shortly thereafter. We don't know the details of what she did or said. What comes through the gospels is an over-arching theme. It's one of Mary accepting God's call to her, and her thanksgiving for God and God's action in history.

### **God's servant, Emanuel's**

When the church gazes at Mary, we see ourselves: normal, imperfect people. Blessed with God's presence and grace in our lives. Called to bear the presence of

Christ into a world that longs to know God. Invited to a shared role with divine dreams that seem overwhelmingly large, compared to little ol' us.

As a congregation, we are seeking to live as Christ's disciples together – and to follow where God calls us next. We're bit like Mary. It is as if we standing on the edge of a precipice, waiting for God to show us the way. But it's not like Mary's journey was easy for her. Remember the trials and the struggles that she had to go through. Consider the hopes and dreams that she must have lost. "Normal" marriage and family life flew out the window as soon as that angel appeared.

We are filled with our own heartaches. We grieve the people we love who have left Emanuel's over the years, for whatever reason. We grieve the good times that have been, and the ways that God has blessed us in and through this congregation. As Mary must have done, we grieve the hopes that we had for our church's future, which may not come to be. Now it appears that God may call us a different way, a way that has not yet been revealed.

This week, I will attend a meeting of pastors of congregations like ours, for whom the financial realities of ministry are difficult these days. This synod-hosted conversation is a first step for Emanuel's. God may be there, inviting us into new ministry relationships that would be a blessing, and a gift of new life. Or it may be clear that God is not calling us in those directions, and that we should keep our prayerful eyes and ears open to God's call.

Regardless of what happens, we are standing on new spiritual ground together. The prospect of major change to church life can bring a mixture of feelings. It is natural for us to be sad or angry, uncertain or fearful about the situation.

On her feast day we look to Mary, probably the first saint among them all, as a guide. We don't know how Mary dealt with the uncertainty and the fear that must

have followed the angel's visit. The Bible has lots of space between the lines of scripture. She may have done far more than say "Here am I." She may have felt sadness and loss, along with thanksgiving and praise. Like us, she may have looked back over her short life, and over her dreams for the future. Yet somehow, in her song it's clear that she kept her gaze on God through whatever she was thinking and feeling. She remembered how God had blessed her people for many years. In her song, she cited, "the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." (*Lk 1:55*) And then Mary named how God was blessing her, in particular. "...[F]or he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed". (1:48)

God has blessed the people of Emanuel's for over one hundred and three years, in the name of Christ. God continues to shower us with forgiveness and peace, joy and faithfulness in our lives. God continues to call us to live Christ's word of grace in the world. Whatever happens next, I trust those blessings will not end. Thanks be to God.