

A Light in a Dark World

December 20th, 2015

Play Video: *Mary, Did You Know?*

Mary, did you know? Truth is, when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, she could **never have fully known...**

- That this promised baby was already standing amidst the angels of heaven as they worshipped Him as the perfect Lamb of God.
- She could **never have fully imagined** how, by kissing her child's face, she would, in fact, be kissing the face of God.
- She could **never have fully understood** how the baby she would soon deliver... would one day deliver the world;
- How this baby boy, who would light up her life, would be the **Light of the world!**

When speaking of the coming Messiah, **the Prophet Isaiah wrote** that *"In that time, the people walking in darkness will see a great light... and those living in the land of the shadow of death will know that a light has dawned."*

- But still, Mary could **never have fully known the hope** that this Light would ultimately bring to **what had become a very dark world**.
- We sing about how Jesus' birth **"Came Upon a Midnight Clear;"** how **the night the Savior was born** was a **"Holy Night"** and a **"A Silent Night."**
- "Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright."

And yet, the world into which Jesus was born... the world of Mary, the mother of Jesus... was anything but "calm & bright."

- Born to an **impoverished family** from an **obscure village...** Mary lived under an **abusive foreign rule...**
- Where she would watch **friends dragged away** into slavery because their families **couldn't afford the oppressive taxes** forced on them.

As a young woman **raised on the wrong side** of the tracks **where the average person lived** to around the age of forty.

- Mary lived with **no worldly significance**; had **no voice**; **few rights**, and almost **no power to influence her own future**.
- And yet, still... if you look at portrayals of Mary through centuries of art history, they almost always depict her as this **angelic, serene, uncomplicated** young woman **without a care** in the world.

- But all that is just fiction.

We first meet the “*real*” Mary in **Luke chapter 1:26**. “*In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"*”

- But, of course, as much as she heard the words, **Mary couldn't possibly understand** all that was going on.
- In fact, in the next verse (29), we're told that “*Mary was greatly troubled at the angel's words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.*”

But even beyond the words, **Mary wasn't used to being singled out. She was a very ordinary first-century teen girl** who would never want to call attention to herself.

- Even her name was ordinary. Take a wild guess at this one...
- What **percentage of women** in first century Israel do you think were named Mary?
- About 50%, half of all women back in Jesus' day had the name, Mary (Miriam in Hebrew).

The point is there's **nothing about this particular girl** named Mary that would have **made it normal** for her to be singled out.

- And yet, out of nowhere... **on a day just any other day**, an angel comes to her and says, “*You have found favor in God.*”
- Needless to say, Mary is greatly troubled by this. And yet, what the angel **just said** was nothing compared to what he was **about to say!**

In **verse 34**, Mary asked the angel, “*But how can this happen? I am a virgin.*” *The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.”*

Now, as you hear this, don't forget... **you and I have heard this** story over and over again.

- And so, we can easily **loose the sense of how utterly unprepared** Mary was for what was happening.
- I mean, knowing that **she's still a virgin**, she's being told that she's gonna have a baby... a baby conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Now, forget all the hand-painted smiles in all the nativity scene characters that you'll see throughout the Christmas season...

- and **imagine all this happening in real life**, with real people.
- And now, **without really understanding it herself**, she's going to have to go to Joseph, a righteous man whom she's engaged to...
- **she's going to have to tell him** that she's pregnant... Even though she's never been unfaithful to him.
- Now what are the odds that any man is going to believe a story like that?

Truth is, she knew what would happen to an adulteress in her day—that the most common fate was for a woman to be taken to a public place...

- Where her **clothes would be torn** to expose her disgrace publically in front of her entire community.
- Not only would she **damage her own father's reputation**, but Joseph's as well.
- I mean, everyone will assume that Joseph was the father... even though he's acted with great integrity and character.

Truth is, in a small town like Nazareth, **the gossip that circulated about Mary** would never fully leave her.

- In fact, **when Jesus gives His first sermon** in the synagogue there in Nazareth some years later,
- the people started asking each other, in **Mark 6:3**, ***"Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this the son of Mary?"***

Now, keep in mind that, in that day men, would always be identified as the son of his father—Jesus the son of Joseph.

- But the people don't refer to Jesus like that. Instead, they refer to Him as the **son of Mary**.
- In other words, even after all the years that have gone by, the people there in Nazareth still remember what happened with Mary... **about her being an unwed pregnant girl**.

You know, it's kind of interesting, that when Jesus grew up and began His ministry, He became well known as one who would welcome *not only* women...but **women with shady reputations**.

- **Women with dubious pasts**, for example, would come to Him and bathe His feet with their tears... and He would welcome them!

- He would **protect them** when they were caught in adultery. **Maybe He remembered** what people had said about His own mom.

You see, when the angel spoke that day to Mary, there was a lot she didn't understand... there was a lot Mary didn't know.

- But what she did know was that **all of her dreams** of a **normal, respectable, quiet life** in a small town like Nazareth were about to disappear.
- And yet, **in spite of all of that**, she offers this amazing response to the angel in **Luke 1:38**, ***"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have spoken."***

Now, this isn't a statement of **passive resignation** over circumstances she can't control. **This is a heroic offering of herself.**

- This is a **sacrifice of her agenda**... a laying down of her own **dreams**; her **life**, her **reputation**, of **who she is**.
- She knew that... whatever peace she would know in her life wouldn't come because her life was **calm or bright** or **quiet** or **easy** or **pleasant** or **respectable**—
- because **it would be none** of those things.

Instead, **Mary's peace came to her** as a result of a heart that would cry out, ***"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as You have spoken."***

- Not my will... but Your will be done.
- You see, **before Jesus would ever suffer for Mary** and for all humanity... Mary suffered for Jesus. She was an amazing woman.

But, beyond this supernatural conception, what did the angel mean when he said, in **verse 32-33**, that...

- ***"He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"***
- I mean, we hear those words in the broad context of the New Testament... and we celebrate!
- But back then, those words would have been explosive.

Remember... When Jesus was born, Herod was the king over Palestine; that little area where Jesus was born and raised.

- But **way up over Herod**, the **ruler of everything**, the head of the Roman Empire, was Caesar Augustus.

- Now, **when Caesar Augustus was a young man**, he was adopted by Julius Caesar...
- the one who brought the whole Roman Empire together—kind of the first great Caesar.

When Julius Caesar died, there were people who claimed they saw Julius Caesar ascending to the heavens riding on a comet...

- And, because of this, Caesar was **officially declared a god**. This is the beginning of **emperor worship** in Rome.
- So, Caesar Augustus, **because he's Julius Caesar's adopted son** was declared the very "**son of god**".

And for many, he lived up to his reputation... inaugurating what would become known as the ***Pax Romana***.

- Some of you might remember that phrase from high school history—the Pax Romana, **which was the Peace of Rome**... 207 years of relative peace.
- And because Caesar Augustus brought the ***Pax Romana*** to what ***had been*** considered to be uncivilized parts of the world, he was proclaimed the ***Soter***, the Savior of Rome.

And, **this announcement** of his reign as "**peace-giver**" and "**savior**," was officially declared throughout the empire as the ***Good News***.

- You see, in Mary's day, **the "good news" was that Caesar Augustus, the son of god, has become the savior of his people...**
- The one who has **brought peace to earth**.
- Does that language sound remotely familiar to anybody here? That's loaded language.

You **start attributing that kind of language** to somebody other than Caesar Augustus and you're taking your life into your hands.

- But **that's exactly what the angel says to Mary** about the Son who would be born to her.
- In **verse 35**, the angel says to Mary, "*So the holy one to be born to you will be called the Son of God.*" Not just a son... but **THE** son of the Most High.

And then, in **Luke 2:10-14**, an angel appears to the shepherds and says...

- **“Do not be afraid for I bring you Good News of great joy, which shall be for all people. For today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.”**
- Here is the Good News! The **Son of God**, the **Savior** has been born to **bring peace on earth. And it ain't Caesar.** It's Jesus!

Imagine hearing these shepherds telling you what Gabriel had only told you. Imagine the emotions running through her.

- After the shepherds shared with Mary what the angel had told them, we read in **Luke 2:18-19** that:
- **“All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said but Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”**
- Everybody was amazed. And yet, for Mary, **it went a lot deeper** than that.
- You see, **Mary treasured in her heart** all the shepherds had said.

Now I used to think that this was kind of a sentimental expression, something a mom might do... turning their words into a scrapbook moment of sorts.

- But, that's not what's going on here at all.
- The language of **“treasuring & pondering”** in Scripture were often **attributed to prophets as they discerned** what it was that God was doing around them and in the world.

But now, with all that's being told to her, it's this illiterate, impoverished, obscure, Jewish, peasant girl,

- who is **pondering & treasuring in her heart** everything that was told to her.
- Everybody was amazed at what the Shepherd's were saying... but it was **Mary who first began to understand what God was really up** to in sending us a new king...
- Not just a king, but also a **King over Herod**, a **King over Caesar Augustus**... the **King of kings**.

After that, Mary and Joseph take their new baby to the Temple to be dedicated... **not simply** because the Torah required it...

- but because they shared such a passion to honor the Lord as young parents.
- This would have been a proud moment for any parents... to **dedicate their child** in the temple... the kind of joyful moment that they'd remember throughout their lives.

But as they go into the Temple, they're stopped by an old man named **Simeon** who asks Mary & Joseph if he could hold their baby boy.

- We're told that Simeon was devout and highly regarded man... filled with the Holy Spirit.
- When he sees the baby, he lifts him up and begins praying out to God. He says in **Luke 2:29-32**...
- ***"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of your people Israel."***

Let me ask you... did anyone ever say anything like that over you when you were a baby?

- When our girls were young, I remember getting frustrated when I was out with them and nobody chose to comment just how beautiful they were.
- I would look around in amazement, ***"Are you blind? Do you not see two of the most beautiful girls in the world right in front of you?"***

Of course, **at times people did make comments**... but nobody ever came up to them and said,

- *"Now I've seen everything... the most beautiful baby in the world... Now I can die!"* Not that that would've surprised me.
- But Simeon continues in verses **2:34-35** with **words that will stay with Mary** throughout every moment of Jesus' life.
- Hey said, ***"This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."***

He says that... and then he walks away. What is she supposed to think?

What's she supposed to do?

- **Good news, Son of God, Savior, peace on earth, King of kings...**
- But **what's this about His being opposed**; That **His glory will come through sorrow and suffering**?
- What does it mean that, somehow, through all of this, **a sword would pierce Mary's very soul**?

- **How do you even process** something like that? What happened to “all is calm, all is bright?”

All we know is that after they dedicated Jesus in the Temple, according to **verses 39-40**, “*They returned home to Nazareth in Galilee...*

- *There, the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.*”
- But, you know... it's a **funny thing about kids**. They tend to wanna know their story.
- I mean, **kids will often ask their parents**, “*How old were you when I was born? How did you come up with my name? Did I used to cry a lot?*”

Well... imagine the conversation when Jesus would ask His mom... “***Tell me about when I was a little kid. Tell me my story, mom.***”

- Sometimes we forget that Jesus was a real “little kid!” He wasn't pretending to be a kid... He was a kid.
- **When Jesus was lying in the manger**, He wasn't lying there thinking, “*I've got to go save the world.*”
- He came as a real baby and then He had to grow... and **as He grew, His curiosity grew...** Like other kids, He wanted to know His story!

But, in Jesus' case, what are you going to tell Him? “***That one day, when we took you to be dedicated in the Temple, a deeply respected man of God told me that you were the light and salvation of the world?***”

- **That's cool!** “*But, wait... there's another part.*” **He also said** “*you were destined to cause the rising and falling of many in Israel?*”
- I mean, how could she prepare Him for something that she, herself, didn't even understand?

Well, Son... even though Herod is called a king here in Jerusalem... and even though Caesar is king over the entire Empire, the truth is, he'll never bring salvation and peace to the world. But according to angels and prophets and shepherds and wise men... You will!”

“*But, remember, Jesus... it's a dangerous thing to defy a king. There's so much you'll have to figure out. I just know that I said to God a long time ago, 'Let it be to me as You say... Not my will. Yours be done. So, if it ever*

gets really hard... when you don't know what else to pray, Jesus—if you are ever troubled, if you are ever confused, you can always pray that.”

Sometime later, **they go to Temple for Passover**. But on their way home, they realize, amidst all the craziness, that Jesus isn't with them.

- Can you imagine this? *“Honey... you lost Jesus. **You lost the Son of God... You lost the Savior of the World?! What were you thinking? Man, are you in trouble!**”*
- So they turn around and head frantically back into Jerusalem. Eventually, three full days later, they find Jesus in the Temple.

He's just turned twelve... a watershed moment in the journey of a boy into manhood...

- And **now, we're told, He's sitting amongst the teachers**, listening to them and asking them questions.
- We read, in **verse 47**, that everyone who heard Him was **amazed** at His understanding... His wisdom... the way He answered *their* questions.

When Mary finds Him, she says, in **verse 48**, *“Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere.”*

- Jesus answered in **verse 49**, *“Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's House?” **Didn't you know Mom? Didn't you know?***
- But **we're told** that she didn't really understand yet.

Turns out this would be a **transitional moment in Mary's life**, because it's here that **her relationship with Jesus begins to change**.

- His **identity**, His **mission**, His **calling** was really beginning to take shape. She won't be able to relate to Him in quite the same way.
- She's **going to have to let go...** She'll have to **die a little**. And she wonders, *“**Maybe this is the sword**”* Simeon was speaking about.

But while Mary didn't completely understand what Jesus was saying to her about having to be in His Father's house...

- she didn't simply dismiss His words either. Instead, we're told here in **verse 51...**
- *“**But Mary (again) treasured all these things in her heart.**”* God, what are You doing?

Well... **somewhere between Luke, chapter 2 and 3**, Jesus grows up. And, sometime within those years **Joseph dies**.

- Mary is left a widow, having to raise her family on her own.
- We know from **Matthew 13:55-56** that Jesus had a number of brothers and sisters.
- Eventually, her first-born leaves home in order to begin His public ministry. Of course, it's **never easy for a mother to let go...** but that's not the hardest part for Mary.

Truth is, **Mary still had no idea** what the life of the *Son of God & Savior* would look like.

- In fact, while the Messiah was supposed to purge Israel of sinners, **Jesus is actually hanging out with them?**
- She couldn't understand... **"Why is He sharing a meal with them?"** Why is He **welcoming them** into His community of followers?
- It's not supposed to be that way.

The Messiah is supposed to overthrow Gentile & Roman rulers... And yet, Jesus is challenging **Israel's rulers!**

- How is it that he's affirming the faith a Roman centurion **while offending the religious leaders** of Israel?
- I mean, what in the world is Jesus up to?

We don't often think about how this would have affected His family, but again, we're given little clues here in the Gospels.

- In **Mark 3:21**, for example, we're told that **"When His family heard about this (His strange ministry), they went to take charge of Him for they said He is out of His mind."**
- Did you ever say that about somebody in your family? Anyone have a relative you think is a bit "out to lunch?"
- Is anyone sitting next to the relative or family member you think is "out to lunch?"

Well... Jesus' whole family thinks He's out of His mind. Ever question what Jesus is up to in your life?

- We're told in **John 7:5** that, *"Even Jesus' own brothers did not believe in him."*
- So, they plan a little intervention with Him. They are going to **take charge** of Him. Kids... don't try that at home!

While Jesus is in someone's home teaching, we're told that Mary and her other sons arrived. Still standing outside, **they send someone** in to call Him.

- And so, in **Mark 3:31-35**, someone tells Jesus, "*Your mother and brothers are outside looking for You.*"
- So, Jesus responds... "**Who are my mother and brothers?**"
- Then He looks at those seated around him and says, "*Here are My mother and My brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother, my sister, My mother.*"

Mary's there at the door... trying to understand what Jesus was saying. What is she supposed to do?

- Though she's learned this lesson before, I think it's at this moment that **Mary fully realizes her need to let Him go...**
- to **trust God** in spite of all her questions. "*Let it be to me as You say, God... Not my will but Yours be done.*"
- Perhaps this was the sword that would pierce her soul.

One way or another, she goes back home. She **watches**, she **prays**, she **wonders**, she **treasures**.

- This is pretty much **all we hear about regarding Mary** until the very end of Jesus' life three years later.
- Jesus was **betrayed**, He is **facing death**, He's **in the garden**, He is **agonizing before God**.
- God is asking Him to suffer. The Cross is now before Him.

It's **an anguish** that you and I cannot even imagine. Jesus prays and He **asks to be spared** from having to go through this suffering.

- And **in that agonizing moment** in His life, **He begins to pray...**
- "*But Father, not my but Yours be done. I am the Lord's Servant. May it be to Me as You have said.*"
- You see, **the prayer that Mary prayed when His life began** is **the prayer that her Son prays when His life comes to an end.**

And when Jesus is **arrested**, **tried**, **convicted**, **beaten**, and **hung on a cross**, we're told in **John 19:25**, that **"Near the cross of Jesus stood His mother..."**

- What could be more horrific that the pain of a mother watching the brutal death of her child?
- All of His other followers... and **all of His disciples except one...** have fled. **And yet**, there is Mary "near the cross."

- Her little baby is in front of her... It's like His whole life is running through her mind.

She sees that courageous man on the cross and she remembers the **courage of His earthly father** who stood at her side even when the entire village accused her of adultery.

- She stood there... **remembering Simeon's** words to her, "*And a sword will pierce your heart.*" **Now she knows.**
- Suffering there on that Cross was the **Son of God**, the **Savior**, the **Prince of Peace**... her Son... **branded as a criminal.**
- Mary did you know... that **Heaven's perfect Lamb** would now become **humanity's sacrificial Lamb?**
- With that sword piercing her heart... I think she was just beginning to really understand.

After Jesus' crucifixion, we're told by Luke, in **Acts 1:14**, that "*They all joined together constantly in prayer, the Disciples, along with the women and Mary the Mother of Jesus and with His brothers.*"

- She had just watched her first-born Son die an agonizing death. It was the most painful moment of her life.
- **But like His 12th birthday, AFTER THREE DAYS** she would find Him. After three days, she would see Him again!!

Not many years earlier, they thought He was out of His mind... but even His brother's get it now.

- Now they know... "*He's the Peace of Peace... the Son of God, the Good News all of our history has longed for, the Savior of the World.*"
- Nothing... not **Caesar**, not **Herod**, not **problems**, not **scandal**, not **death itself** can stop this peace,
- which **all began so long ago with that one dangerous prayer**... "*I am the Lord's servant. **Let it be to me according to your word.***"

When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me; Speaking words of wisdom, let it be!

- "***Let it be according to your word, Lord!***"
- An in my hour of darkness, she is standing right in front of me, speaking words of wisdom, 'let it be.'

I may not know what your circumstances this Christmas season. Things may be going pretty well for you or things may feel like they're crumbling.

- But, I do know this. **There is no foundation upon which you can build a life... nothing of this world that can offer lasting peace...**
- Not **money**, not **reputation**, not **career**, not **intelligence**, not **youth**, not **beauty**, not **job security**, not a **nice bank account**...
- Nothing—**except what God has done in Jesus.**

The One born into this world with only one mission... that He would die for you and I... The **One who would cause the rise and falling of many...**

- the **Son of God**, the **Prince of Peace**, the **King of kings**, the **Savior** of the World...
- Is here this morning... and He's reminding us that WE CAN TRUST HIM!

In **John 8:12**, Jesus spoke these words. He said, ***"I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."***

- That even through the worst of storms... that **He is the Light** in the Darkness.
- When God saw all the darkness in the world, **He doesn't send a warning...**
 - o He doesn't send an **army**
 - o He doesn't send a **rebuke**
 - o He doesn't send a **punishment**
 - o He doesn't send an **idea**
 - o He doesn't send a **religion**
- Instead, He **sends a Person...** He sends **His Son...** He sends **Jesus...** who is the **"Light of the World."**

In speaking about that day when the Messiah would come into this dark world, God said, in Isaiah 9 that **for those living** in the land of the shadow of death, **a light will dawn.**

- ***Maybe you need His light to guide you through times of trouble.*** Maybe you just need peace. Maybe your world has been rocked by something.
- Say, *"God, I want to know that kind of peace that goes deeper than whatever it is that has been shaking my world... whatever it is that's causing fear in my life."*

Here is God's Word to you, through His Son... through that Baby born to Mary; that went to a cross.

- He said, "***My peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. And the peace I give is a gift the world does not have to give. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.***"
- Mary do you know? Standing there near the Cross, she understood it all. **Her baby boy was the light of the world...**
- That **whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness**, but will have the light of life.