

“Thoughts on Bread - Part III: The Faith Result”
Mary, Mother of Our Lord/Pentecost 12 - 8.15.2021 - Luke 1:26-38/B

Never having had a child of my body, I was excited to find there's an app that marks a baby's size each week. We were happy when our first grandson was as big as a peanut, then rejoiced that he made apricot, ecstatic when he hit eggplant and could hardly contain ourselves when he was the size of a small melon! The journey from poppy seed to pumpkin size was new to me - but surely got us grandfolks involved from day #1!

I wonder if Jesus was aware of these stages of his own growth when he was in Mary's womb. He was, after all, all-knowing. Mary certainly knew he was there - more and more each day - but since Jesus was truly human, I'd guess he limited himself so as to experience being born like the rest of us. So, he would have to depend on the memories of Mary and Joseph, to hear about the beginning of his life. Human life. Just like us.

But Mary experienced something completely unique in history. No other woman carried a son who was miraculously created by the power of God through the Holy Spirit. Now, every human child is a miracle in and of itself, but Mary's boy was not only the **Son** of God, he **was** God, and Mary became intimately connected to the Creator of the Universe - a human vessel to carry God in flesh into this world.

Wow. And you thought parenting was huge responsibility! Put yourself in Mary's shoes. Mother of a son - her son, but also God's Son. Imagine what it felt like, knowing that the Holy Spirit was present every moment of every hour of every day. Looking over her shoulder...watching her do what she was born to do, with her child - who was not her child.

Today we mark the festival of Mary, Mother of Our Lord. August 15 is set aside to venerate her - to tell her story and to honor her life-long sacrifice in service to God. Ancient legends say that Mary's life did not end in *death*, but in her miraculous "assumption" into heaven - "taken up, bodily" just like Elijah and Jesus before her. Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches require this belief. While Lutherans do not, we **have** marked this festival since the Reformation. So, today, August 15, we tell her story.

Luke's Gospel that I just read is where we first meet Mary. Her response to Gabriel's message is called *The Magnificat*, her song of praise that we sing during *Holden Evening Prayer*. And just like that, Mary's life is changed forever. With one encounter, one conversation, she will no longer lived the life she had planned.

She goes to visit her kinswoman, Elizabeth - who has had a similar visitation herself, and is pregnant with John the Baptist. After their visit, Mary returns to journey to Bethlehem for a census. It is there she gives birth to her son. Had she thought she would skip the pains of childbirth because of who he was? No. But it was more than that: she was not in her own home, her mother was far away, and there was no midwife to assist her. But the moment he was born she knew one thing: he needed her help. He needed her body for warmth and nourishment and comfort. He needed her. And from that day on, her life was for him alone.

The family settled in an obscure place called Nazareth - where she would raise her son, Jesus, to become the Lamb of God, Savior of the world. I don't think she could have done that without being clear about what God was doing with her; or with him.

There are two stories I think give us deeper insight into Mary - and how well she "navigated" this task she so willingly embraced. The first is all we have about Jesus' childhood.

Since it appears only in Luke, it must not have been widely known. Maybe Mary had only shared it with the inner circle of apostles, because any parent who has ever “lost track of” their child in a park or a store or even in your own yard... knows the terror that rises from the center of yourself.

Discovering that Jesus was not with the relatives leaving Jerusalem after a festival, the frantic mother searched for three days, and finally spies him at the Temple, “*Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety!*” Then, relief once she knows he is safe, and even a bit of pride in his excuse, “*Why were you searching for me? Did you not know I must be in my Father’s house?*”

In the space of a few moments, we see a frightened woman moving from terror to anger to relief and pride. By the moment of reunion, she has forgotten about herself. Because now that he’s safe, she is all about him.

Back in Nazareth - he continues to grow. He learns the crafts of both his fathers - and Mary is so proud. When others ask if he has married yet - she might smile and say that he has other plans. A wise cover by a mother who knows, who has kept these things and pondered them in her heart. But how did she live with Jesus, the Christ, as her little boy? Did she ever feel *adequate* to raise this child who belonged to God? Did they ever talk about who he was and what he was meant to do? Scripture is silent.

But then, a Wedding in Cana - Mary’s gifts of friendship, hospitality and compassion are being shared beyond Jesus, now an itinerant teacher gathering students. Mary is that kind of friend who notices the unspoken needs of others (perhaps that is where Jesus got that trait!) So, when the wedding’s wine supply runs dry, she knows that her friends will be humiliated, even shamed. She goes directly to Jesus for his assistance. “*They have no wine.*” “*Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?*

My hour has not yet come.” That sounds to me as if they had previously discussed the timing of Jesus’ going public. Apparently, he was not quite ready. But, never underestimate an expression of compassion in the eyes of your mother... Before Jesus even agrees to this mother-directed debut of his public ministry, Mary goes and tells the servants, “*Do whatever he tells you to do.*” And especially because this story is written in John’s Gospel - where Jesus is clearly the Son of God from Chapter 1, verse 1 - when Jesus communes with his Father, the Author of All Creation, **the creation responds**. The water turns into fine wine. Because Mary encouraged Jesus - just at the right time - **being** the presence of God.

Luke includes Mary in the last three years of Jesus’ life - the most important years - the years for which they were made for each other: making sure the world knows of her impact at the most important moments of Jesus’ life: his birth, the beginning of his teaching, the first miracle, his preaching, and his death. We know that Jesus made sure that she became the God-figure for his closest friends when he said to her and the beloved disciple from the cross, “*Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother.*” And she was there Easter morning to celebrate his Resurrection.

Finally, Acts 1:14 makes it clear that Mary was still part of the Jesus movement after he ascended to the Father. She, along with his brothers, was numbered among the disciples in the first wave of witnesses. Mary was a mom. She found favor with God early on, and fulfilled her calling throughout the earthly life of God’s most precious gift. Her body was *his first home*. Her faith was shared *as she sang to him in her arms*. Her love carried him through the confusions of this life and gave him strength to do what he was meant to do. But when did they know what they were supposed to do with who they were? As fellow humans - their experiences were probably much like our own. We each have a unique answer, an individual time that we answered that calling by God. Do you remember how old you were when you decided what you wanted to be

when you grew up? Some discover it early on; others wait on God. But once Mary knew, once Jesus knew what God had in mind - they did it.

Some years ago, Advent hosted one of our favorite choral music composers, Pepper Choplin. He conducted the choir and also preached - asking everyone to imagine what kind of sermon our lives were preaching to the world. Following worship he asked me, "Pastor Susan, do you know what your Life Sermon is?" I didn't really know what to say, except what I **hoped** my life says to others. *"No come on, you know what it is. Pastor Susan's Life Sermon is 'being the presence of God in the world.'" WOW. How humbling is that? Brought me right to tears. And I believe that Pepper's words apply to each and every one of you. Because as followers of Jesus, YOU are the presence of God in the world.*

Mary, Mother of Our Lord - deserves her very own festival day. She deserves the love and respect and reverence the church has bestowed on her for generations. She is the one human being who all others can approach without fear, for she was a mom. And she loved her Son. Now, while we rarely pray directly to the saints, I believe that she would be happy to introduce you to her son, to help you find your way, to help you pray. Whatever you need, she will try to provide it. And if you listen carefully, she might teach you to sing, along with generations of those from whom she came. The Chosen People, beloved by God.

Mary might help you find your song and your calling from God - for just as she guided Jesus, just as she walked with the apostles, just as she showed generations how to be faithful, Mary has shown us how to be, the presence of God in the world. And all people will call her "blessed." Amen.

Pastor Susan Langhauser
Advent Olathe