

“Heart” Matters: A Look at Mary

by Shari Miller

Please do NOT use the “if time permits” sections when your study session time is limited.
These sections could possibly be done by the participant in private.

Introduction:

Have you ever wondered about the relationship between Jesus and His mother Mary? Share your thoughts in small groups or with the entire group.

Answers will vary, but encourage everyone to share. Make it clear that everything confided within the group stays within the group.

Opening Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we rejoice and thank You for creating us and making us Your children through the waters of Holy Baptism. We confess that we sin daily and destroy our relationship with You. Thank You for the forgiveness we have because of Your Son’s own victory over death. Because of His resurrection, we, too, look forward to eternal life in heaven with You! Please send Your Holy Spirit to be with us today as we study Your Word. In Jesus’ great name we pray, Amen.

A Faithful Heart

Read Luke 1:26–38.

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

26 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, **27** to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. **28** The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” **29** Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. **30** But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. **31** You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, **33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” **34** “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” **35** The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. **36** Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. **37** For nothing is impossible with God.” **38** “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

Choose one or more of the following and discuss in small groups or with the entire group.

Mary’s initial reaction to the angel’s appearance (v. 26–33) might have been:

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| A. Fear | D. Faith |
| B. Confusion | E. Concern |
| C. Doubt | F. Curiosity |

Answers will vary – encourage everyone to answer.

What question does Mary ask Gabriel in **verse 34**? “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”... with emphasis on the “How will this be....?”

Is this a question you would have asked? Why or why not? Answers will vary.

What truths about Jesus are emphasized by the angel in **verses 35 and 37**?

Conceived by the ___*Holy*___ ___*Spirit*___

Born of the ___*virgin*___ ___*Mary*___

The ___*power*___ of the Most ___*High*___ is at work

Called the ___*Son*___ of ___*God*___

Jesus’ conception and birth will be a miracle. Nothing is ___*impossible*___ with God!

Gabriel announced to Mary that she would have a miracle child who already had a name and a mission. For many people, this departure from the ordinary expectations of life would have been too much to

believe. Often, we think we know how things are supposed to go, and we are not much interested in things that do not fit into our plan. Yes, Mary had questions, and she was not hesitant to ask, "But how can this be...?" However, Mary's heart was faithful...her faith had been nurtured by hearing the Word of God in regular worship. She knew God was able to do great things, because she knew Scripture and the history of God's love and care for His people throughout previous generations.

In your own words, what is Mary's response to the angel in **verse 38**? "I'm your servant, Lord...please use me for Your purpose."

If time permits: How would **you** (honestly!) respond if an angel were to reveal God's plan for your life?

Answers will vary.

- A. Ask a lot of questions
- B. Wonder if I had any say about it
- C. Rejoice that God could use me
- D. Worry about my ability to carry it out
- E. Run away scared
- F. Rather not know about the future; prefer to be surprised

What do the following Bible passages indicate about Mary's (and Joseph's) intent to nurture Godly faith in her very special Child? **They presented Him to the Lord and offered a sacrifice as required by the Law of Moses. They were regular in their worship practices, exposing their Child to the Scriptures.**

Luke 2:21-24; 39-40

Jesus Presented in the Temple

²¹On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. ²²When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

³⁹When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

Luke 2:41-42

The Boy Jesus at the Temple

⁴¹Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom.

Read Psalm 51:10-12. ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

What are the means of grace that the Holy Spirit uses to give us new hearts and nurture our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? See **1 Thessalonians 2:13**, (¹³And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.) **Word of God**

Romans 6:4, (⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.) **Holy Baptism**

Mark 14:22-24. (²²While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." ²³Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴"This is my blood of the [a] covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.)

The Lord's Supper

Faith Talk: Complete one of the following statements and share in small groups or with the entire group. Encourage everyone to participate. The means of grace (Word and Sacraments) should be the main focus here. Family devotions, regular worship habits, living out faith and talking about faith are a few examples.

When I was young, the Holy Spirit nurtured my faith through these people ...

I will nurture in those I love the saving faith of Jesus Christ as Savior by ...

A Devoted Heart

Read Luke 1:36 and 39-45. ³⁶Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

³⁹At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

Why did the angel tell Mary about Elizabeth in **verse 36**? What would the visit to Elizabeth have accomplished for Mary? *Answers will vary, but could include the encouragement that Mary would gain from knowing that God has performed a miracle in Elizabeth's life and could do the same in hers.*

Mary responded to Elizabeth's greeting with The Magnificat (Mary's Song, "My soul magnifies the Lord") in **verses 46–55**. What specific phrases reveal Mary's devotion to her Lord God?

Mary's Song

⁴⁶And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. ⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

"My soul glorifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; the Mighty One has done great things for me; His mercy extends to those who fear Him; He has performed mighty deeds; He has scattered the proud; He has brought down rulers and lifted the humble; He has filled the hungry; He has helped Israel; He is merciful...even as He said to our fathers" (in other words...God is faithful).

Read Luke 2:1–20. Mary was a devoted mother. She had accompanied her husband on a strenuous journey in the very last month of her pregnancy. We must assume that she took proper physical care of herself so that the birth was a healthy one. She had her long-awaited Child in a town far from home in crude surroundings. How did Mary respond to the birth of her child and the subsequent visit from the shepherds in **verse 19**?

The Birth of Jesus

¹In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ²(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³And everyone went to his own town to register. ⁴So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

⁸And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ^{al} the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this

thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

She treasured all the things that had happened and pondered them in her heart.

How would you define the word “ponder”? *Answers will vary.* Look up a dictionary definition. 1 : to weigh in the mind : **APPRAISE** <pondered their chances of success> 2 : to think about : reflect on <pondered the events of the day>

What other words could have the same meaning? *consider, think about, think over, contemplate, deliberate, wonder about, muse, meditate, ruminate, reflect*

Read **Matthew 2:13–15**. How does this account further show Mary’s devotion to the safety of her Child?

The Escape to Egypt

¹³When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." ¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

She was willing to accompany her husband very quickly on another stressful trip from her own country – for the sake of her Child.

If time permits: Matthew 13:54–56 gives a brief glimpse into Jesus’ family life. ⁵⁴Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. ⁵⁵Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"

John 2:12 further indicates that Jesus spent time with his family. ¹²After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

What were the names of Jesus’ half-brothers? *James, Joseph (Joses), Simon, Judas* What kinds of activities do you think Jesus might have enjoyed with them and His sisters? *Answers will vary.*

Faith Talk: Share in small groups or with the entire group specific activities that can serve as an example to those you love of *your* devotion to the Lord.

A Believing Heart

Read **John 2:1–11**. What does this account likely reveal about Mary’s belief in her Child as her Lord and Savior? *She knew after all she had seen and heard that He was the Lord!*

Jesus Changes Water to Wine

¹On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." ⁴"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come." ⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, ⁹and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." ¹¹This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

How was the prophecy of Simeon in **Luke 2:34–35** fulfilled for Mary in **John 19:25–27** and **30**? *She had to witness the rejection and death of her first-born Child. In this she also saw the fulfillment of the name she was told to give Him — Jesus — because by His death He was “saving” all people from sin and death.*

Luke 2:34-35 ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

John 19:25-27, 30 ²⁵Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his

mother, "Dear woman, here is your son,"²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Read John 20:3–10. ³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰Then the disciples went back to their homes...

It could be assumed that John went home after witnessing the empty tomb and told those in his household what he had seen. Since Mary was now in his household, she might have heard the Good News of Jesus' resurrection very quickly!

Describe some of the probable feelings that Mary (the mother of Jesus) might have had during the days between her Child's death and the news of His resurrection. *Answers will vary; sadness, grief, despair, shock, aimlessness, belief, unbelief, joy, hope*

Read Acts 1:13–14. What did Mary do after Jesus' resurrection from the dead? *She gathered with believers in fellowship and prayer.*

¹³When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

What do the following passages say about the relationship between a mother and her child? How were these traits demonstrated in Mary's relationship with Jesus?

Psalm 139:13 ¹³For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. *Mary LOVED Jesus – He was her Child from the womb. Jesus LOVED Mary as his earthly mother.*

Song of Solomon 8:2a ²I would lead you and bring you to my mother's house—she who has taught me. *Mary TAUGHT Jesus – He learned life lessons, as well as how to relate within a family. Probably some of the parables and examples in His teaching ministry came from experiences in his early years.*

Ephesians 6:1–3 ¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²"Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise— ³"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Jesus HONORED his mother and since He was sinless, He OBEYED her.

1 Thessalonians 2:7–8 *As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, ⁷but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. ⁸We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*

Mary CARED for and LOVED Jesus, both physically and spiritually. Jesus CARED for and LOVED Mary; He showed this concern and love in some of His last words from the cross.

If time permits: Think of Biblical examples of mothers who shared their faith with their children.

Jochebed (the mother of Moses), Ruth, Hannah, Proverbs 31 woman, Lois and Eunice (grandmother and mother of Timothy)

Faith Walk: Identify someone in your life who needs to hear the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Resolve to share this message with that person this week.

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, We thank and praise You for giving us the gift of Your own Son Jesus Christ. We praise You that our sins are forgiven and we have eternal life because of His death and resurrection. Give us *faithful* Spirit-filled hearts that read Your Word and participate in Your sacraments. Give us *devoted*

hearts that cling to You in both good times and bad. Give us *believing* hearts that are surrounded with Your power and love. Be with our family and friends and keep them in the one true faith. Open opportunities for us to witness about the salvation in Jesus to those who don't know You. All this we are bold to pray in the great name of Jesus! Amen.

Sing "Go My Children with My Blessing" – *LSB* 922. Speak the words of the last verse together.

[**Additional:** A musical version of Mary's *Magnificat* could be shared on CD or sung together from *LSB* 933. Have a movie night and watch "The Nativity Story" after doing this study. See the Spring 2009 *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* archives for further study on motherhood – "Mothers Undaunted: Naomi, Hannah, Deborah."]