

Be a Berean!

The Bereans...received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day. (Acts 17:11)

["Be a Berean" will regularly cover topics that arise during Lockport Alliance Bible classes. Contact Franklyn Pfeil—liftedup@lockportalliance.org—with questions or comments.]

"The hopes and fears of all the years"

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

As you read this, Christmas has come and gone. So be it. This isn't about Christmas. It's about Mary, the biblical Mary, the mother of Jesus on every day of his life, who bore him, who watched him die (1), who believed in him before the first Christmas (2) and, unlike his brothers, before the first Easter (3).

Over the centuries, Mary has been misshapen. She's been over-emphasized by the Catholics. Then, in reaction, she's been under-emphasized by Evangelicals. Prayed to by some; nearly forgotten (except for Christmas and Mother's Day) by others. Wrong and wrong.

Mary is merely awesome! The 'merely' part is because she's a sinner in need of a Savior, just as I am (4). The 'awesome' part is found, for the most part, in Luke 1 and 2. Read her brief moments in Scripture and you'll be able to discern not only who taught the Savior to walk and talk, but also who taught him to fear the Lord, and to trust in God's amazing, unfathomable, tenacious grace. If you're going to turn the world--and the tables in the Temple--upside down, this is the kind of Mom you'll need.

For the Bible student, she serves as a prime example of how important (and difficult) it is to read what Scripture says without the layers of cultural pre-conditioning we accumulate over time. Mary is merely awesome, like Scripture itself--if we take it straight, unfiltered.

When the angel announced to her that she'd been chosen to be the mother of the Son of God, she counted the personal cost of submission to God's will, then simply trusted Him to work things out. She composed a song that magnified the greatness of the Lord while she willingly faced the rejection and the snide gossip. She and Joseph marveled, and wondered, as the elderly prophet Simeon held the child in his arms and blessed God for allowing him to see His salvation. *Then 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, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."* (5)

It is apparent from the song she composed that Mary had memorized and skillfully weaved together many Old Testament phrases in her praises to God. Knowing Scripture by heart, leaving Bethlehem with her child in her arms, re-playing Simeon's freshly fallen prophecy as they escaped from Herod to Egypt, this new Mom's thoughts turned to some of the Bible's other Moms. She thought of Hannah, whose song at the dedication of her child, Samuel, had inspired Mary's own song. And then she thought of Rachel and Jacob, on their way to Bethlehem, so long ago:

And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labor.

And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also.

And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin.

And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. (6)

Then from Egypt to Nazareth of Galilee, her thoughts must have been filled with images in conflict: *And a sword will pierce your own soul too...the falling and rising of many...a sign spoken against...hearts revealed...Rachel called him Benoni, 'the son of my sorrow'...but his father called him Benjamin, 'the son of my right hand,' the victorious one...Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:*

*"A voice is heard in Ramah,
mourning and great weeping,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because her children are no more." (7)*

Then from Nazareth to the wedding party at Cana, where Jesus cut the cord: *"Woman,"* he called her, distancing himself, *"what have you to do with me?" (8)*

She'd known this day must come. He'd distanced himself before, when he was just a boy, when they'd searched in vain for him amongst the convoy. Three days later, relieved to find him in the Temple amongst the teachers and the experts in Scripture, they'd heard him declare that *I must be about my Father's business (9)*. She'd winced at the insensitivity of the phrase and reflexively looked to Joseph. How that remark might have stung the humble, hardworking carpenter. But Joseph stood, stolid as a rock, ever the backbone of the family. The boy, until lately just a go-fer in the shop, had begun to show a real knack for carpentry and had become his right-hand man. But he also knew that Yeshua was on a mission from God, and that he was the kind who played to win. No offense taken.

And Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (10)

Then from Cana to Jerusalem, where the son of her sorrow fell, and rose...

To his own nation, Israel, he is Son of David (11). To the wider, Gentile world, he is Son of Man. To the believing universe, he is Son of God.

But to just one person, he is *bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh (12)*. When they pierced his side, they *pierced her own soul too*. To one person, to her alone, he is Son of Mary. (13)

And she treasured all these things in her heart. (14)

Scripture cited: (1) John 19:25; (2) see Luke 1:34-38; (3) see John 7:5; (4) Luke 1:47; (5) Luke 2: 34-35; (6) Genesis 35:16-19; (7) Jeremiah 31:15/Matthew 2:17-18; (8) John 2:4; (9) Luke 2:49; (10) Luke 2:19; (11) Mark 10:47; (12) Genesis 2:23; (13) Mark 6:3; (14) Luke 2:51

It is our fervent hope that you will 'be a Berean' by attending one of these Bible-based classes this week! —

"Jesus, the One and Only"--Sunday at 9:45

"Approaching God: Lessons from the Inspired Prayers of Scripture" --Sunday at 9:45