

M - O - T - H - E - R
 Mary, the Mother of Jesus
 by Ardis Dick Stenbakken

Theme: Obedience, Reliance, Trust

Call to Worship: *Praise at God's Throne*, #708, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal; *I Will Extol the Lord with All my Heart*, #715, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal; or a Scripture of praise to God

Opening Song: *Come, Thou Almighty King*, #71, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal

Closing Song: *Trust and Obey*, #590, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal
 or *Marvelous Grace*, #109, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal

Scripture: various scriptures in Luke

Canticle or Prayer (if desired): *The Song of Mary*, #835, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal

This is a sermon that can be used for Mother's Day, for Easter, or for Christmas, or any other date if slightly adapted.

When we think of the faces around the cross,
 surely the most anguished and painful must have been
 Mary's, the mother of Jesus.

I cannot think of anything worse for a mother than to watch her child die.
 Her eldest son.

I try to imagine it and cannot.
 In truth, I do not want to.
 You see, my eldest is a 33 year old son.
 I cannot begin to imagine the heartache of that mother.
 I am sure she must have thought clearly and often of Simon's prophecy:
A sword shall pierce your heart.@

If she was like the rest of us, she was also probably thinking,
ALord, why me?@

How was Mary chosen?
 Why her?
 Did Jesus help pick her out?

Augustine wrote,
AMary first conceived Christ in her heart by faith, before she conceived in the womb.@

But the question *AWhy me?@* had been answered long ago in her life.
 When the angel appeared to her, in a sense, she said,
AWhy me?@

Why me can be positive as well as negative.
 Why me? Because, the angel said,
AYou are highly favored. The Lord is with you.@
 But on that Friday 33 years later, I am sure she wondered,

ALord, where are you now?"

Through the years she had struggled with this matter of her son's divinity
and what it meant
and how it was to be manifest.

Desire of Ages tells us that she knew He was special
but at the same time,
she wanted Him to be more like the others,

*When the priests and teachers required Mary's aid in controlling Jesus, she was greatly troubled;
but peace came to her heart as He presented the statements of Scripture upholding His practices.*

*At times she wavered between Jesus and His brothers,
who did not believe that He was the Sent of God;
but evidence was abundant that His was a divine character.* (D of Ages 90)

Matthew says when speaking of the visit of the shepherds:

Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

There are times we do not understand God's will.

But we too can keep the words in our hearts and

Ponder them until He makes it plain to us.

The whole story of Mary is of course wrapped up with

The Christmas story.

Mary is the only woman in the Christmas story itself

Only person other than Jesus essential to the story.

Others not essential

Could have done without Joseph

There was the Holy Spirit

Could have done without shepherds

Someone else, fewer, other

Could have done without wise men

Could have been local church leaders/

Government officials

Could have done without the innkeeper

There really should have been someone else step in

But no one could take Mary's place

Mary is interesting person. We know so little about her.

Luke tells us the most, the most personal details.

Maybe because he was a doctor, she felt more free to talk to him.

Yet she is the most well known woman in the world.

Most drawn and painted

Most popular girls name in the world.

Maria

Marie
 Miriam
 Even masculine forms:
 Mario
 Marion

The name Mary is found 51 times in the New Testament.

Perhaps because of the popularity of Mariamne, the second wife of Herod I. She was the last representative of the Hasmoneans.

Through the history of the church she has gained more and more fame and religious importance.

One time I made a visit to Czestochwa, Poland.

It is the home of the famous Black Madonna in the cathedral.
 Supposedly painted by St. Luke.
 In 1430 at the appearance of the Madonna, a looter died.
 Black Madonna became the symbol of Polish unity.
 When we visited, everyone kneeled. We stood.
 We were jerked to our knees. Even then I squatted—
 I could not bring myself to kneel before a picture.

I have visited Our Lady of Fatima, Fatima, Portugal.

In 1917 three children saw many visions over six months.
 Visions of the end of World War I
 and predicted World War II
 They said the world being punished for offending God.

Pope John Paul II was supposed to reveal what Mary is supposed to have told the children in a third vision.

I don't know if that happened.

There have been more and more appearances recently.

In shadows, pies, breakfast rolls, any and everything
 Crying Madonnas especially popular.
 Some even leak milk.

What does scripture reveal about this most unusual woman?

Let's use an acrostic to look at six aspects of her life.

M O T H E R

M is for mentored

We know nothing of Mary's immediate family
 nor her age at the time of the annunciation.
 Probably between 12 and 17.
 As in many cultures, girls marry when they reach puberty.

As an aside, this is one of the reasons for high maternal
 mortality in many cultures

Today, and everyday, around the world
 1500 women die in childbirth.
 And it was risky in New Testament times too.

When she received the message that every woman had been waiting to hear for generations,
 She left immediately and walked 80 miles to a relative Elizabeth.

Luke 1:35: *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. 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. For nothing is impossible with God."*

Elizabeth was six months pregnant and Mary stayed three months.
 Scripture does not say, but likely Mary stayed until
 John was born.

Imagine the benefit six months later when Mary gave birth in a barn
 She knew how the birth process went
 She knew how to tie off the umbilical cord
 She knew how to rub down the baby with salt
 and wrap in swaddling clothes.

What else did they talk about? What did Mary learn?
 Elizabeth secluded herself for 5 months (Luke 1:24).
 Perhaps it was during this time that the angel gave her
 Instruction on how to raise John
(Daughters of God, page 49.)
 And she shared this with Mary.

Mary was like many women (and men) today.
 No nuclear family.
 No one to show her how to raise a baby.
 She must have been overwhelmed at the idea of raising the Son of God

Elizabeth was
Upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. (Luke 1:6)
 Who better for Mary to turn to.

One of the most curious facts to me is that Jesus was taught by his mother.
 How did she learn to read?
 In that culture, she would not ordinarily have been able to read.
 Probably not even Joseph, a carpenter, could read.
 He did not learn in the schools of the rabbis,
 But at his mother's knee.

The child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things. The very words which He

Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother's knee. As He advanced from childhood to youth, He did not seek the schools of the rabbis. He needed not the education to be obtained from such sources; for God was His instructor. CDesire of Ages, 75.)

O is for open/obedient

Mary could have become proud and arrogant.

Every Jewish girl had dreamed of becoming the mother of the Messiah.

And she was after all of royal blood,

A descendent of King David himself.

Instead, she gave all praise to God for regarding her humble estate and exalting her.

She said, *A*let it be to me according to your word.@

If she thought about it for even a minute,

She knew there would be embarrassment, suspicion and misunderstanding.

But she willingly consented

to yield her virgin body to the Holy Spirit

God never forces.

It was an honor mixed with humiliation.

She had total trust.

Although of the House of David

she was a very real humble village maiden.

Song "I'm God's Grandmother"

*Al*t was the willingness of her heart that the Lord looked upon, and her love made the offering sweet. So God will accept our gift, however small, if it is the best we have, and is offered from love to Him. **B**Daughters of God, 50.

Further evidence of her obedient heart was that she followed
the religious laws and ceremonies.

As an observant Jewess they had to stay in the stable 7 days

(It would have been 14 days if it had been a girl)

Before they could move into a house.

She and Joseph had Jesus circumcised on the 8th day

And when Mary's period of purification of 40 days
was completed

They took baby Jesus to Jerusalem.

They had no earthly wealth as they offered 2 turtledoves

Cthis was an offering for the mother, not the baby**C**.

(This is further evidence that the wise men did not arrive with
their gold, frankincense and myrrh until some time later.)

But she did bring a willingness of heart and love.

Can you imagine Mary when they thought they had lost Jesus in Jerusalem?

That absolutely frantic feeling when you can't find your child?
 They were three days from Jerusalem
 The agony of that return trip.
 Mary had talked to the angel,
 heard the angels and shepherds report
 witnessed the adoration of the wise men.
 She knew he was the Son of God.
 It is one thing to lose your child,
 But it is another to lose the Son of God!
 Unfortunately, that is possible of each of us.
 Have you ever felt like you lost God—you couldn't find Him?
 He doesn't answer when you call?
 This is when faith must step in and you continue to search and pray regardless of feelings.

T is for trust

I think of Mary at the Marriage at Cana.
 She was a woman so she was involved in the work,
 the serving—especially when it was a wedding.
 There was a problem with the refreshments, the food,
 and so as a woman, she needed to do something about it.

She may not have had a complete and accurate understanding of her Son's mission,
 But she trusted him completely.
 Furthermore, as a mother, she wanted to help her son with His work.
 And so she came to Him for a miracle.
 This story has a wonderful lesson for us, however.
 She told him the problem: "They have no more wine."
 But she did not tell Him how to solve the problem.
 How often we tell God how to solve our problem
 instead of letting Him in his wisdom and time solve it for us.
 And her faith was marvelously rewarded.

H is for History

Tradition says that Joseph died when Jesus was 18.
 We know that there were at least 5 other children, all younger than Jesus:
 James, Joses, Judas, Simon and an unnamed daughter or daughters.
 There may have been step children as well from Joseph;
 Ellen White refers to "sons and daughters of Joseph."
 But at a relatively young age, Mary was left a single mother.
 I think Jesus probably has special sympathy for single mothers.

We know from the Magnificat,
 Mary's song of praise after the Annunciation,
 that she was well acquainted with Jewish history, literature and tradition.
 Her song, patterned after that of Hannah

Indicated a world view
 An understanding that the world was going to be turned
 upside down.

But I doubt that she could have guessed what was going to happen
 to her little world as Passover approached.

E is for Easter

Mary too looked for Messiah's reign on David's throne.

On the way back from Jerusalem when Jesus was 12,
 He tried to point his parents to his future that he was newly understanding,
 but it is hard to break out of pre-conceived ideas,
 and Mary was no different

She was looking for great success for her son.

Perhaps a typical Jewish mother in many ways.

Of all the people in the world,
 one would think that Mary would have the most
 undeniable knowledge that Jesus was special
 Divine, the Messiah

Someone totally different.

But even she had doubts and wavered.

I am so glad Jesus was so patient with her.

And with us when we have doubts.

But now it was Passover
 and it was evident that things were not going well.
 Sometimes I think women are better at feeling the wind,
 determining the mood of persons and crowds,
 and she knew there was trouble, that sword was hanging over her.

Mary had not traveled with Jesus during most of His ministry
 there are only a few references to her interaction with Him.

But now she was there.

Perhaps the last of the children had flown the nest.

Perhaps it was because she wanted to be with Him for Passover, a family time.

Whatever the reason, it was Friday afternoon,
 And she and the other women stood at the foot of the cross.
 John was there too,

But the sword was no longer hanging over her,
 it was in fact piercing her heart.

How could this be happening?

God, have I misunderstood?

Didn't you say, "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end?"

When the angel first said that to Mary,
 she had asked, "How will this be?"
 Of course that had been because she was a virgin.

Now she must be asking again, **A**How will this be?@
 And John gently leads her away.
 But she can't stay away, because scripture indicated she returned once again.

Why did she not go to live with her other sons or daughters?
 Perhaps they did not fully accept Jesus yet
 and Jesus knew she would be uncomfortable.
 Maybe they were married and John was single.
 Some say that Jesus was just asking John to take Mary
 away from the scene of His last agony
 But tradition says that she lived with John
 First in Jerusalem and later in Ephesus.

The last scriptural reference to Mary is in Acts 1.
 The disciples are assembled in the upper room.
 They are waiting for the Holy Spirit.
 There was no longer separation between the men and women.
 Scripture says,

They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. Acts 1:14.

They were involved in the organization of a new movement
 one that would truly turn the world upside down.
 One in which we can be involved.

She was undoubtedly one of the early church leaders
 an example of true servant leadership
 Total dependence on God.

R is for rest/reliance on Jesus Christ

One day during Jesus' ministry, a woman in the crowd called out, **A**Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.@

Oh, yes, what a blessing! Beyond our imagination.
 What a woman. Truly, blessed among women.

But Jesus answered, **A**Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.@(Luke 11:27)
 That's you and me!

There is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved
 not Mary's
 not ours
 no other
 only Jesus.

A physical relationship to Him did not confer blessing
 maybe more pain than anything
 but obedience, a complete reliance on Jesus
 that is what brings the blessing.

It was what brought blessing to Mary.

It is my prayer today that we may have that complete reliance
as we too contemplate the cross and what it means to us.

Why me, Lord?

Because of your overwhelming grace and nothing more.

About the Sermon Writer: Ardis Dick Stenbakken recently retired as the director of women's ministries at her church world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. She and her husband, Dick, a retired Army chaplain, live in Colorado; they have two grown, married children and one granddaughter. Ardis especially enjoys helping women discover their full potential in the Lord.