

What did the cross meant to... Mary

Fifth Sunday in Lent,
March 29, 2009

We're continuing towards Easter by still focusing on the Cross of Christ and what it meant to the people who were there at the time. Today we're looking at Mary, the mother of Jesus. What did the cross mean to Mary? Maybe a better question to ask first, is – why devote a whole message to Mary?

I know in other church bodies, Mary is lifted high and adored. I also know many of the people here at LCC were at one time part of some of these other church bodies. It's not my intention to make this a "sermon about the blessed and perpetual virgin Mary" but rather to take a look at probably the one person in Jesus' life who had the best understanding of who He was.

It seems to me there are two general views about Mary in the Christian church today – either she is someone to be lifted up to the extent of being prayed to, and in some cases considered almost a co-redemptrix with Jesus, or, she's someone to be totally ignored and left alone as nothing more than an ordinary person who had a baby.

I think both of these views, however, are too extreme. While we don't want to elevate Mary to a position of deity, we need to remember she was the one young woman out of every other woman in the world, chosen by God to be the mother of His Son... of Himself. The technical term for this is *Theotokos* – "God bearer." I love the line from a song by Christian musician Michael Card, "No fiction as fantastic or wild: a mother made by her own Child." Jesus had her nose, her eyes; maybe had her smile and tilted His head the same way she did when He prayed. It's not appropriate to make too much of Mary, but neither is it appropriate to make too little of her. We can't write off Mary too much. Jesus loved her – she was His mamma. More than the disciples, more than the followers of Jesus, more than all the other people Jesus came in contact with, the cross cut Mary deeper, hurt her, and broke her heart more than all the others.

And so today, we're taking a look at Mary, and my goal is to see the connection between what the cross meant to Mary, and how it means some of the same things to us today. I'd like to start by inviting you to turn in your Bibles to what might seem like an unusual place in this season of Lent: Luke chapter 2, verses 21-35. Luke is the third book in the New Testament, so the order goes, Matthew, Mark, **Luke**, and John – the Gospels that tell about the life, ministry death and resurrection of Jesus. Then comes the book of Acts which tells about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early church. Luke was a doctor by trade, and was not one of the original disciples. In fact, some wonder if Luke was even Jewish, or if he was a gentile convert to the Christian faith. "Luke" is not a Jewish name – it's a Greek name.

Luke wrote not only the book of Luke, but also the book of Acts. I've mentioned this before: it's almost a shame that the book of John comes in-between Luke and Acts. The book of Acts picks up where the book of Luke leaves off. Acts is almost like "Luke, part II." Luke was not an eyewitness to the events of Jesus' life, but was rather like an investigative reporter who interviewed witnesses to learn as much as he could about Jesus, and present it all in an orderly, written account. For the ladies who just finished the Bible study on Lee Strobel's book, "The Case for Christ", you can think of Luke like a first century Lee Strobel.

So again, we're going to Luke 2:21-25:

"On 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. When 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 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for Him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You now dismiss Your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel." The Child's father and mother marveled at what was said about Him. 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."

Now, keeping these verses in mind, I'd like to show you a presentation with a song typically associated with Christmas – "Mary did you know?"

{Presentation: The song, "Mary, did you know?" with images from the movie, "The Passion of the Christ."}

Does it seem odd, having a 'Christmas-y' reading, and hearing a "Christmas" song with images of Jesus' arrest, torture and crucifixion? We're talking today about what the cross meant to Mary, and in our reading we see the first thing: it meant a fulfillment of a prophecy about *her*. You can underline, "*And a sword will pierce your own soul too.*"

You can also circle that word, "too." It was a given from Jesus' birth He was going to suffer. There was never a time in His life when the shadow of the cross wasn't upon Him. There was never a time when Jesus didn't know He was going to be the deliverer for believers. In fact, in your Bibles, you might be able to look directly across the page into the next column of verses to

see a heading that says something like, “Jesus at the Temple.” The very next time we see Mary after she had these words said to her by a prophet, she’s looking for Jesus some 13 years later when He got lost in the big city of Jerusalem.

Take a look at verse 49 and 50 and Luke 2. When Joseph and Mary finally found the young Jesus He says to them, “*Why were you searching for me?*”... “*Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?*” *But they did not understand what He was saying to them.*” Other versions say, “Didn’t you know I had to be about my Father’s business?”

This is the second thing the cross meant to Mary: her Son was different, and was a God-sent savior. Now I realize some might say the whole immaculate conception might have given her that clue that Jesus was different, too, but the cross drove it home. The cross drove the point home that Jesus was all about God the Father’s business. He was her son, yes in the biological sense, but Jesus was the Son of God, and because of that He was all about the business of God.

And what is the business of God? You are. You are God’s business. Next to verse 49 in Luke 2, you can write the reference John 3:16, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but will have everlasting life.*”

Mary did you know that your baby boy was sent for us? Mary did you know that your baby boy would die for us? Mary did you know the business your baby boy was about, was the people here at LCC?

A third thing the cross meant to Mary is she would be alone and without Jesus. Let me explain this because it seems kind of simplistic. “Really thought hard on that one, didn’t you, Pastor?” But, there’s a more beneath the surface of this statement than we might originally think.

In that society, the oldest male child was responsible for taking care of the parents, especially of a widowed mother. Now we don’t know what happened to Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph, but since he is not mentioned anywhere in the later life of Jesus, the assumption is that at some point before Jesus began His ministry, Joseph died.

This means Jesus would have been responsible to see that Mary was taken care of. In the margins of your Bibles next to Luke 2:35, the verse about Mary’s own soul being pierced, you can write the reference John 19:25-27: “*Near the cross of Jesus stood His mother, His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother there, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*”

The interesting thing here is that Joseph and Mary had other children after Jesus was born. Jesus had brothers, but rather than entrusting His mother to them, He entrusted Mary to the disciple John.

I know I'm going to stretch a point here, but I'd like to draw a connection with these verses and us. Jesus didn't entrust His mother to His brothers who at that time were not believers. Later, after the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, at least two of Jesus' brothers, James and Jude, came to believe in Him as the Messiah, but at first they did not. The scriptures even tell us they were embarrassed of Him, and tried to take Him away and committed as someone who was insane¹. His brothers were very much caught up in the things of their world.

Jesus took care of His mother by putting her into the hands of someone who was not of the world. He takes care of us the same way.

We've not been entrusted to the world. Jesus never said to us, "Ok, I'm going to hand you over to the unbelievers to take care of you." He said just the opposite, "**I'm** going to be with you forever. I'm never going to leave you, and I'm going to send my Holy Spirit to strengthen your faith, bring You into a deeper understanding of who I am, and lead you in the paths you are to go."

What's more, we weren't given to the world, the world was given to us – "Go into all the world and make disciples of all people, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

The cross meant Mary would be without the physical presence of Jesus, but not without His protection and care. We, too, are not without His protection and care. We, too, are not without His desire for us, for our lives: to be about our Father's business.

And that's the fourth thing the cross meant to Mary, and its connection in the same way to us. I'd like to invite you to turn in Your Bibles a couple of pages to the book of Acts, chapter 1, verse 14. It's just a few pages forward. Acts chapter 1 records what happened after Jesus ascended into heaven with the believers who were left behind. We're also going to look at Acts chapter 2, verses 1-4, which tell about the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

As you're turning to Acts 1, verse 14, it's good to know that at this point there are about 120 believers in Jesus as the Messiah. Notice what it says in verse 14: "*They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*"

His brothers were now believers, as was Mary, and they gathered together with other believers. Now jump over to chapter 2 and let's read verses 1-4: "*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues*

¹ Mark 3:21

of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

Mary was one of those to whom the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. Did she go on to speak with other tongues as the next section of Acts 2 talks about? Good question. Probably not, since it specifically says in verses 14 and 15 that Peter stood up with the Eleven and said, "These men are not drunk..." But whether she did or didn't isn't the point right now. The point is, the cross meant she would be filled with the Holy Spirit and then turned loose to reach out to the unbelieving world.

You know where I'm going with this...

The cross means that all who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior are also filled with the Holy Spirit, and turned loose to reach the world. After Easter we're going to be talking about the early church and looking at our role in the church and world, but for today let me just say that no, being filled with the Holy Spirit does not mean we each are supposed to have tongues of fire resting on our heads, but it *does* mean we are not to sit on a stump and rest our rumps, either. When we encounter – and I mean *really encounter* – the cross and the empty tomb, we are changed by the Holy Spirit.

The cross meant Mary was touched by the Spirit, and it means we are, too. Mary was turned loose to say to the world, "Let me tell you about my Boy." We are turned loose to the world to say, "Let me tell you about Mary's Boy. Let me tell you about Jesus."

Let me be about my Father's business.

Would you please pray with me?

Lord Jesus,

Thank You for choosing Mary to be the Theotokos – the God-bearer. Help us to never elevate Your mother to a co-equal status with You, and help us to never disrespect Your mother to an unimportant role, either. What a joy it must have been for You and her when she entered into Heaven at her death and saw her baby boy again, and You saw Your momma.

Holy Spirit, You came at Pentecost and filled the hearts of the believers with Your power and strength to tell the world all about Jesus. We sit here today, about the same number of believers here at LCC today as there were then in that upper room on the day of Pentecost, and pray for You to move in us. You've already come, there's no need to pray for that! And so we pray instead that we would be open to Your power among us each as You release us to go out into the world with the good news. Those first 120 believers were used by You to bring 3000 people in one day to saving faith in Jesus. Use us today,

tomorrow and all this week to be like they were: faithful to the call to evangelize the world, and strong in the faith to the end.

In Jesus name, Amen.