

A Letter to Mary
Presented by Pam Hunt
December 28, 2008
First UMC of Palmetto

Our gospel reading this morning comes from Luke Chapter 2, Verses 16-19

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

And, John Chapter 19, Verses 25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, 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.

Good morning. Before I begin this morning's message, I'd like to take just a moment to introduce myself. I am Pam Hunt and my husband Walter and I attend Faith UMC in west Bradenton where we are both involved in church activities. In addition to being active in the church; Walter and I are also very involved with the Emmaus community. I know some members here at 1st and I will look forward to meeting more of you after the service.

When Pastor Stephen asked me to fill in for him this morning I knew pretty quickly what the topic would be. Throughout this year, and especially this Christmas season, my thoughts seemed to keep going toward Mary and imagining what her life was like raising the Son of God. I ended up putting my thoughts together in a letter to Mary and I would like to share that with you this morning.

Dear Mary,

I wanted to write and let you know that I've done a lot of reading about you and a lot of thinking about you this year. What I've seem to focus on is how it must have been for you to be the mother of the Son of God. I can only imagine the faith and the courage that it took for a 13-year old girl to accept the message that the Angel Gabriel brought to you from God. That you answered, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." leaves me in awe. I can imagine I might have said, "Yes Lord...but could you give me a few minutes to think about your request?"

I wonder how much you understood at the time of your son's birth about his destiny. I rather imagine that you were more concerned with the day-to-day tasks of raising Jesus than thinking about the plans that God had for him. Was He a good baby? You know they wrote a song about the manger scene and described it like this...the cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes. I rather think that maybe Jesus did cry that night after all the visitors had left and Joseph was sleeping. I can imagine that you picked him up and went and sat outside the stable and looked at the stars, holding your new baby close. I believe that you rocked him and sang to him and held him close to you so that he could feel your heartbeat. I picture that you told him how special he was and how loved he would be. And in the stillness of that night I believe that God, come to earth as a baby, felt for the first time the power of a mother's love.

The next few years must have been pretty busy for you. Raising a very special child along with the other children that came along and trying to show the same love to all of them couldn't have been easy. Did you ever begin to feel like your family would be normal or was it always in your mind and in your heart that your firstborn was different and was destined to change the course of mankind? Did God reveal to you how you should raise Jesus or did he just let you be a mother to your son? Did you ever recall the words of Isaiah's prophesy and did that affect the way you looked at your son? And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Or did you and Joseph just raise your son and call him your little boy?

The story in Luke about losing Jesus after being in Jerusalem was certainly something I could relate to. We moved into a new house the summer after our son Matthew finished the first grade. He would be starting 2nd grade in a new school. Since he would now be walking to and from school, we practiced walking the route the week before school started. Matt was also instructed to wait and walk with his older sister Amy. Well, we never found out exactly how things went awry but Amy got home without Matt that day and after retracing the route to the school without being able to find him, I called the police. During the next 30 minutes I begged and pleaded and bargained with God to please bring Matthew home safely. God did bring Matt home safely...the Chief of Police found him about a mile from home, walking in the wrong direction. I know that I felt a fear like no other in the pit of my stomach until my son was home. Did you feel that fear or did you just trust that God would guide you to your son? I would imagine that even knowing that God would protect him; you still felt a sense of relief when you and Joseph found Jesus in the temple.

I can only imagine the scene when you explained to Jesus how he was born and who his true father was. In her novel, *Christ the Lord, Out of Egypt*, Anne Rice pictured the scene like this.

Now one morning, I'd awakened early and I didn't know why. It wasn't light yet. I was up and standing in the room. My first thought was that my mother needed me. But I went in to her and she was asleep and well.

I came back into my room. The room completely filled with light. It happened instantly. It happened silently. The light was everywhere. Everything that was in the room was still there but it was filled with the light.

I wasn't afraid. I stood there and I saw a figure in the light, the figure of a man only it was much bigger than a man and it didn't move. I knew it wasn't a man. It spoke to me. It said that I had found favor with the Lord. It said that I was blessed among women. And that from my womb would come a son named Jesus, that he would be great and he would be the Son of the Most High. It said that the Lord God would give him the throne of his father David and that he would reign over the House of Jacob forever. I spoke to the voice and said that I had never been with a man. The voice said that the Holy Spirit could come over me. It said the Holy Child born from me would be the Son of God.

Well Mary, you would be the one to know what really happened the day that you told Jesus who he was, but the rest of us just wish we could have been there. Did you tell him of Joseph's acceptance of what the angel told him and his obedience to God? Did you tell Jesus of the loyalty and faithfulness of his adopted father? Did the light change in the room? Did angels provide a choral background for your words? Did thunder and lightning crash down? Or did you just quietly hold your son and tell him your story? I can only imagine.

Did Jesus learn about compassion from you, Mary? When he became a man and began his ministry he had such a deep caring for those who were hurting from the pain of seeing a loved one who was sick. In Matthew, Jesus' response to the centurion who asked for help for his ailing servant was "I will go and heal him." Jesus was astonished at the centurion's deference and his faith that Jesus could merely speak it and it would be done. Did He learn that humility from you?

Jesus' relationship with you surely shaped his compassion and his empathy for those who needed His healing touch. He felt the touch on the hem of his robe and healed the bleeding woman. He saved the prostitute who was to be stoned even at the risk of being accused of breaking the Law of Moses concerning adultery. He felt the pain of Martha and Mary for their brother Lazarus, Jairus for his daughter, and a widow for her son and responded by lifting their loved ones from the hands of death. Did his compassion come from the times you helped someone in need? When you kissed a skinned elbow and "made it better," or when you rocked a sick child or soothed them back to sleep after a bad dream?

Surely Jesus learned some of his patience from you. When His disciples argued over who was the favorite or who got to sit where in the kingdom it must have taken a mother's patience for Jesus to teach them again instead of boxing their ears. I remember our children clearly..."He got to ride in the front this morning" and "She's your favorite." Mary, what mother hasn't been at her wits end and said, "Don't you ever listen? How many times do I have to tell you?" But then, didn't Jesus do what mothers do? He took a deep breath and in that breath, remembered how much He loved that child, and began the teaching again? Did you realize at the time that your lessons would help to shape Jesus' human character?

Did you know when Jesus made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on a donkey that it would be the beginning of the end of his days? Did God send an angel to give you words of comfort? Did your mother's heart start to ache at the thought of what your son would go through? Or did God spare you that anguish and fast forward ahead to your son's triumph over the grave? I believe that I would not have wanted to know what lie ahead beforehand. Matthew served in the Army as a diesel mechanic and my husband and I felt pretty sure that they didn't put mechanics out in harm's way. I mean, if they got shot at who would repair the trucks? So when Matt was in Iraq we weren't overly concerned. Well, yes Mary, we were pretty concerned but we weren't in a panic. Until Matt came home and we saw photos of him riding on top of Humvees as the gunner. It seems that he qualified in all of the weapons and that made him more valuable on top of a vehicle rather than repairing it. I was happier not knowing about the danger he had been in and I would think that it would have been the same for you. I'm sure that then, as now, we need to have faith in God and He will not only be with our child but He will ease the fear in a mother's heart.

I believe that John 19 says a lot about your relationship with your son. That you could bear the sorrow of standing near the cross so your son could see your face speaks to the depth of your relationship with him. In the devotional, *Passion with a Purpose*, Anne Graham Lotz wrote of God's Comfort like this:

How could Mary bear to watch her Son tortured? Yet how could she tear herself away? Her entire body must have quivered as though from an electric shock as she heard Jesus calling to her from the cross. Surely her breath caught as she strained to hear His words, yet He spoke clearly, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple [John] "Here is your mother."

And somehow, even with the horror of the scene before her, and the weight of agony pressing against her chest, she knew everything was going to be all right. She didn't understand, but in the midst of the anguish only a mother knows as her heart is shattered by the pain of her child, a quiet peace must have stolen its way within when God spoke directly and personally to her from the cross. God had singled her out. He had noticed her. He had cared for her, and she was comforted.

I believe God does that for mothers, Mary. He comforts us when he knows that our hearts are breaking. Mary, my heart is breaking for Matthew right now. He is fighting a battle against an enemy that I can't help him with. And Mary, just as you did, I am trusting in God and his plan for Matt. It's not easy though, is it?

There's a song that was written by Mark Lowry that they play during the Christmas season called "Mary Did You Know?" There's a verse that goes like this:

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?
Did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you've delivered will soon deliver you.

You see Mary, we want to know what it was like. We want to know what made God choose you to teach him what it was like to be a human being. To love, to be disappointed, to feel sorrow, to be human. You must have been an extraordinary woman Mary. Yes, I've learned more about you this year. But to really know what you experienced I guess I will have to wait for the day you can tell me in person. Until then, Mary,...

I can only imagine.

Signing to I Can Only Imagine

Benediction:

Lord God, never let us forget that you know what it is like to be human. You know our frailties, our flaws, and our strengths. Christ, help us to live each day as you did, confident that our Father knows what is best for us and will always be by our side. Now and forever. Amen.