

“Mary’s Little Lamb”

Luke 1:26-38

Series: Welcome the Child Week 2. Mary

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The Woodside Church

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As we give to “Welcome the Child” and help the children of Zambia find homes, we are hearing the stories of those who made great sacrifices to Welcome the Christ Child to our world. Today we hear the message of Mary. For a moment, let us see her as she was – a simple, pure Jewish woman. Put aside, for just a moment, the great masterpieces and grand cathedrals created in her honor. Look at her and see a woman filled with faith and fear.

She sits in a one room house in a village so small it does not even appear on Caesar’s map. She is a single mother, since the death of her husband, yet she is not alone. There are always children and grandchildren running in and out of the house. Mary is sitting at her loom in the heat of the afternoon. The woolen threads are stretched like piano strings between two wooden beams. Back and forth she weaves her shuttle, pausing with each pass to beat the cross threads into place. She wants the fabric to be tight and strong. She is making a special garment for her eldest Son. She had high hopes for Him. But things are not turning out as prophets and angels predicted.

Oh, I have guests. Welcome. You caught me at my weaving. When I am at my loom I love to recite the words of Isaiah the prophet. He said God gives us “a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Isaiah 61:3). I have known despair. I have looked into the utter darkness. Once I even stood on the edge of the abyss and asked God, “Why?” In those moments, I take to my weaving and repeat the Word of the Lord. Passing the shuttle to and fro sends my mind back across the years. I open the memories treasured in my heart and take out each one. Each story is a thread in the tapestry of my life. Each carries a strange mixture of wonder and fear.

I can see myself as a young woman over three decades ago in this same village of Nazareth. My father arranged a good marriage for me to the town carpenter. Joseph, by what I observed, he was a gentle and righteous man. He will give me a quiet home and a peaceful life. Yet before we came together as husband and wife something happened which meant my life would not be peaceful or quiet. While working at my loom in my parent’s house a blinding light filled the dark room. I dropped the shuttle, covered my eyes and trembled in the corner. Even now, thirty years later, I can still feel the terror at seeing what an angel, a messenger from God.

Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. (Luke 1:28)

Me? Highly favored by God? The voice continued,

Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end. (Luke 1:30-33)

The Messiah? The promised King who reigns forever? The son of David? No, more than that. What did the angel say? “The Son of the Most High”? The Son of God. Son of David, yes. That made sense since Joseph is a descendent of David. But wait! God has something else in mind. This child will not be Joseph’s.

How will this be since I am a virgin? (Luke 1:34)

What the angel explained is still a mystery to me.

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. For nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:35, 37)

Well that's not the way my mother said it would happen. How can I, a poor peasant girl from little Nazareth, be the mother of the Messiah, the mother of the King of kings, the mother of God's own Son? As I puzzled over this I suddenly realized the angel was waiting for my reply. I felt all the angels of heaven, the entire universe was holding its breath waiting for my answer.

I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said. (Luke 1:38)

Three months later it was time to hold my breath when I told Joseph about the child. For a night our marriage hung by a thread thinner than this wool. Thankfully, as Joseph slept, the angel confirmed what I said. This soft lamb's wool reminds me of the night my Son was born. Though he destined to be King, he was not born in a palace among the nobility but in a cave among sheep. His first cradle was a feeding trough. His first visitors – shepherds. They told us angels sent them to witness the arrival of my little lamb. The angels sang,

Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. (Luke 2:10-12)

They gazed in wonder at our tiny infant. Then the shepherds left to tell others the news.

Forty days later, Joseph and I brought our baby to the Temple for the first time. The Law of Moses requires purification after birth and, in the case of a first born son, to offer him to God and then buy him back with a sacrificial offering. The Law tells us to bring a lamb and a dove but poorer families may bring just two doves. I did not know then we were also bringing a lamb.

The moment we entered the Temple courts, a strange man rushed up and seized the child from my arms. Before I could scream, he lifted up my baby and cried to God.

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. (Luke 2:29-32)

His name was Simeon, a devout follower of God. I later learned the Holy Spirit told him he would not die until he saw the Messiah. He handed my baby back to me and said, "This child will cause many to rise and fall. He will face great opposition and expose the secrets of many hearts." Then he whispered to me, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

A sword will pierce my soul? It was a dark prophecy I did not understand. Yet with each passing year, the painful blade drives deeper into my soul. I first felt the point of the sword the day Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. After an agonizing three day search, Joseph and I found our twelve year old in the Temple, talking with the priests. Frantic, we spun him around and demanded, "Why did you treat us like this, Son? Your father and I were worried to death." His reply was innocent. "Didn't

you know I would be here in my Father's house?" I was speechless. Your Father's house? From that moment, I started to feel my little lamb slipping away.

The great break came on a day that should have been a celebration. It happened over there in our synagogue. He returned to Nazareth after a visit down south to see John the Baptizer, the child of my kinswoman Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah. With fire in his eyes he entered the synagogue and read the Scriptures. He chose a reading from Isaiah.

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. (Isaiah 61:1)

At first the people rejoiced to hear Jesus will free us from the Romans and reign forever as our Messiah. But celebration turned to confusion when he said, "No prophet is accepted in his hometown." And confusion turned to rage when he said he will set all people free – Jews and Gentiles. They seized him and dragged him to the edge of town to throw him off the cliff. I followed the crowd crying for mercy until the terrible moment. Then I shut my eyes. When I opened them, I saw him calmly walking away from the mob. He never returned to Nazareth.

His fame, though, reaches the village. There are tales of miracles and multitudes of followers. My neighbors whisper when I pass. They avoid me, point fingers at me. I hear them. "He is possessed by a demon. He is the devil." Even my own sons tell me he is mad, crazy, out of his mind. "We must stop him," Jacob my second son says, "before something dangerous happens. It is for his own good. He is disgracing our family name. We have to get him home before he hurts himself and brings the wrath of Rome down on us. Come with us mother. He won't listen to us but he'll obey you." I am reluctant. But I can feel the point of that sword pushing deeper into my aching soul. I want him home again...to hold him and keep him close. I don't want him to be a King. I just want my little lamb back with me.

So when I finish the robe I made for him, I cut it from the loom, bind the edges and carry it with me down to Capernaum surrounded by my other sons (Mark 3:20-34). It is not hard to find him. We follow the crowd to a house but we cannot get near the door. My son Jacob sends word through the crowd to tell Jesus his mother and brothers want him to come out and see them. We wait until finally word is passed back. A stranger relays his message.

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother. (Mark 3:33-35)

His words drive the sword deeper into my soul. My sons fly into a rage. They want to leave immediately. But I stay and wait, hour after hour. When finally the crowd breaks up late into the night, I go to him and give him the robe. I want to unleash all my anger and pain on him but when I look into his eyes...I see love...his love for me. "Thank you mother." he says. "I will need it when I go to Jerusalem for the Passover. My hour is approaching, the hour predicted for me from birth, the hour when I will be raised up." At first I am elated. Finally he will be crowned king of Israel. But I see no joy in him.

When Passover approaches, I go to the Holy City with my children and neighbors. We even march in the spontaneous victory parade. They all cry for Jesus, my son, to be crowned king of the Jews. I celebrate the feast at my sister's house in Jerusalem. Together we eat the Passover lamb and remember how long years ago, the blood of the lamb saved our ancestors from slavery and death in

Egypt. With great anticipation we all believe this is the year when God will deliver us and finally save us. Perhaps tomorrow Jesus will be crowned king!

The next morning the dreaded news comes. My son was arrested during the night. The secret trial is already over. He was condemned by the Sanhedrin and the governor. They are dragging him through the streets, outside the walls to a hill called the Skull. I push my way through the crowds to that horrid place of torture and execution until I see before me, silhouetted against a rapidly darkening sky, three lone crosses. How can this be? My son – a criminal? An enemy of the state? An enemy of God? I almost cannot breathe as I draw nearer and nearer. Finally, when I reach his cross I see soldiers laughing and rolling dice across a blood soaked garment. Then, with horror, I realize it was *the* robe – the one I lovingly made for my son. All my treasured memories are woven into that cloth. Summoning all my courage I look up and see him - the child that was woven together in my womb is coming apart at the seams, my baby, my little lamb. He gasps for each breath. And with one of his last breaths he says, “Dear woman, there is your son now.” Gesturing to one of his disciples he says, “John, here is your mother.” And then, with a few more convulsions, he breathes his last.

“No God! No!” I scream. “This is wrong! Why? It isn’t supposed to happen like this. You promised he will be King. You said he will reign forever. You said he will save us. You said he is your Son. Is this what you do to your Son?” At that moment a cruel soldier picks up a spear and runs it through the limp body of my baby. At that moment, I feel the sword make its deepest thrust into my soul...and everything goes dark.

Mary is right. There is a lot of wrong in our world.

We know there is something dreadfully, tragically wrong with this world. Like Mary, we see the threads of this life, some of them stained blood red, and ask, “Why?”

Then we look at the Cross. There we see the heart of God is torn and ripped by all the evil of this world. There we see every blood stained thread and every evil strand tied together in the death of Jesus, in the sacrifice of Mary’s little lamb. Those who think God is distant and disconnected from the pain and evil in our world must look at the Cross and see that every evil in the history of this world is woven through the torn and tattered heart of God.

What Mary could not see and often we cannot see is the pattern God, the Master Weaver, is making with those threads. We see only the fragment of life before us. He sees the whole fabric. We see the unfinished work. He sees the completed piece. Mary did not know Jesus is a King who came to die. Mary did not know her little Lamb is the Passover Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Mary could not know the fabric of his life was torn so the tear in our hearts could be mended, so each one of us can be made whole.

The sword left a hole in Mary’s soul. Yet Jesus, after he rose from the dead, filled it with the Holy Spirit. And the last time we see Mary, she *and her sons* are praying with all the disciples. Jesus wove all their lives together in a fabric that cannot be broken, that will never end.

Are the treads of your life tied in a knot?

Is the fabric of your life coming apart at the seams?

Let Jesus mend your torn heart with His Cross-stitch.