

Mary, the Loyal Mother

Devotional Reading: Revelation 12:1–6

Background Scripture: Luke 1:26–56; 2:15–19; John 2:1–5; 19:25–27

Luke 2:15–19

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

John 2:1–5

¹ On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”

⁴ “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.”

⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

John 19:25–27

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” ²⁷ and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.



Key Text

Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. —Luke 2:19

Introduction

A. Hidden Treasure

My children love a good mystery, and we often listen to podcasts as a family when we travel. It is common for us to choose enigmatic tales. One such recent story involved the so-called eighth wonder of the world—Prussia’s Amber Room. The Amber Room was built between 1701 and 1714 for King Frederick I of Prussia. It was given to Peter the Great, the Tzar of Russia, and moved to the Catherine Palace near St. Petersburg in 1716.

The Amber Room was considered one of Russia’s most beloved artifacts for 200 years, a cultural treasure. But the Nazis stole the room in 1941. It was reconstructed in Germany and then disassembled and packed up for protection from the war in 1944. No one has seen it since. Historians believe it was stored in crates in the basement of a castle museum that collapsed from wartime bombing.

In pictures of the replica, the Amber Room glows with golden light. It is a wonder to behold. Unfortunately, its beauty was stolen and hidden, resulting in great loss.

Today’s lesson tells of a different kind of hidden treasure—the identity, capabilities, and calling of the Lord, Jesus Christ. It focuses on Jesus’ mother, Mary, and how she trusted the slow unfolding of Jesus’ person and work.

B. Lesson Context: Luke

Luke 2:1 sets Jesus’ birth narrative during the reign of Caesar Augustus (27 BC–AD 14). Augustus was a powerful ruler, and his supporters heralded him as the “savior of the world” because he brought peace to the Roman Empire. Luke tells us that Caesar Augustus decreed a census. The purpose of such a decree was to determine who was subject to taxation and military service. The census required that people return to their familial hometowns. It also served as a reminder that Rome ruled the world, especially for those who lived in small, far-off provinces like Palestine. Thus, Mary and Joseph journeyed the 90 miles from Nazareth in north Galilee southward to Bethlehem. There, they had a baby!

Luke’s Gospel provides many details about

The Testimony of Faithful Witnesses

Unit 2: Faithful Witnesses Say “Yes” to Jesus

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recount how Mary expressed her trust in Jesus.
2. Explain Mary and Jesus’ loyalty to one another.
3. Write a prayer of trust to Jesus, expressing faith amidst uncertainty in present life circumstances.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Hidden Treasure
- B. Lesson Context: Luke
- C. Lesson Context: John

I. Mother’s Amazement (Luke 2:15–19)

- A. Visited at the Manger (vv. 15–18)
- B. Pondered in Her Heart (v. 19)
Keepsakes and Memories

II. Mother’s Request (John 2:1–5)


- A. The Setting (vv. 1–2)
- B. The Need (vv. 3–5)
Known Well

III. Mother’s Future (John 19:25–27)

- A. New Son (vv. 25–26)
- B. Responsible Caretaker (v. 27)

Conclusion

- A. Steadfast “Yes”
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember



Trust, even
when you don't
understand.

Visual for Lesson 8. *Point to the visual and say, "Mary's loyalty teaches us to trust God amidst life's amazements and disappointments."*

Mary and her experience—more than any other Gospel. Luke records the angel Gabriel's visit and Mary's miraculous conception (Luke 1:26–38). He also describes Mary's visit to her relative Elizabeth's home and the special reception she received (1:39–45). Luke records Mary's worshipful song of praise to God (known as the Magnificat) and her example of faithful trust in God's plan (1:46–55).

C. Lesson Context: John

Today's texts from the Gospel of John act as bookends to Jesus' life and ministry. They focus on two times that Jesus' mother is mentioned. The first is at a wedding in Cana, and the second is at Jesus' crucifixion. The first passage has no parallel texts in the synoptic Gospels. Parallel texts for the second are found in Matthew 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; and Luke 23:49.

I. Mother's Amazement

(Luke 2:15–19)

A. Visited at the Manger (vv. 15–18)

15. When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

A group of *shepherds* receive a heavenly visitation. It is the third time an angelic messenger appears in Luke's narrative (Luke 1:11–20;

1:26–38; 2:9–13). This group declares a Savior newly born.

As the *angels* return to *heaven*, the shepherds deduce that the city mentioned (Luke 2:11) is *Bethlehem* (1 Samuel 16:1, 13). They decide to seek out the sign and *go* and *see* the Christ child. They recognize that the message they've received came from the *Lord*.

What Do You Think?

Have you ever heard about something you just couldn't wait to go and see for yourself? What made it necessary to not just take someone else's word for it?

Digging Deeper

What investigation methods do you use to safeguard against "false news"?

16. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

A *manger* is a feeding trough for cattle. Mary and Joseph used it as a crib out of necessity (Luke 2:7). What a strange sign for the shepherds to receive (2:12)! Yet it proves to them the identity of Jesus, the infant Lord (2:11).

17. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

The shepherds' sight of the baby (*him*) in the manger is enough to confirm what they heard from the angels. Immediately, they become evangelists, spreading the "good news" to the surrounding towns and villages (compare Luke 2:10).

18. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

The shepherds' witness is effective. People hear and respond. The story the shepherds tell includes heavenly messengers, unlikely recipients, incredible directions, and a humble infant Savior lying in a feeding trough. The story sounds far-fetched, but it is accurate and makes the hearers marvel.

B. Pondered in Her Heart (v. 19)

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

In contrast, *Mary* stays quiet. Like creating an

interior scrapbook, she takes mental notes of each moment, memory, and visitor as she experiences God's plan unfolding. Mary considers the miracle of it *all* and then tucks the memories away in her *heart*.

Imagine the things Mary *pondered*: angels, visions, dreams, her husband's obedience, a miraculous pregnancy and subsequent birth, tales of more angels, and shepherds who know what she knows—this is no ordinary baby!

What Do You Think?

How do you purposefully mark special milestones or experiences in your spiritual walk?

Digging Deeper

What are you more likely to do with spiritual news or experience: "spread the word about it" like the shepherds or quietly contemplate it like Mary? Why?

Keepsakes and Memories

My daughter recently got married. Before the wedding, her sister and I opened our old cedar chest to look for memorabilia from my marriage 25 years ago. As I pulled out layer after layer of various keepsakes, we marveled at the tiny dresses she and her sister wore when they were babies. We smiled at the little blue sweater my son wore for his two-year-old pictures.

At the bottom of the chest lay our guest book, white candles, and dried flowers. We thumbed through wedding photos and then dug around some more to find the specific thing I was looking for: the cake cutter my husband and I used at our wedding. My daughter wanted to use it for hers.

Seeing all these special things took me back to when I was young. I saved only the most critical things but kept more than that in my heart. Looking at the keepsakes I realized that, like Mary, I have a lifetime of memories to ponder.

Consider Isaiah 43:18; Philippians 3:13–14; and 2 Peter 1:9; what biblical criteria do you use to decide which memories are worth storing in your heart and which are not? —L. M. W.

II. Mother's Request

(John 2:1–5)

John 1 expresses the beginning of Jesus' ministry from an external perspective, focusing on him as an adult coming into the fullness of his ministry. John 2 turns to the vantage point of Jesus' mother, who has intimately known him all his life.

A. The Setting (vv. 1–2)

1. On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,

Jesus' mother (who is never specifically named in John's Gospel) attends a wedding in Cana, a small town less than 10 miles from Nazareth. Her attendance at the event makes it probable that she has a family connection with someone in the wedding party. It is possible she came early to help. At the least, the marriage involves close family friends.

Jesus' mother's presence serves as essential background information for the episode that follows.

2. And Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

If Mary is related to the bride or groom, Jesus is too. Therefore, Jesus' presence may be a family expectation at the event. Jesus' *disciples* are present with him. Thus far in John's Gospel, we know that the band of disciples includes Andrew (John 1:40), Peter (1:42), Philip (1:43), Nathanael (1:49), and the unnamed disciple of John the Baptist (1:35–40). The unnamed disciple might be John the Evangelist, the author of this Gospel. If John is present, then it is likely that his brother, James, is in attendance too (compare Matthew 4:21–22).

Weddings in first-century Judea lasted for seven days after the bride and groom finalized their vows. The invitation to this *wedding* was not to an afternoon ceremony but rather an extensive feast. Those *invited* to the celebration could expect an abundant time of joy, food, wine, desserts, music, and danc-

How to Say It

Bethlehem	Beth-lih-hem.
Caesar Augustus	See-zer Aw-gus-tus.
Magnificat	Mag-nif-ih-cot.
Magdalene	Mag-duh-leen or Mag-duh-lee-nee.

ing at the groom's family home. Jesus and his disciples accept the invitation to participate. Nathanael is from Cana (John 21:2), so he is likely acquainted with the family hosting the wedding.

The scene is set for the first of seven miraculous signs that point to Jesus' identity as the Messiah (John 2:1–11; 2:13–22; 4:46–54; 5:1–15; 6:1–14; 9:1–38; 11:1–45).

B. The Need (vv. 3–5)

3. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

A near catastrophe occurs: the *wine* runs out. Since the customs of honor and status naturally led to comparisons with other families and local wedding celebrations, no bridegroom wanted to be considered miserly for scrimping on the event. Tradition and public image pushed wedding feasts toward extravagance. The tendency would be to provide a lavish experience that made others in the village consider the bridegroom a generous provider. As in any era, communities have long corporate memories! The host (the groom's family) was responsible for providing all food and drink for the duration of the celebration. To fail to do so was shameful. Therefore, a shortage of wine was an embarrassing problem!

Jesus' *mother* informs him of the situation, and her message conveys more than simple information—it bears weight, urgency, and concern with the reputation of her family and friends. Some commentators think Mary wants Jesus and his company to leave to minimize the family's embarrassment. However, given what follows, this explanation is unlikely. Mary thoroughly knows who Jesus is and that he has the power and authority to fix the situation.

Bearing in mind the potential that this wedding is for a portion of Jesus' relatives, the pressure behind Jesus' mother's words could have been intense. A sharp edge of obligation to her tone could explain Jesus' response (see below).

4. "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

Jesus responds in three parts. First, he acknowledges his mother as *woman*. This designation sounds disrespectful to modern ears,

but it was not inappropriate to refer to a lady in this manner in the first century. Jesus also uses this same term in addressing his mother in John 19:26 (see below). Although not disrespectful, the moniker does create a separation between Jesus and his mother.

Second, he asks a question. The Greek phrase underlying the translation *why do you involve me?* is an idiomatic expression used in both the Old and New Testaments. It can function as a stern rebuke (Judges 11:12). It can also be a neutral equivalent to, "What does this have to do with me?" (2 Samuel 16:10; 2 Kings 3:13). The question can be either direct or rhetorical. It appears that Jesus is reconfiguring his familial relations with the query. The question builds on his reference to his mother as "woman." As Jesus begins a new season of life and ministry, every relationship is transformed. With his mission before him, his blood relations become secondary.

Third, Jesus refers to his *hour*. The Gospel of John frequently mentions Jesus' "hour" (John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1). The term refers to the moment when Jesus' complete identity will be revealed, his passion undergone, and his glory exposed. Jesus mentions this "hour" at critical moments in his personal life. Here, he states that ultimate revelation and fulfillment remain in the future. Jesus' comment may be a reminder to his mother that God the Father chooses when and what is revealed about him in any situation.

What Do You Think?

As a parent or grandparent, do you know things about your children or grandchildren that others don't know?

Digging Deeper

Do you ever ask them to get involved in things because you know they could help—and you know they wouldn't naturally step in themselves?

5. His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Despite Jesus' brusque response, Mary is not dissuaded. She trusts that Jesus will do something

helpful. Mary instructs the household *servants* to follow Jesus' lead. During large celebrations such as these, the bridegroom might hire a coordinator or steward to manage the event. Mary speaks to those serving the household and guests, behind the scenes. Although her words are specific to the situation, they hold the key to Christian discipleship; it is wisdom to *do* the things Jesus says to do! You never know when a miracle may be right around the corner.

Mary shows great faith in Jesus and plays a significant role in the first miracle of his public ministry. Jesus goes on to turn six pots of water into wine—"choice wine" (John 2:10). Imagine Mary's delight as she witnesses yet another marvel! The "master of the banquet" is impressed with the bridegroom's provision (2:9–10). Presumably, the wedding feast runs its course, and the celebrants finish their week with joy. Jesus' glory—his divinity—manifests in this miracle. Those who follow him grow in belief (2:11).

Known Well

When my children were in school, we attended many band concerts. While sitting through one, my son and I started playing a game together. We each tried to be the last audience member clapping after a song. We enjoyed the game thoroughly, and eventually he said, "It's not brave to be the *last one*. What's brave is being the *first one* to clap." After that, our game changed, and we carefully gauged when it was appropriate to begin the clapping.

Eventually, my son also started playing in band. He often sat across the theater from my husband and me, waiting with his friends for their turn to play. Sometimes, I heard one lone clap start or end the applause, and I laughed as I searched the crowd for my son. When I found him, we shared a conspiratorial smile. We knew each other, and we knew our game.

Similarly, Mary knew her son. She knew how he would react when he discovered the wine ran out, and she knew he could do something about it. Because of this, she witnessed a miracle. How well do you know Jesus? What might you learn from Mary's confidence in him? —L. M. W.

III. Mother's Future

(John 19:25–27)

A. New Son (vv. 25–26)

25. Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

Near to Jesus' *cross*, several women gather. Interestingly, three of the four are named Mary. The group is comprised of female followers of Jesus who remain present with him despite the brutality, pain, and suffering they witness.

Matthew's Gospel states that the women were there to minister to Jesus, poised to care for his needs (Matthew 27:55–56). In contrast to John's perspective, Matthew and Mark state that the women stand at a distance to watch (27:55; Mark 15:40). Mark's Gospel adds that "many other women" were also there (15:41), so perhaps we may imagine quite a crowd. The women had followed Jesus from Galilee (Luke 23:49). Luke's Gospel adds the detail that the women "mourned and wailed" for Jesus (Luke 23:27).

What a difficult scene for Jesus' *mother*! Yet she stands in solidarity with him, enduring.

What Do You Think?

Have you witnessed someone passing? What was it like?

Digging Deeper

Are you willing to remain present with someone who is suffering? To witness injustice?

26. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son,"

Here, John mentions another *disciple*: the one *whom [Jesus] loved*. It is very common to identify this disciple as John himself. The "beloved disciple," as many endearingly refer to him, is mentioned at a few key points throughout John's Gospel. Most famously, the one "whom Jesus loved" leaned against Jesus at the Passover table (John 13:23) and had a conversation with him about Jesus' betrayer (13:25–26).

Seeing the two figures together, Jesus addresses

his *mother*. On the formal, attention-getting salutation *Woman*, see John 2:4, above (compare 4:21 and 8:10). Then he asks Mary to consider this disciple a *son*.

B. Responsible Caretaker (v. 27)

27. And to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Jesus turns his attention to the *disciple*. This man is to consider Mary his *mother*.

More important than identifying the disciple’s name who is “standing nearby” (John 19:26) is to reflect on Jesus’ words to him. This man takes Jesus’ saying as a direct order and obediently accommodates Jesus’ mother’s care. From this moment, the two are asked to think about each other as family; Mary gains a *home*.

Jesus’ request is at least partially a practical measure. Jesus’ (legal, but not biological) father, Joseph, is likely no longer living. Therefore, as the eldest son, Jesus is responsible for his mother’s care. We do not know why Jesus asks someone outside his immediate family to look out for Mary because we do know Jesus has other brothers (Matthew 12:46; 13:55; Mark 3:31; 6:3; Luke 8:19; John 7:3–5). What is clear, however, is Jesus’ love for both the disciple and his mother. He desires to see them in a supportive relationship. As Mary loses one son, she gains another.

Jesus is in the business of reconfiguring familial relations (Luke 14:26; John 2:4; see commentary above). John 1:11 says that Jesus “came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” Here, John says that the disciple *took her into his home*. Jesus’ work is nearly finished (John 19:30). Ultimately, he creates a new family built around response to his ministry rather than bloodlines. In doing so, Jesus fulfills the mission of John 1:12—he gives power to those who receive him to become children of God, vital parts of God’s family. This disciple and Jesus’ mother demonstrate a new kingdom reality and familial relationship on two levels. The first is practical—the disciple cares for Mary in his home (compare 1 Timothy 5:4). The second is spiritual—they are indeed related as a part of God’s family.

Conclusion

A. Steadfast “Yes”

Mary’s “yes” to God included cherishing her son’s identity through tender, exciting, and excruciating circumstances. She trusted God to sustain her journey and Jesus as her son and divine Lord. Mary held Jesus as he took his first breaths, and she was there with him as he took his last. She was with him as much as possible in between, even witnessing his first miracle. Mary observed Jesus’ earthly life in all its humble humanity and divine activity. She kept watch and cherished the glorious (albeit painful) unfolding of God’s perfect plan: the salvation of the world through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Mary’s consistent “yes” models a beautiful pathway through uncertainty for us. She believed so fiercely in God’s provision that she submitted her whole life to obedience and wonder. From the beginning, Mary collected and purposefully remembered the signs God sent that proved his prophetic word was true. She didn’t waiver in her belief. Mary’s love and loyalty were rewarded by continued care and belonging in God’s family.

Mary was a model disciple. She knew the significance of Jesus’ life and trusted that he could make a difference in times of need. Jesus was a model son. He did all he could to provide care and support for his mother.

What Do You Think?

In what ways does Mary’s witness or specific “yes” to God inspire you toward greater loyalty to Jesus?

Digging Deeper

What promises from God are you incubating? What keeps you steadfast in your belief?

B. Prayer

Father God, may we remain committed to you in the highs and lows of life. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Loyalty to Jesus means a life of sacrificial love.