



**Temple Baptist Church**  
**Wilmington, North Carolina**  
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**The Mother of the Risen Lord**  
**Acts 1:12-14**

Talk about feast or famine!

Our Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters revere and venerate the Virgin Mary to the utmost, giving her an honored place next to Jesus her Son. From early times in the ancient church, Christians referred to her as the *theotokos*, the “God-bearer.”

We Protestants, on the other hand, downplay or even largely ignore Mary, except at Christmas. She is the one who bore Jesus the Messiah, so we honor her for that. But then we seldom think of her again until next Christmas.

Yet here she is in the New Testament. While the letters don't mention her, all the Gospel accounts and Acts do, and usually in a positive light, while never in a negative one. So what are we to make of Mary?

***Which Mary?***

Now reading about Mary in the New Testament can become a little confusing. After all, there are at least six Marys, probably seven of them in the four Gospel accounts, Acts, and Romans.<sup>1</sup>

Mary Magdalene is the second most prominent Mary in the Gospel narratives about Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, also figures into the accounts of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Matthew refers to her as ***the other Mary*** in 27:61.<sup>2</sup>

Then there's ***Mary the wife of Clopas*** in John 19:25. Some think that she may be the same person as Mary, the mother of James and Joseph.

The third most prominent Mary in the New Testament is Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. She's the one who sat at Jesus' feet listening to his teaching while her sister Martha prepared the meal. She also anointed Jesus with costly ointment at a meal during his last week to prepare him for his burial.

In Acts, Mary, the mother of John Mark, hosted a prayer meeting as the church in Jerusalem prayed for Peter while he was in jail awaiting execution for preaching Christ.

Then in his letter to the Romans in 16:6, Paul sent greetings to Mary, who had ***worked hard for*** those in the church in Rome.

But the most prominent, the most important Mary in the New Testament is of course by far Mary, the mother of Jesus.

So what can we know about Mary, the mother of Jesus, our risen Lord? And how can what we know help us in our own walk with her Son, Jesus?

***What the Scriptures teach us***

Both Matthew and Luke tell us about the events leading up to and following Jesus' birth.

Their emphasis is that Jesus was, as that ancient confession of faith known as the Apostles' Creed later put it, "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary." He had no human father, yet the Son of God became human by being born just as we all are. This was *not* a story like the pagans had about many of their deities who were half-divine and half-human because a god or goddess had physical relations with a human resulting in a birth. Rather Jesus is *fully* God and *fully* human through a *supernatural* conception and a *natural* birth.

Luke tells us that when God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary to announce to her that she would bear the Messiah, she was pledged to be married to Joseph. This betrothal, as it was called, was as binding as marriage and could only be dissolved by a formal divorce. It usually lasted a year. The couple were husband and wife in every way except that the bride was not taken into the groom's home until their wedding, and the physical aspect of their one-flesh union was not to take place until after the wedding. Mary and Joseph were honoring that requirement of chastity.

When Gabriel appeared to Mary, he greeted her, saying, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28). She was perplexed. He told her not to be afraid, that the Lord was with her, and she would bear a son whom she was to name Jesus. Gabriel went on to tell her (Luke 1:32-33):

***"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."***

Mary questioned how this would be since she was a virgin. Gabriel told her that the conception would be miraculous, the work of the Holy Spirit, not of a man.

Gabriel also told her how her cousin Elizabeth, who up until now had not had any children, was expecting a child in her old age.

Mary's response was a model for us all as disciples of Jesus: ***"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word"*** (Luke 1:38).

So there she was, hearing the angel Gabriel's message that she was to bear the Messiah! It would not be *her* doing; it would be *God's* doing! He would be the *initiator*; she would be his *instrument*.

Later Mary went to visit Elizabeth, who lived more than 50 miles away in Judea, and the child Elizabeth was carrying leaped within her when Mary greeted her. She blessed Mary as the mother of her Lord. Mary praised God with that beautiful psalm of praise in Luke 1:46-55 that we know as the *Magnificat* or *Mary's Song*.

So that's the first thing Scripture teaches us about Mary—*she is the mother of our Lord*. She had a special place in God's redemptive plan. While some Christians have made far too much of her and her special role, we dare not make too little of her or of her role! She was God's instrument to bring the Messiah into the world, so that he might be truly Man as well as truly God.

Mary's response to Gabriel's news was so simple, yet so profound. She recognized that she was God's servant. She gave herself up completely to God and put herself under God's control. As Elizabeth would describe it, she ***"believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord"*** (1:45). Because she believed, she said "Yes" to God and to how he wanted to work through her!

That's the second thing Scripture teaches us about Mary—*she is a model for our life* as

followers of Jesus. Mary is what my teacher Charles Talbert calls the “ideal believer”—“she hears God’s word, believes it, and surrenders herself totally to it . . .” For Luke, Mary is a model for disciples, a model of self-surrender and abandonment to God’s will.<sup>3</sup>

Ben Patterson once pointed out how medieval artists often portrayed Mary in stained glass windows. He said:

Her pane would be the only one with no color on it. Clear glass. All the other windowpanes would filter the light of the sun through their own distinctive designs. Mary was clear, unfiltered. There was nothing of her to affect the light that came through. She could not advance herself and advance the work of God.<sup>4</sup>

We see Mary’s trust in God and her dedication and devotion to her Son lived out through the Gospel accounts, and even into the book of Acts.

Luke’s account goes on to show how circumstances landed Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem at the time Jesus was born. Because there was no place for them in the inn, a small cave where the animals were stabled served as shelter as ***the Word became flesh*** (John 1:14). She welcomed the shepherds who came to visit after the angels announced his birth to them. She ***treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart*** (Luke 2:19).

She and Joseph were careful to follow devoutly all that the law commanded them to do concerning Jesus. Though she was perplexed by Simeon and Anna’s reactions when they saw the baby Jesus in the temple after his presentation to the Lord, she was intent on being the mother God intended her to be to her Son.

In the Gospel according to Matthew, when the Magi from the east came to visit this one ***“who has been born king of the Jews”*** (Matthew 2:2), Mary received them and their gifts for Jesus. Intent on protecting Jesus, when Joseph was warned in a dream to flee to Egypt because Herod was seeking to destroy the child, they went immediately, and returned only when the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph saying it was safe to return home.

When the holy family went to the temple in Jerusalem for Passover when Jesus was twelve years old, and he stayed behind when the caravan started home, Mary and Joseph searched until they found him in the temple discussing theology with the teachers of the law. This gave Mary more to treasure up and ponder (Luke 2:51)!

The Gospel accounts also show us how Mary interacted with Jesus after he became an adult. At times she didn’t understand him. Yet she expressed her supreme confidence in him, as at the wedding in Cana. When she told Jesus that the wine had run out, it was clearly with the expectation that he would do something about this embarrassment to the host. Even though Jesus mildly rebuked her, telling her that his hour had not yet come, she told the servants, ***“Do whatever he tells you”*** (John 2:5). They did, and he turned the water into wine that was superior to what the host had already served.

And in what must have been unbearably excruciating for her, John tells us that Mary was at the cross when Jesus died. You who are parents know how our hearts ache when we see our children suffering, even when it’s the consequences of their own poor choices. Can you even begin to imagine what it must have been like for Mary to see her Son dying such a horrible death, knowing all the while that he was sinless and completely innocent?

We see Mary one more time in the text we read from earlier, Acts 1:12-14. There she was gathering with Jesus’ followers *after* his resurrection and ascension to the Father. They were all devoting themselves in one accord in prayer. She was a woman of *faith*. She was a woman of

*obedience*. And she was a woman of *prayer*.

### ***A model for mothers***

So on this Fifth Sunday of Easter and this Mother's Day, it's appropriate that we consider Mary. She's the mother of our risen Lord and the model believer, and *an excellent model for mothers*. She trusted God and sought to bring Jesus up faithfully. She cared for him, and with Joseph provided for him until he grew up. She pondered in her heart God's work and purpose for him. And she demonstrated her loving devotion to him by being there at the cross as he died. She was a model mother.

Now you mothers may be saying, "Yeah, but she was raising Jesus! How hard could that have been?"

True, but think also about all that she had been told was his destiny, and that to get there he'd have to be rejected, suffer, and die on the cross. Think about what it must have been like to have the responsibility of raising the Son of God, then *releasing him* to God's will!

No, you aren't or weren't raising Jesus. But the children God gave you are precious gifts he entrusted to you. And while they're not Jesus, God does have a purpose for them in Christ. And you play a vital role in fulfilling and accomplishing that purpose.

Mary's motherhood shows you how—through submission to God, depending on him and his power, reflecting on his purpose, praying for his guidance and strength, lovingly caring for your children, bringing them up in the Lord's ways and being there for them as adults.

Or to put it another way, you fulfill your role faithfully as a Christian mother by living out your Christian commitment in your family life.

Because here's what we need to understand—*Mary was a model mother because she was a model disciple*.

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne McCready, "Mary" in the *Holman Bible Dictionary*, ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville: Holman, 1991), 928-929.

<sup>2</sup> Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®.

<sup>3</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, rev. ed. (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), 25, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ben Patterson, "A Faith Like Mary's," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 87.