

St Thomas of the Air Church
Christmas Eve
2020
rmcneely+

Mary, Did You Know?

For many this has been tough year.

A threat of a contagious disease that has been deadly for some.
Quarantine and isolation as our leaders try in vain to limit the virus
Unemployment and poverty spread as businesses
were boarded up and closed
Social and criminal unrest filled our streets
Extreme political division and discord
Wildfires and air that was dangerous to breathe
It has seemed that evil is advancing as never before
And despair seems to be lurking at our door.

Then on Monday

As if to remind us
Of an event from 2000 years past

There was this Star

This Christmas Star

That penetrated the gloom and despondency.

A shining celestial reminder

Of His presence

Of His love

An heavenly phenomenon

Coming just when we so needed it.

It took us back 2000 years

To the incarnation of Jesus,

To the birth of Jesus, the Christ

To a time when Israel was occupied

by an invincible foreign power.

It takes us back to Galilee.

And to Mary, this young teen-age girl from Nazareth.

There is nothing about her to suggest that she
Is well educated
Is sophisticated
Worldly

There is nothing about her early in the story that is special or outstanding
She is from a small town in, out of the way, Nazareth

Not a wonderful place
Not a special place.

In fact it is a backward, insignificant minor military post
For Roman troops transiting outlying Galilee

Mary has been betrothed by her family
to a much older man; Joseph
In the arranged marriage of the time.

The courtship will take about a year
And during that time
The bride and groom will have supervised time
to get to know one another
But they will rarely be alone together.

All is going well and very normally
When one day everything changes.
Mary is visited by the ArchAngel Gabriel
With some highly unusual news

Gabriel tells this young Jewish girl
That she will be the Mother of the Son of God.

It must have taken some time for that to sink in
Can you imagine Mary thinking:
What?
I am going to what?

And after a time she recovers herself
It isn't every day you are visited by an Angel
And an ArchAngel at that.
But the news!

Mary needs some facts.
How can this be, as I know not a man?

And Gabriel explains
The Holy Ghost will come upon thee
And the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee
And ye will conceive a Son

Mary is thinking
Yeah. Right.

Gabriel pushes her
And you shall call His name, Jesus
And He shall be called the Son of the Highest
And He shall reign over the house of Jacob, forever
And His kingdom shall have no end
And He shall be called the Son of God

Mary must have been motionless
My son, whom I shall name Jesus
Shall be the Son of God

After a time Mary
This young girl from backward Nazareth
Said the words that changed her life
Changed the life of her betrothed
Changed the life of everyone who knew her
Words that changed the course of history and of all mankind.

Mary said:
Be it unto me according to thy word.

But then she had to tell Joseph.

Joseph who knew he had not been intimate with Mary
That she would soon bear a son, who would be the Son of God?

Can you imagine that conversation?

So Mary and Joseph are at the corner Starbucks in downtown Nazareth
You know, down by the rug place?

And Joseph is droning on about the latest doorframes that he is making
And Mary interrupts him and says

Listen Joe

Darling

We need to talk

And tells him what has happened

The burst of light

The Arch Angel,

The Holy Ghost

Overshadowing

The Son of God

The whole deal.

You can imagine Joseph:

Judas's priest

What is this girl saying?

Who is going to believe her?

What will my family say?

What will her family say?

Do I need to publicly divorce her now?

The shame.

Public divorce will ruin her, may ruin me

She may be stoned to death for adultery

I can't have that. I love this girl.

Joseph has his dream and Gabriel confirms all that Mary has told him.

He decides to love her and to marry her to stand by her.

Heck with the consequences

And then there is a tax decree mandated by Caesar Augustus

And they must go to Bethlehem.

So Joseph and Mary set off for Bethlehem

85 miles of rugged trails and terrain

on foot and on the back of a donkey

Mary is 8 months pregnant

Now it has been some time since I was pregnant

But I have it on pretty good authority that walking even on level ground

In the best Air Jordan athletic shoes available

Is tough going when you are 8 months pregnant.

It is hard to imagine the 85 miles that Mary traveled

That is like walking from here to Santa Cruz

When they arrived

They found all the places were filled

Turns out a lot of other people were coming to Bethlehem for tax decree

They found a sort of cave like place where farmers kept their animals

And it was there that Mary gave birth to the Son of God

Not in a palace

Not attended by nurses, midwives

Doctors

The best of the best

Or the highest of the high

But in this place built for farm animals.

Let's stand there quietly
 next to Mary and Joseph for a moment
Mary and Joseph have delivered the Son of God
 By themselves.
And with only the animals as witness
 God became man.

Mary gazes at her baby boy for the first time
 As mothers have since time immemorial
Adoring
 Studying every feature
 Counting little fingers and toes
 Memorizing every tiny wrinkle, pore and square inch of baby soft skin.

She holds in her arms the very first Christmas Gift
She looks at him, looks deep into his eyes

Does Mary know that this little helpless life
 This little baby boy
 Was all that stood between the devil
 And his total domination of the world?

Did Mary know that after 400 years,
 This baby boy was the Messiah?
Mary, do you know that the baby you delivered
 Would soon deliver you?

Mary sees her baby
 But she sees so much more
 As she gazes into His eyes
Mary is the only person in all creation
 Who
 To an absolute certainty
 Based upon her own direct knowledge
 knows
 That she holds the Son of God

As she holds Him in her arms protecting Him from the night chill
As she stares into the eyes of her little baby boy.
She realizes that she is looking into the heart of God

After a time
Shepherds arrive
They tell Mary of the Angel
Bringing good tidings of great joy for all people
The pronouncement:
“For Unto you this day in the City of David
Is born a saviour
Who is Christ the Lord”
They tell her of the Angel chorus and the music
They bow down,
Pay homage

The shepherds retreat back into the night.

It is just Mary, Joseph, the baby and you.

Mary hands you the baby Jesus
In your arms
You hold
The Son of God
And as you look into His face
You realize
That you too are looking into the heart of God

In your arms you hold
What everyone in the world
Longs for
While the rest of the world hustles and bustles
There you are
In the silence of the night
Looking into the heart of God

Perhaps we, who know the rest of the story, cannot help but be a little sad
He would suffer
He would die on the cross
Die for our sins
Because of our sins he would die an agonizing death

But we also cannot help but rejoice
Because we know
This child
Will rise from the dead
He will defeat the evil
He will put death to death
And open the way for eternal life

Time to hand Him back to Mary

But before you walk away
You turn
And take one last look
Mary holds her baby
Joseph next to her with his arm around her shoulders
Both Gazing at the little baby boy wrapped in swaddling clothes
The love of God

You see God's Love
God's immense love
For them
For you
His Forgiveness
His mercy
His wisdom

God has touched you that night

God has touched you.

