

Lesson Twelve

LUKE 1:26–56; LUKE 2; JOHN 19:25–27

Mary: "Let It Be to Me According to Your Word"

She was probably thirteen or fourteen years old. The town of Nazareth was a dot on the map of Galilee, small, poor, despised even by other Israelites ("can anything good come out of Nazareth?" John 1:46). She had a fiancé, a hope chest, and the ordinary dreams of a Jewish girl her age. And then an angel walked into her house, called her by name, and turned every plan she had into a question.

She would be the mother of the Most High. Her unmarried pregnancy would scandalize her town. Her firstborn would be a king and a Savior, and also, eventually, a man hanging on a cross while she stood there watching, just as the prophet Simeon had warned her thirty years earlier that a sword would pierce her own soul. She would lose Him on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem when He was twelve. She would watch the village turn on Him when He was thirty. She would bury Him before she was fifty.

And she would give us the most extraordinary sentence ever spoken by a teenage girl: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." Mary is a model for every woman who has ever been asked by God to do something harder, costlier, and stranger than she ever imagined. She is also a careful theologian, an honest grieving mother, and an example of a kind of obedience the rest of us spend a lifetime trying to learn. Read Luke 1 and 2 and John 19:25 to 27 this week, and let our twelve weeks together finish where every Christian story eventually does, at the foot of the cross of her Son.

First impressions

Mary occupies a unique place in the story of redemption. Among women in Scripture, no one carries a burden quite like hers. She is, however, also a daughter of Adam and Eve. She needs a Savior just as we do (and she says so in Luke 1:47, "my spirit rejoices in God my Savior"). The Bible honors her as God's chosen instrument and a remarkable woman of faith. It does not present her as sinless, as a perpetual virgin, or as a mediator between God and us. Those later teachings, developed centuries after the apostles, are not what Scripture says about her. The right path is to honor her the way Scripture honors her, neither diminishing her nor exalting her beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6).

1.
 - a. Read Luke 1:26 to 56; Luke 2; and John 19:25 to 27. After reading, what is your overall impression of Mary?
 - b. What in these passages do you find most moving?

- c. What do you find most surprising?

The annunciation (1:26–38)

- 2.
 - a. Read 1:26 to 28. Where is Mary, who is she engaged to, and how does the angel greet her?
 - b. Note 1:28: "O favored one, the Lord is with you!" What is the nature of God's favor here? Easy? Comfortable? Or something else?
- 3. Read 1:29. How does Mary respond? Why is it significant that her first reaction is to be troubled rather than to be proud?
- 4.
 - a. Read 1:30 to 33. List everything the angel says about the child Mary will bear.
 - b. How is this announcement the fulfillment of promises stretching all the way back to Genesis 3:15, 2 Samuel 7:12 to 16, and Isaiah 9:6 to 7?

Study Skill, Following Old Testament Promise to New Testament Fulfillment: When you read an Old Testament prophecy, look for the New Testament passage that quotes or fulfills it. When you read a New Testament passage, look back to see what Old Testament promise is being fulfilled. Luke 1:31 to 33 is a wonderful place to practice. Almost every line picks up an earlier prophecy and announces its fulfillment. The Old Testament and the New Testament are not two separate religions; they are one story told in two acts, with Christ at the center. Studying both together will guard you against many errors.

- 5.
 - a. Read 1:34 to 37. Mary's question ("How will this be?") is different from Zechariah's question earlier in the chapter (1:18). Compare them. What is the difference?
 - b. What does the angel tell her about how this will happen (1:35)?

The virgin conception of Christ is taught clearly in Matthew 1:18 to 25 and Luke 1:34 to 35, and prophesied in Isaiah 7:14. It is not a small detail. It preserves both Christ's true humanity (He was born of a real woman) and His uniqueness (He did not inherit Adam's guilt in the ordinary way). Romans 5:12 to 19 and 1 Corinthians 15:21 to 22 set Christ alongside Adam as a second representative of humanity, undoing the disobedience of the first. The virgin birth is one of the cornerstones of the gospel itself. We surrender it only at the cost of everything that rests on it.

6.
 - a. Read 1:38, Mary's answer. "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." Sit with that sentence. What is she agreeing to?
 - b. What is she risking, socially, relationally, physically?
 - c. What would the equivalent answer look like coming out of your mouth this week, about whatever God is currently asking of you?

Optional Application: Write Mary's words in 1:38 on a card and carry it with you this week. Whenever you hit a hard decision or an unwelcome interruption, pull it out and pray it: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

The Magnificat (1:39–56)

7.
 - a. Read 1:39 to 45. Mary goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth. What happens when Elizabeth hears Mary's greeting?
 - b. What does Elizabeth call her in 1:43? What is significant about that title, and what is not there that some later tradition would add?
8.
 - a. Read the Magnificat (1:46 to 55) slowly, ideally aloud. Mary is perhaps fourteen years old. What kind of theological mind does this song reveal?
 - b. Note the verbs in 1:51 to 54: He has shown strength, He has scattered, He has brought down, He has exalted, He has filled, He has sent away, He has helped. What kind of God do these verbs describe?

For Further Study: Compare Mary's song with Hannah's song (1 Samuel 2:1 to 10, from Lesson 6). Notice how saturated Mary's prayer is in Old Testament imagery. She is not making this up on the spot. This is the fruit of years of meditating on Scripture in a small village by an ordinary girl. What does that say to us about the value of memorizing Scripture in our quieter seasons?

9. Notice 1:46 to 48. Mary calls God "my Savior." What does this reveal about Mary's own self-understanding?

Bethlehem, the temple, the boy in the temple (Luke 2)

10. a. Read Luke 2:1 to 7. What is Mary's situation when Jesus is born?
- b. What does it tell us about God's heart that the King of kings is laid in a feeding trough?

11. a. Read 2:19. What does Mary do with everything she sees and hears?
- b. How is this practice, treasuring and pondering, a model for the Christian life?

Study Skill, The Habit of Treasuring God's Word in Your Heart: Luke records twice that Mary "treasured up" or "kept" things in her heart (Luke 2:19, 51). Bible study is not only an academic exercise. It is the practice of taking what God has said and storing it where it shapes us. The psalmist writes, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). The simplest tools, slow reading, memorization of key verses, frequent rereading of familiar passages, and the habit of meditating, may not look impressive, but they form the soul over time the way water forms stone.

12. Read 2:33 to 35. Simeon's blessing on Mary contains a warning: "A sword will pierce through your own soul also." What is he foreshadowing?
13. a. Read 2:41 to 51. Mary loses Jesus on the way home from Jerusalem. How does she handle the moment when she finds Him in the temple?

- b. What does Jesus' answer in 2:49 begin to reveal about the way His sonship to God will eventually require Him to belong less and less to her?

For Thought and Discussion: Mary's hardest task as Jesus' mother was learning to release Him. Every mother in our group will recognize the pattern. What is Mary teaching us about how to hold our children rightly before God?

At the cross (John 19:25-27)

- 14.
 - a. Read John 19:25 to 27. Where is Mary?
 - b. What does Jesus do for her from the cross?
 - c. What does this scene tell us about Jesus? About Mary?

For Further Study: Compare John 19:26 to 27 with John 2:4 and Mark 3:31 to 35. Jesus' earthly relationship with His mother is unique, tender, and yet always bounded by His ultimate identity as the Son of God. How does He honor her even at the moment He is finishing the work the Father gave Him to do?

After the cross (Acts 1:14)

- 15.
 - a. Read Acts 1:14. Where is Mary in the days after the resurrection and ascension?
 - b. What is striking about her placement in the story?

After Acts 1:14, Mary disappears from the New Testament. No more named appearances. No recorded last words. No doctrinal pronouncements. The book of Acts moves on to the spread of the gospel through the apostles, and Mary, like the rest of the early disciples, becomes one more saint in the gathered assembly. Her quiet, faithful presence among the praying Christians of Acts 1 teaches us how to finish well. Most of our final years will be unspectacular. The aim is not to be remembered after our death, but to be found faithful when Christ returns (Matthew 25:21).

Honoring Mary the way Scripture does

16. Mary herself, in the Magnificat, calls God her Savior (1:47) and calls herself His servant (1:48). What does this tell us about how Mary would want to be remembered?
17. a. Mary models a particular kind of submission to God, not passive, not reluctant, but informed, courageous, costly, and free. How is that different from how the world tends to picture submission?
- b. Where in your own life is God asking you to that kind of "let it be to me" obedience right now?

For Further Study: 1 Timothy 2:5 says, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Read it carefully. Who is our mediator? How many mediators do we have? How does this verse help us see why the New Testament asks us to pray to the Father through Christ alone (John 14:13 to 14; Hebrews 4:14 to 16), and not through Mary or any other person?

Your response and the close of our study

18. Look back over these twelve weeks. Of the twelve women we have studied, which one has most affected the way you see yourself? Why?
19. Of the twelve women, which has most affected the way you see Jesus? Why?
20. What is the single most important thing God has done in you through His word during these twelve weeks? Be specific.
21. What is the one area of your life in which you still need to say to the Lord, with Mary, "Let it be to me according to your word"?
22. Write a closing prayer, your own, committing what God has done in you over these twelve weeks to His ongoing work.

For the group

Warm-up. This is your closing session, and it deserves space to breathe. Begin by asking each woman to share one moment from the past twelve weeks that she does not want to forget. Don't hurry this. The goal of the warm-up is to celebrate what God has done.

Discussion. Mary's story is rich enough to fill a year, so pick four or five questions to anchor your discussion. Pay particular attention to questions 6 (let it be to me), 8 (the Magnificat), 11 (treasuring and pondering), and 17 (Mary's model of obedience). Then move into the closing questions (18 to 21), which look back over the whole study.

Wrap-up. Close by reading Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46 to 55) aloud together. Thank God for the twelve women He has used to shape you these weeks: Eve, Sarah, Hagar, Rahab, Ruth, Hannah, Abigail, Esther, the woman at the well, Mary of Bethany, the sinful woman, and Mary the mother of Jesus. Pray for one another by name, asking the Lord to send each woman home more like His Son than she came in.