

# First Sunday of Christmas

MARY, DID YOU KNOW?

Luke 2:41-52

First Sunday of Christmas

Analysis by Joseph Justus van der Sabb

41 Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. 42And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. 43When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 44Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. 45When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 46After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' 49He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' 50But they did not understand what he said to them. 51Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

**An Extended Note:** *Mary, the one we like to sing about, has a problem. "Gentle Mary laying her child, lowly in a manger." "The*

Favoured One." "The Virgin Womb." "Blessed Mary." "O Blessed Maid." "Mary Chosen Virgin Mild." "Mother Mild." "Mary Free." "Mary His Mother, so like to a Queen." "Pure and Mild." "Chosen Virgin." "The Virgin bears the Infant, with Virgin Honor Pure." "Virgin full of Grace." "Mary, Did You Know?" Yeah, Mary, you. You have a problem.

I am not picking on Mary. I am staying within Luke's story, picking at and following a thread which perhaps does not get enough attention. (Anyway, it has been argued by some that the Johannine inclusion of Mary at Cana and beneath the Crucifixion is as a device and not as a person.) There is so much that can be said, "enough to fill a bajillion books," as someone once quipped, but here are some cursory notes:

As for Luke's narrative: OK, granted, Gabriel sold Mary a bum bill of goods: "You're going to have a baby. 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 ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (1:32-33)." Mary, unfortunately, doesn't ask the right questions. Typical of a teenager, her one and only question is, "Doesn't sex come before pregnancy?" She should have been asking: "What's so great about a Messiah-King who sits on hillsides and rides donkeys and then gets crucified by the House of Jacob? The Throne of David is a tombstone on a hillside?! That's GREAT?! Show me the MONEY!" No wonder she ends up disillusioned! Simeon's got her number when he notes that: "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed -and, Mary, a sword will pierce your own soul too" (2:34-35).

The Lukan narrative more than hints at a clash between Jesus and his mother. Mary is visited by Gabriel (1:26-38) and then

travels to visit her relatives Elizabeth and Zechariah (1:39-56). She and Joseph travel from their home in Nazareth to Joseph's clan's ancestral home in Bethlehem and she gives birth to her son there. Shepherds visit them and relate how they too were visited by angels who told of "good news of great joy" and a "a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord." Mary treasures these things in her heart and fulfills the naming and circumcision and redemption and purification rites according to the Laws of Moses. Simeon and Anna speak words over the child and then the young family return to "their own home town of Nazareth" (2:1-40). The child, there at Nazareth, "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him."

One year at Jerusalem, however, Jesus doesn't bother to tell his parents that he has better things to do and lets them take the road home without him. Jesus remains at the temple, listening to the teachers and asking them questions, amazing everyone with his understanding. His parents are justifiably frightened and now outraged to discover, three days later, Jesus acting as though they are absurd for expecting him to have had the common decency to let them know he was going to a sleep-over at the temple for three days... starting the day they were leaving. Jesus responds to his mother's hurt and loving concern and outrage with pure cheek. But, he does return to Nazareth with them, and is obedient.

Like Elizabeth's five months of hiding (1:24) and Zechariah's nine months mute (1:20-80) and the apostles who are instructed to wait (24:49; Acts 1:4), Jesus disappears into the woodwork at Nazareth, waiting. His ministry's birth is tied to John the Baptist's message of preparation and the rite of baptism which Jesus also undergoes. After his baptism, while he is praying, there is voice from heaven saying "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (3:1-21). Jesus' identity is now revealed, so it must be pointed out that, "as was thought," he

was the son of Joseph bar Heli, a descendant of King David and of Adam, who is called "son of God."

Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, faces the temptations of the devil and overcomes them. The devil leaves him until an opportune time and Jesus returns to Galilee and begins to teach in the synagogues (4:1-15). In the very next verse Jesus is home again, back in Nazareth. Nazareth. Where Jesus has been waiting in the woodwork for thirty years. Where the great-grandsons of Matthat bar Levi of Nazareth have established shops and farms. Where Mary's parents Joachim and Anne of Nazareth and their families have lived for generations. Even if the village had a few thousand people, Jesus would be related to most of them and almost certainly would know virtually all of them. To them, to his folk, to his family, to his mother and his brothers, Jesus says: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, to proclaim release to captives, to give sight to the blind. And today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." And his family, his cousins and aunts and uncles and second cousins, the whole synagogue, was filled with rage. They try to kill him. "Is not this Joseph's son?!" How dare he! Mary then stood up with Jesus' brothers and cousins and defended Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, noting that while the promise was that that he would sit on a throne, that part was allegorical and had a spiritual meaning. Oh wait. They didn't.

Luke does not report that Jesus ever again returns to Nazareth. "You [Jerusalem] would kill the one sent to you, the heir... I want to help you, but you won't let me. So your house is left to you. You won't see me again till you're singing Hosanna" (13:31ff). So much for being Jesus "of Nazareth"! (See also 9:5.)

Jesus is traveling and has passed through Capernaum and Nain and is now moving through "cities and villages" and the twelve are

with him, as well as some women. "Mary and Joanna and Susanna and many others" (8:1-3). But no mention of Mary his mother. Where is she? Sour grapes back in Nazareth? She and Jesus' brothers come to see him (8:19-21) and when they can't see him privately, send him a message. Why is this delegation from Nazareth here? What have they come to say? What have they come to hear? Jesus comes to see them in the evening, when the crowds were gone, and embraces them, saying: "It's good to see you! How's Nazareth!?" Oh wait. He didn't. He refuses to see them and makes a comment to the crowd around him: "Those guys? I don't know them. My real mother and brothers hear the word of God and do it." Ouch.

Luke has many chances to mention that "Mary his mother" was with the several other Marys, following after Jesus. Yet she is not mentioned at the crucifixion or burial (23:49, 55), nor at the empty tomb (24:10), nor with the disciples as they cower behind closed doors (24:33). She has left the story, and Jesus keeps making remarks which would've stung, had Mary heard them.

A random woman hears Jesus preaching and is pretty impressed. She calls out: Blessed is your Mom! Jesus smiles and says: Yeah, she's pretty neat! Momma, come up here and take a bow. Oh wait. He doesn't. "Blessed, rather, are those who hear the Word of God and obey it!" Slam! (See 11:27ff.)

Noticing that large crowds were following him, Jesus said: You guys think being my disciple is a joke!? "Whoever does not hate his father and mother, and his wife and children, and his brothers and sisters cannot be my disciple" (14:25ff). (Compare to Matt. 10:34ff and note how Luke reports "hate-speech" where Matthew tones things down. Luke's Jesus is grinding an axe!) And also, what about those people who start something and can't finish it, who bite off more than they can chew? Those losers send delegations to negotiate for peace. (That had to hurt like

*hell when the folks back in Nazareth heard it!)*

*You think I've come to make peace? Not me. I bring a sword and father will be set against son, and mother against daughter (12:49ff).*

*Mary of Nazareth has a tough journey-from Chosen and Visited to shut out and rejected when she rejects Jesus. Granted, Jesus wasn't much to look at compared to her Legitimate Expectations (which she's been treasuring)! If only Gabriel had told the truth! Nevertheless, Jesus doesn't come looking for her. He hurts. He waits. She hurts? She waits? This is hardball.*

---

**DIAGNOSIS: Mary, did you know? You have a problem.**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) :** *Being His Mom Has Got to Count for Something! And It Doesn't.*

Being the mother of the Son of God, wow, sounds pretty neat! Not really. She's His Mother, the Theotokos ("God-bearer"), but he doesn't have time for her. He's not Momma's Boy. Not now when he's a kid. Not later when he's a man. He won't/can't/doesn't give her a free lunch. Just because she's been his mother and loved him and worried over him and raised him, and been loved by him (presumably) and heard the angel's promise and sung those lovely "I am the servant of the Lord, I live to do your will" words... it doesn't mean she's part of his crowd. It doesn't mean she's good enough. She tries to cash in her chips and is rebuffed, rebuked. Twice. Sorry, Jesus says, there's no hangers-on. No moochers. No Chosen People who get in on the good deals just because they're from Nazareth, just because they changed my diaper and suckled me. The Kingdom is no Entitlement Welfare State. "Hey Mom, you want in? Get your act together. Pick up your cross and follow me. Hear the Word of God and do it." Wowee! This guy's got some edges! Tough talk from the tough guy!

## **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *Opposing a Sign*

Why does this make us fidget? Hey, it's Christmas. Everyone gets something! Ho, ho, ho, Merry Christmas, right? Even if Santa knows if you've been naughty or nice, he tends to overlook naughty in this lenient age and everyone gets a little something from Walmart. What do you mean Jesus might not bring Blessed Gentle Mother Mary Mild along for the ride? You mean he holds even her accountable? She's his Mother! Full of Grace, Miraculously Assumed and all that! We sing songs about how she "bore the Infant with virgin honor pure," for crying out loud! Give the Lady a break! She's entitled to one. And, we'd like to think (for no particular reason) so are we.

We want a world where our families and clans and allegiances matter – when they're in our favor. When we are loving and loyal, the other guy should be loyal back. That's how this works! People are trying hard to be good within their own frameworks, you know? And the Rule is that when a person is trying, especially someone you know, you respect that and let him be. You give him a break. You don't break his kneecaps. But Jesus doesn't just let things go. He pushes... and it just isn't helpful.

Jesus' extreme messages of accountability and perseverance in persecution and long-suffering sound like "austerity measures" to us-bad policy! And he's just a bit radical when he says "no one who starts and then looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God (9:62)," right? We should give up our second shirt? Our extra food? Can't the government or God or someone just take some non-invasive measures and take care of all this without blowing the budget too much more?

Anyway, maybe Mary has the right idea. Jesus is a lovable hot-head. Maybe it's best to stand back a bit and do our own thing for a while. Let Jesus and those freakish friends of his do

whatever it is they're doing; let them have their fun. We have respectable, tolerant religion with respectable and economically sound expectations. Things are not that bad. Besides, at this rate it is not likely he'll be reigning over the house of Jacob anytime soon.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem- with God) :** *Written off. "I don't know you. You're not my family."*

Jesus has no time and no patience either for his opponents or for those who show interest in his program but lack the nerve, the zeal, the resourcing to follow through 110%. Tender and lenient Jesus is not. The Kingdom of God is not for people who are half-hearted, or who follow in fits and starts. It's not for slackers or hypocrites. Does he have to set the standards so impossibly high? Is he being intentionally cruel to his mother? It's not her fault she was given other expectations! Why can't he just give her a break?

- The Kingdom is not for the ones who hear but from whom the devil takes the word so that they may not believe and be saved. It is not for the ones who receive the word with joy, but having no root, fall away in a time of testing. As for those who are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, their fruit does not mature (8:11ff).
- "... whoever rejects you [disciples] rejects me [Jesus] and whoever rejects me [Jesus] rejects the one who sent me [God]" etc., (10:13-24).
- Boy-Jesus mouthing off to his mother in front of the impressed crowd at the temple: Silly goose, why in the world are you worried? Why are you looking for me? You should have known I was here (2:49)!
- Man-Jesus mouthing off to his family in front of his friends: Eh, my mother and brothers? Who are they? My actual family hears the Word of God and does it (8:19ff).
- Master of the house mouthing off to his fellow friends and



acquaintances and not letting them in: I don't know you (13:22ff).

- 12:8-10: And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; 9but whoever denies before others will be denied before the angels of God. 10And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.
- Names not written in heaven (10:20).

Rejecting Jesus and his vision, his game plan, is the same as him rejecting you. Nazareth and Mary learn the hard way. They imposed their own concept of Messiah on Jesus and were shocked and thrown into great anxiety as he ignored them and reproved them-even rejecting them. But the Kingdom of God is at hand, and seriously, you want to be known by Him on that Day.

If Mary can't get her ducks in a row, things are a bit bleak, out here in Nazareth. Mary, did you know that your baby boy would someday walk off and leave you out on a cold winter's night that cut so deep, like a sword? Noel?

## **PROGNOSIS: Ave Maria, The Lord is with you.**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) :** *Written*

After a gruesome death and a dazzling, amazing resurrection, Jesus has some explaining to do. He really does. He starts by meeting up with two of his followers as they are walking home from Jerusalem and "interpreting to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (24:27). Then he shows up back at Jerusalem and "opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus **it is written**, that the Messiah is to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem," etc. (24:45).

This is not a precise, per se, repeat of what Isaiah or Malachi wrote. Even Mary, with her wealth of angel quotes, would not have been able to come up with this. This is written? Where? Impromptu 12:34-36? How come no one else seems to have picked up on the fact that “Messiah, King, Savior, throne of David, reign over the house of Jacob” actually means “be rejected by the house of Jacob, die nailed to a beam and then rise from the dead three days later?” That would have been a useful hint!

Yet this is precisely the Luke-Acts claim—that Jesus’ life and death and resurrection are exactly what the Scriptures, the Law, Moses, the Prophets, the angels had in mind all along. Even though not a single person has noticed it before. Over and over Peter, Philip, Stephen and Paul “cross” scripture with the life/death/resurrection of Jesus to demonstrate that God has indeed acted in history, has indeed sent his Messiah who is Lord of all, and that this is distinctly Good News for all who hear and believe it. Be they Gentile or Jew, named Mary or Saul.

Here’s what Jesus said: The Father has chosen to give you the Kingdom, so have no fear, little flock (12:32). Somewhere between Nazareth and Bethany on Olivet a glimmer of hope has been kindled. Jesus has managed to combine accountability with forgiveness in such a way that there are hurt and grieving friends of his left at his tomb; they haven’t all run away. The seed has fallen, here and there, on good soil (8:11-15). These followers of Jesus have caught a glimpse of the God that Jesus calls Father, the Father who kept a tender watch on Jesus, to whom Jesus spoke in a familiar and trusting way, and to whom Jesus had taught them to pray, saying “Our Father.” Kindled by the Holy Spirit, what was yesterday faltering faith is today resurrected. They are indeed gathered into the arms of the Shepherd (15:1-7). They can be happy that they are not written off. Their names are written in Heaven (10:20). The Son will acknowledge them before the angels of God (12:8). Why? Because

the Father has chosen to give the Kingdom. What is the final scope of that gifting? For a text study on Luke 2, it may yet be too early to tell, but when someone from Nazareth or anywhere stands outcast along the road (18:35ff), and cries out: "Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me! I want to see!" the Son of God has mercy. And now the glimmer is flaring into a beacon of light and hope for all the world.

It's not "Mary, did you know you have a problem?" anymore. It's "Mary, tell me more about your Salvation!"

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis: (Internal Solution) :** *Hearing and Doing the Will of God*

And this faith, in fact, does bear fruit (8:15). Bearing fruit is not the Got To, it's the Get To. So is there a Got To? 1. Yes, Jesus has Got To suffer and die and be raised on the third day. So says Jesus, Moses, the scriptures, the disciples, the women, everyone. It's practically unanimous. 2. If you want the benefits that death and resurrection can give you, yes, you've Got To believe Jesus when he says "You're in. You're mine. It is written." But this Got To is more like a Get To, so would say Mary, I think. It's like breathing a sigh of relief when the shepherd has scooped you up. It's like gazing into your Dad's eyes and seeing only love and forgiveness. It's like watching your dinner guest break bread and seeing the Son of God in your home. It is knowing yourself to be the lostest little lamb among all the lost lambs, the most ridiculous and pathetic of all the sons who know better. It's that trust that we are still children of the Heavenly Father, for Jesus sake. That's the faith that makes us well, by which we stand up and walk, that opens our eyes and sets us to glorifying God!

**Step 6: Final Prognosis: (External Solution) :** *Life in the Little Flock / Being in My Father's House*

Luke begins and ends in the Temple. Gabriel and Jesus and Peter

have a range of speaking engagements there. Of much hay that probably should be made of this, I will leave that to the enthusiastic reader. In the opening chapters of Acts, the people Jesus describes as his mother and brothers—those who hear the Word of God and do it—are constantly in the Temple, praising God and speaking to the people about who Jesus is and what that means. They are willing to let their loved ones go home without them. They are willing to be beaten, ridiculed, opposed. They are also living together as a community in what appears to be a new way; sharing what they have with each other and the needy. They are living in the joy that comes of knowing they are safe in Father God because of Jesus, and allowing that joy and confidence to permeate their attitudes, actions and household economies. Whether or not this is prudent economic advice which will win an American election, I leave that to the energetic preacher. But the Jesus people, wherever they are, are doing it.

And where are Mary and Jesus' brothers after all this? Have a look for yourself (Acts 1:14). And what do you bet Mary remembers the words to her song: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior (Luke 2:46ff)!