**Mary, Did You Know?**

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**Texts: Colossians 3:12-17, Luke 2:41-52**

It’s still Christmas, you know.

It’s that part of Christmas that comes after the excitement of pageants and candlelight services…the part that comes after all the wrapping paper and ribbons have been cleared away and leftovers of the great feasts have been packed into the fridge. Guests have come and gone and we’re all eyeing the Christmas tree wondering when it can come down.

But it’s still Christmas. Yes, the shepherds gone back to their fields. The angels have returned to the heavens. The magi, with their dire message to run to Egypt, are almost here, but not yet. The stable is empty now, save for the holy family and animals quietly munching on their hay. And, in this quiet stillness, Mary holds God in her arms. I wonder what’s she’s thinking.

I remember the moment when the reality of parenthood set in for me. It was the click of the car seat into its base and the nurse waving through the window as we drove out of the hospital’s circle drive. I mean, I knew, academically, that this would happen, of course. I’d been hoping and praying for this child. But, right then, with all the excitement of the birth over and crowd of experts dispersing, there was a moment of realization. I remember thinking, really, just like that? Wait, I still have questions? Who will help when I’m not sure what to do? Oh, no, it’s me. This tiny, fragile human is depending on me for everything. Even the stuff I don’t even know I don’t know yet.

I wonder if Mary had the same doubts. I mean, academically, she knew. Her song, the Magnificat, sung well before his arrival, shows she knew. She knew that this baby was special, holy, divine. She knew he would turn the world upside down…that he was the key to the kingdom of God for us. She knew why he was coming and what he would do. But he didn’t come fully grown. This tiny baby is how God chooses to come alongside us. This tiny baby who needed to be nurtured, taught, and loved. First, he has to grow and she’s the one who has to make sure he can do it. Did she ever worry about how she could possibly mother the divine? Was she confident that she knew what to do? I bet she had more questions than answers.

Mary is an interesting person. She’s fully human and surprisingly ordinary. She’s young, but not so young to turn heads in that day and age. She’s solidly middle class, not struggling without a home or food to eat, but certainly not a wealthy powerhouse either. She’s just ordinary. There are some that claim she is sinless, divine in and of herself. But she’s not…she’s human…just like us…with all the foibles and flaws that come with humanity. And that’s important, because God trusts her enough to parent God’s son. If God believes in Mary, who is like us, perhaps God trusts us to grow God’s love in this world too.

We don’t have many stories about Jesus as a kid or of his parents growing into parenthood. Only Luke records anything of this time…and then only two stories. First, when Jesus is eight days old and they take him to the temple for the purification rites and Simeon and Anna rejoice over him while everyone, including Mary and Joseph, watches in amazement. And then this morning’s story, when Jesus is twelve years old…

As a kid, I was fascinated. This is where I got a glimpse of Jesus being like me. This is where I got to imagine the awkward teenage Jesus who bumped into everything because his legs and arms were suddenly too long. To imagine Jesus, who would rather spend time talking with the adults in the temple than with the kids his own age. Maybe he didn’t quite fit in either. To imagine Jesus, who was having to figure who he was and what he was going to do with his life. He was going through the same things I was and I wanted to hold every moment.

Now, as an adult and a parent, I notice Mary. This story is not the Facebookable story moms are looking for. This story is about the time she lost her kid. Like Home Alone lost her kid. It’s a whole day before she notices and two more days before she manages to get back to him. We hear the panic in her voice as she scolds him. “Why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” Even Mary’s kid can throw her for a loop.

And then, when they find him in the temple, Jesus seems surprised, saying in an annoyingly calm, almost patronizing voice that my teenagers have also perfected, says “Why were you searching? Did you not know I must be in my Father’s house?”

Clearly, Mary didn’t know. She had expected that he was following the others, remaining with his cousins and aunts and uncles, like all the other children. If she had known, she certainly wouldn’t have lost track of the Son of God. Clearly, Mary didn’t know about this.

Even if the Bible doesn’t list them all out, I bet Jesus threw a few more surprises her way as he grew. While she knew he was destined to break open the kingdom and establish justice and peace, I don’t think she knew exactly what raising God was going to be like. But what she did know was that she was to love and nurture this child because he loved her and God trusted her to do so.

But maybe that’s enough. Maybe we don’t have to have all the answers. Maybe we don’t even need to know all the questions. Maybe we just need to make time and space in our hearts to ponder what God is doing all around us. Three times in first two chapters of Luke, the gospel writer says that Mary pondered and treasured the amazing things that were unfolding before her. First, when the angel came to her bedside with God’s request, she pondered how she could have found favor with God. When the shepherds burst into the stable in the middle of the night and told her what the angels had told them, she pondered what all this meant and treasured it. And then in these rare glimpses we have of his childhood…when Simeon and Anna rejoiced over him and when he makes his home in the temple, she treasures these things in her heart.

She allowed herself to recognize these moments when the power of the kingdom was shining brightly around her son in ways she hadn’t anticipated. The way he brings people together. The way he brings joy and peace to those he encounters. The way he pushes at the expectations of the world and opens up new possiblities. She knew she was seeing glimpses of God’s world intertwined with ours and she treasured those moments.

She didn’t try to make it all make sense. She didn’t try to control it. She just ponders them, trying to remember every detail, sitting with the questions, and with the mystery of God living in the middle of the world.

In a study group I’m in with a group of pastors, we start each meeting with a covenant of presence. One of them states, “Love the questions themselves. Let your questions linger. Release the compulsion to answer them or have them answered.” I wonder if that’s what it means when it says that Mary pondered these things in her heart. She doesn’t rush to answers. She just keeps noticing the things that Jesus does that reveal who he is and what he is doing. And lets these questions linger, valuing the experience, because she recognizes it as an unexplainable moment of divinity and humanity intertwining. She lets these moments dwell in her heart and change her.

This, I think, is what it means to ponder like Mary. Her response to the incarnation is to sit in the mystery of it and be entranced by its beauty. Who said I don’t know why you’d pick me, but let me hold the divine within myself and nurture it so it grows in the world. It’s the same thing Paul tells us to do…you’ve been touched by the divine…made God’s chosen ones through Jesus’s incarnation. So put on love which breaks so many boundaries. Let God dwell inside you and rule your heart, so that all your actions are loving ones. Don’t be afraid to be amazed by God’s actions in the world. Don’t worry if you don’t know all the answers. Mary didn’t know either. What we do know is that God came to be with us so we could be with God.

I wonder if it means holding onto those unexplainable moments…

* + when I say something about God and I don’t know exactly how I knew to say that
  + when we sing my grandfather’s favorite hymn and I can almost hear his voice in my ear
  + when I see a sprig pushing itself up between a rock and a hard place in the sidewalk and marvel at how things grow
  + when we look into the eyes of a baby and can almost see hope bursting into this world
  + when I pray for the rain to stop because I’m scared and, miraculously, it slows until I reach my destination
  + when we gather around this table and I inexplicably feel the presence of those long gone who have stood here so many times
  + when I end up somewhere at just the right moment to be helpful when I hadn’t planned to be there at all
  + when we share stories, when we let people into our hearts, and long-held beliefs begin to shift because love teaches faster than we know
  + when people appear to say just the right thing to answer an unspoken question in your soul and put you on a right and holy path.

Let the questions linger. Rest in the holiness of this unexplainable space. Recognize God’s love swirling in and between the questions, making something new possible. When we give ourselves over to that love, it shines through us. If we treat everything as if it were God’s, and it is, and everyone as if they were the Christ child entrusted to us, what a beautiful world that would be.

It’s still Christmas. Let us remember this part of it all year long..the quiet wonder of Mary who loves the questions and gathers up the treasured miracles happening all around. Linger in the candlelight and the miracle in that manger that defies all explanation. Ponder like Mary, treasure the moments when we see the kingdom inexplicably break through, and nurture the love born within and among each of us today. Amen.