

## A Psychological Profile of Mary, Mother of Jesus

1. Warm-up question: On Sunday Jeff said that each of us is on a journey meant to grow our souls and teach invaluable lessons. Each of us has a story to tell that others can learn from. Suppose someone were to write a biography of your life. What might the title of your biography be? ☺
  
2. On Sunday we launched a December/January sermon series called “From the Cradle to the Grave – Lessons from the Life of Mary.” Our goal is to learn everything we can from the example of Mary’s life. On Sunday, we began with the angel telling Mary she had been chosen to bear the Messiah and with Mary’s reaction to that. In particular, we focused on the words of the song of celebration she sang after receiving this news. The song (and/or poem) is typically called “Mary’s Magnificat.” Our reading this week is a bit longer than usual, but it’s important to get the full context. So let’s read Luke 1:26-55, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Verse 39 tells us that Mary left Nazareth “with haste” to go to the Judean hill country and spend time with her Aunt Elizabeth. Mary’s pregnancy prior to marriage surely created quite a stir in her home village of Nazareth and she needed to get away. When in your life have you felt like that – a time when you were humiliated, embarrassed, or disbelieved, and you just wanted to get away?
  - b. Being a young teenager pregnant before marriage with a child who would be called the Son of God could have easily been completely overwhelming, yet Mary’s song is full of joy. Why? She tells us in verse 48, “For God has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed.” Take a look at the list on p. 4 of all the factors conspiring to make Mary a lowly nobody. She easily could have doubted herself. What are some factors in your life that could easily cause you to think that God could never use someone like you to do something great?
  - c. The Bible repeatedly tells us that God delights in choosing “what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are.” I Corinthians 1:28. Why? Why do you think God chooses to operate that way?
  - d. Against all odds, Mary had amazing confidence in herself *because* she had great confidence in a God who can and will use lowly people to do great things. Have you ever known someone who was/is lowly in the eyes of the world who nevertheless did things that you consider great? Tell us about that lowly person and what God used them to do.
  - e. Like Mary, we must never underestimate what God can do through us. When in your own life have you been surprised by God using you to do something you thought you never could or would?

3. In the second half of her song, Mary goes on to celebrate what God was going to do through her son Jesus, as best she understood at that time as a teenager. This, Jeff said, is where Mary starts to get political. Basically, she understood the mission of the Messiah to be to overthrow the oppressor (the Roman Empire), liberate Israel, and usher in a golden age of earthly peace and prosperity. In other words, Mary expected her son to lead a political, earthly revolution. She would have innately understood how dangerous this would be for both her and her son. Rome would do everything in its power to crush any such movement. Yet Mary was all in! She had a passionate political/justice perspective and was ready to throw herself into the middle of this dangerous mission.
  - a. This part of Mary’s song, Jeff said, completely shattered his traditional view of her as a quiet, retreating, wallflower who sat next to Jesus’ crib with her hands primly folded. The real Mary, it turns out, was much more like Rosie the Riveter! Mary had hutzpah! Does this way of seeing Mary (and her personality) challenge your traditional view of her? How do you feel about this “new” way of seeing Mary?
  - b. Why do you think God chose a young woman with so much passion and hutzpah, and such a well-developed political/justice perspective, to be the mother of Jesus?
  - c. Jeff summed things up this way: “If we want God to work through us, we don’t need to have social status, we don’t need to be rich or powerful or brilliant or popular, but we do have to be bold. We have to be willing to take some risks. God don’t need no snowflakes.” Looking back across your life, tell us about a time when you did something really bold because you sensed God nudging you to do it? How did that feel?
  - d. Looking back across your life, tell us about a time when you failed to do something bold even though you sensed God nudging you to do it? How did that feel?
  - e. As a church, we’re about to do something really bold by becoming the leading spiritual voice in Indiana for transgender people. We’re about to put up billboards across our city, to convene a statewide organizing meeting for trans-affirming pastors, to gather clergy signatures on a public letter spiritually defending transgender people, and to rally our congregation and others to contact our state legislators to oppose further anti-trans legislation. We’re just a lowly little church that’s crazy enough to attempt something huge. How do you feel about this? What kind of impact do you think we’ll have?
  - f. In your personal life right now, what’s something bold you feel God may be nudging you to do? Do you think you’ll do it? What causes you to hesitate? What do you think Mary would do?

## **Luke 1:26-55**

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup>And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God.' <sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

39 In those days Mary went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, <sup>40</sup>where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup>and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup>And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup>For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. <sup>45</sup>And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

46 And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup>for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup>for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup>His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup>He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. <sup>52</sup>He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; <sup>53</sup>he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup>He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup>according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.'

### **Factors Conspiring to Make Mary a Lowly Nobody**

As a woman, she was considered property

As a woman, she was not educated

As a woman, she was not allowed in the main room of the synagogue

As a woman, she was considered incompetent to testify in court

She was only a teenager

She came from an obscure village in an outback region of Israel

She became pregnant before marriage – creating scandal

She was part of an oppressed people subjugated by the Roman Empire