

# MARY: THE VOICE OF WONDER

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*Luke 1:26-56; 2:1-20*

Some thoughts from RBC Booklet:

"Mary & Joseph: Reflecting on the Wonder of Christmas"

## Introduction:

One of the most haunting Christmas songs is the folksy, airy tune "I Wonder As I Wander." It speaks of the mystery of the Christmas story and the miraculous intervention of God. It tries to express in word and note how difficult it is for the human heart to understand what God chose to do—and why He chose to do it.

*I wonder as I wander out under the sky,  
How Jesus, the Savior, did come for to die.  
For poor ornery people like you and like I  
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.*

I can't imagine a more appropriate word to describe that miracle than **wonder**. Wonder speaks of omnipotence and omnipresence and creative power. Wonder speaks of God. George Beverly Shea wrote:

*There's the wonder of sunset at evening,  
The wonder as sunrise I see;  
But the wonder of wonders that thrills my soul  
Is the wonder that God loves me.  
O the wonder of it all, the wonder of it all—  
Just to think that God loves me!*

The wonder of God's love found its fullest expression in the coming of Christ on our behalf. Let's take a few moments to look at the Christmas story through the perspective of a young woman who had more cause for wonder than any other person involved in the story.

## I. The Wonder of Privilege

An American Express credit card ad used to say, "Membership has its privileges." They promoted their credit card by appealing to the human desire for being select and elite, for having an opportunity that others could only imagine.

Some privileges, however, are more than just a special treat or a membership card. They carry with them the sense of amazement that you have been selected above all the rest. I suspect that young Mary felt that way when the angel Gabriel told her that she had been chosen to give birth to the Christ-child. The prophet Isaiah told of how one day a virgin would conceive and bear a son who would be Immanuel – God with us. Centuries came and went, and no Messiah arrived. Then the message came: The time had come for Messiah to be born, and Mary was to be His mother! Even in Gabriel's greeting, the wonder of privilege is clear: "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Lk. 1:28).

Luke tells us that Mary was perplexed. Sensing her confusion, Gabriel explained it further:

*"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will call his name Jesus. 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 father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:30-33)*

"Found favor" meant that Mary was privileged. Talk about wonder! Amazingly, Mary understood the magnitude of what she had been chosen to do, and she accepted with humility. Imagine the wonder in her heart.

## II. The Wonder of Pregnancy

The Scriptures are largely silent about the 9 months Mary carried the incarnate Christ, but we can make some assumptions based on what we know about life. It would have been a time of new experiences in which Mary felt things she had never known before. She had no frame of reference for what she was feeling, physically and emotionally, with every day of the baby's growth.

There certainly must have been times when Mary doubted her own understanding—"Did I really see an angel? Did it all really happen like I remember, or is everyone right in what they say about me and my child?"—until the wonder was affirmed.

Early in her pregnancy, Mary traveled to the Judean hill country around Jerusalem to visit her elderly cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant with the baby who would grow up to be John the Baptizer. Seeking safety and support, she sought out Elizabeth. They were two women, separated by age, but connected by family. Separated by miles, but connected by history. Both were the unlikeliest women to be pregnant—one too old and one a virgin.

Upon seeing Mary, Elizabeth declared:

*"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:42-43)*

Mary's affirmation had come from a most unexpected source—the unborn baby that had leaped in Elizabeth's womb at the sound of Mary's voice. Mary's response, sometimes called "the Magnificat," shows the true sense of wonder she felt at the privilege of her pregnancy:

*"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me; and holy is His name." (Luke 1:46-49)*

Mary's sense of awe at this miraculous pregnancy is clear in her eloquent response of praise, worship, and thanksgiving. The wonder of this divinely orchestrated pregnancy had grasped her heart, filling her with true and uninhibited wonder.

### III. The Wonder of Childbirth

When Mary was nearing the end of her pregnancy, she and Joseph began the long, arduous journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register in the imperial census (Lk. 2:1-3).

Though this is just one piece of the overall wonder of the Christmas story, I find it no small thing that, in essence, the sovereign God put the entire Roman Empire in motion for the single purpose of getting Mary where she needed to be at the moment Christ would be born. Perhaps

because nothing short of an imperial edict would make a woman nearing childbirth travel about 80 miles on the back of a donkey! (Lk. 2:4-5). Another miracle. Another wonder.

Bethlehem, the home of Joseph's family and ancestors, was a village located about 5 miles south of Jerusalem, not far from the foothills of the Judean desert.

Upon their arrival in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph found the small community flooded with pilgrims who had come for the census. The inn was groaning under the weight of overflow capacity, and there was no place for the young couple to sleep, let alone give birth to a child.

The city of David was without shelter for the young woman who was ready to deliver. Yet they found a place of shelter in a simple stable – the place where sheep were sheltered when birthing their lambs. Though primitive, this provided them shelter from the elements and the evening chill, and privacy from the mobs of people.

And so, the stage was set for the most marvelous reality of all—that the Lamb of God would be born in a stable.

*"And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." (Luke 2:6-7)*

I am always struck by the simplicity of that description. This remarkable event is so understated, so matter-of-fact, that you could almost miss it if you blinked. So much is left unsaid that you are compelled to read it again ... and again – *read vv. 6-7 again.*

A veil of silence is pulled over the young woman as she agonizes through childbirth. The shouts of joy are left unrecorded as Joseph, apparently serving as Mary's midwife, delivers the baby and hands Him to His mother.

On one level, Mary must have experienced every wonderful emotion felt by every new mother as she held her child for the first time. But on another level, she had to have been overwhelmed by the realization that this child she cuddled and nursed was the Son of God, and by the

thought of what this child had come to do—rescue a lost race from their sins (including herself, His own mother).

Nothing in Mary's young life could have prepared her for all this. She was a normal first-century Jewish girl from an ordinary family living in an ordinary small town. Yet with wonder and obedience she embraced the extraordinary implications of God's extraordinary plan for her life. And the wonder of her 9-month emotional roller coaster brought her to one simple response:

*"But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." (Luke 2:19)*

Mary, in her own mind, was trying to understand all that was happening. Today, in our technology-driven culture, we would say that she was "processing."

- Processing the fulfillment of the promise.
- Processing the culmination of the pregnancy.
- Processing the journey from her home to Bethlehem.
- Processing the surroundings in the stable.
- Processing the struggle of childbirth.
- Processing the visit by simple shepherds.
- Processing the wonder of God incarnate in her child.

Two thousand years later, we are still processing. Still caught up in the wonder. Again, the carol "I Wonder As I Wander" puts it well:

*When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a cow's stall,  
With wise men and farmers and shepherds and all.  
But high from God's heaven a star's light did fall,  
And the promise of ages it then did recall.*

That's it—the promise of the ages. The wonder of Christmas. The wonder of it all.