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Resource Centre

# From our Churches

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## **Mary Remembers** **A Conversation with Luke, the Gospel Writer**

*(Opening monologue by Dr. Luke, centre stage.)*

Luke: How could John Mark have missed it? Something so important. At least I think it is important. John Mark has written a fast-paced account of the life, ministry and death of Jesus. But he writes not one word about Jesus' miraculous birth and all the drama around it. Two pregnant women, relatives, living miles apart. One an old woman long past child-bearing age and the other an unmarried teenager. Both had men in their lives whose plans were disrupted. And there were angels and dreams and long, difficult trips by foot and by donkey from Galilee in the north to Judea in the south. Somebody needs to write it all down before this remarkable story is forgotten. Nearly 70 years have already gone by. *(Pause)*

I have an idea. **I'll** write the story! I may be a Gentile with a Greek education, but I care about this Jewish Jesus. As a doctor, I know how crucial it is to get the background and details exactly right. Who better to tell them to me than Mary, the mother of Jesus, herself? If she is still able to do so. She is far from young anymore. I remember, years ago, treating her for an anxiety attack when Jesus came back home to Nazareth and the villagers drove him out of town, wanting to throw him over a cliff. That was a tough time for her. One of many. I'll find out where she is living and go talk to her. Ask her about the beginning of the story of Jesus.

*(Luke moves off the stage.)*

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*(Mary is settled in a rocker, slightly to the left of centre stage. Luke re-enters with a note pad and pen and approaches Mary.)*

Luke: Hello Mary. Do you remember me? I'm Dr. Luke.

Mary: No, I don't think so. I'm getting old and forgetful you know.

Luke: Never mind. But I hope you can remember some things. Important things. I'm writing the story of your son, Jesus, and I want to start at the beginning. Will you help me?

Mary: If I can. There are some things one never forgets.

Luke: Mary where did you live when you were a child?

Mary: Oh, I know that. I lived in the city of Sepphoris. It was a big place with lots of markets and traders and Jews and Gentiles – all kinds of people. It was the capital city of the region of Galilee.

Luke: Galilee. A place that Rome kept an eye on after hundreds of years of conflict and revolts and Roman brutality. Didn't the Romans completely destroy Sepphoris?

Mary: I guess so. Somebody did. Parts of the city were a mess when I was a child. But it was being rebuilt. That's how I met Joseph. He was a builder, you know. He worked with wood and stone.

Luke: You met Joseph on a construction site?

Mary: No, not exactly. He did do some reconstruction work near our home but I met him in the market. He lived in Nazareth, a town a few miles to the south. He was buying some tools and produce to take home when he noticed me. I was embarrassed – but also flattered. I was only 13. He was much older. And so handsome!

Luke: You must have met again. In the market?

Mary: Many times. And not by accident! We found ways of meeting.

Luke: You fell in love?

Mary: Oh, yes. Joseph was wonderful. He was such a good and godly man, a descendant of King David, and well established in the building trade. It was about then that my family moved to Nazareth. Joseph and I spent more and more time together. I was very young, but soon we were “betrothed” as they said. We would marry, but not for awhile.

Luke: Did you have a job?

Mary: A job? I was only 13, remember. But I helped mother with her chores. One of my tasks was getting water at the town well each day. That well was very important. Without it, the town would not have survived. Our house was on the south side of town and the well was on the north, up a steep hill. It was a hard climb for mother so she began to send me. I think she missed meeting the other women there and picking up all the gossip.

Luke: So you, a young city girl, got to know the town women?

Mary: I didn't really fit in. I tried to go at a time when others weren't there. And that day, it was a good thing that I was alone.

Luke: That day. What day? What happened?

Mary: Some things, some days, one never forgets. That day is one of them. I had just pulled my jar of water from the well when I sensed a presence. But I had heard no one approach. I turned and a person, a being the likes of which I had never seen, spoke to me. I still remember his words. "Greetings, favoured one. The Lord is with you," he said. I knew that. I had been taught that the Lord is always with us. But favoured one? What did that mean?

Luke: Were you afraid?

Mary: Confused and afraid. I don't know how I knew but I knew this was no dream. Deep inside I understood that this was an angel talking to me and he told me not to be afraid, that I had found favour with God and that I would become pregnant and give birth to a son and I should name him Jesus.

Luke: All that in one breath? His words must have been a shock. What else did he say?

Mary. He said my child would be great. That was a silly thing to say. Doesn't every mother think her child is great? But the angel – his name was Gabriel – also said that my child would be called the Sons of the Most High, that he would be a king who would rule forever. That went way beyond just great!

Luke: How would this happen?

Mary: That's what I wanted to know. I was a bit feisty, even at age 13, so I asked. And I told him in no uncertain terms that I was a virgin. I had not been intimate with Joseph or any other man! The angel didn't appear offended by my impetuous speech. He told me that the Holy Spirit would overshadow me and that my baby would be the Son of God and.....

*(Trail off. Action moves to young Mary at right of the stage.)*

### ***Monologue #1 by Young Mary***

I was sitting on the edge of the well. The angel was still there but I felt alone. Very alone. I was only 13. At first I felt skeptical, like Sarah when the angel told Abraham she would have a baby – but I didn't laugh as Sarah did. I wondered what on earth was going on. A girl of 13 should answer back to an angel? I have to admit I was a bit proud of having been chosen by God for such a special task.... for all of, maybe five minutes. Then I was scared.

From somewhere I found the strength and wisdom to respond. "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it happen to me just as you say." The angel disappeared and I went home in a daze with my water jar.

I waited awhile then gathered up my courage and told my mother, "I have seen an angel! He had a message for me." Mother seemed more concerned with preparing dinner for the men. "Mary," she said, "bring me some oil. Bring flour." She was too busy to hear about an angel's message. She did stop when I told her about the baby! "It's not Joseph's baby," I argued.

When my father found out, he was really angry. Of course he suspected Joseph had a part in it even though I insisted he didn't. And that's when I began to realize that while I might be blessed among women, it was a very mixed blessing!

*(Action back to Luke and Mary, who is looking off into space. Young Mary sits down.)*

Luke: Mary. Mary! Are you with me? You drifted off and spoke as you might have done when you were 13. But I scribbled all you said on my note pad. That conversation with the angel must have been very disturbing.

Mary: It was. Why had God chosen me? Surely I wasn't worthy to be the mother of God's Son. But Gabriel said God delighted in me. ME! And that God was with me. That was comforting. Such turmoil. Disturbance and comfort.

Luke: Did Gabriel say anything more?

Mary: Oh yes. He told me that my cousin Elizabeth was pregnant, too! Imagine that! Elizabeth was an old woman. Her husband, Zechariah, was a priest almost ready to retire. They lived in Judea in the south, near Jerusalem. When my father had time to cool down he decided it would be wise – and safer – to send me to be with Elizabeth for while. I could help her.

Luke: But Jerusalem is nearly 85 miles from Nazareth. That's a long trip through deep valleys and over high hills, mountains really. What a difficult journey for a pregnant teenager!

Mary: You better believe it. And morning sickness didn't help. But you wouldn't know about that.

Luke: Not personally, but I am a doctor.

Mary: But the journey gave me time to think. Sometimes one needs time and space away from the centre of a complicated situation. And God was with me. The angel told me that. God is always with us. The prophets had a word for that, for God being with us. Emmanuel, wasn't it?

Luke: You had such thoughts at age 13?

Mary: I'm not sure anymore what I thought then and what came to me later. I've had a long time to think about everything.

Luke: When you arrived at Elizabeth's house, was she surprised to see you? Were you surprised?

Mary: Yes and yes. Zechariah didn't talk to me. I was surprised. He always talked to everybody. I learned that Gabriel had also visited Zechariah to tell him Elizabeth would have a baby – in her old age! Because he refused to believe Gabriel, Zechariah lost his voice until the baby was born. And Elizabeth. I'll never forget her greeting.....

*(Fade to monologue #2 by Young Mary.)*

## ***Monologue #2 by Young Mary***

Elizabeth looked at me with surprise and said, "Mary! What a blessing to see you, my dear.!"

How ready I was to hear those words. I had travelled with a caravan down to Judea. My father supplied a donkey but it still was a hard trip. Elizabeth called me a blessing. What a change from what I knew people back home would say.

"And you, Elizabeth. Adonai sar shalom. Blessing be yours and God's peace within your walls," I replied. Elizabeth couldn't wait to tell me her news. A woman at her age, barren for years, now pregnant in her sixth month. She was surprised that I already knew. Who would have thought that an angel would have spread such exciting gossip!

I was surprised to hear that Zechariah had met Gabriel, too. I told her, "Gabriel came to tell me that I am also to be a mother. Elizabeth, I am to bear the Messiah."

Elizabeth winced. I quickly came close to support her. She said she'd just felt her baby give the strongest kick ever. Then she said, "Mary, my dear, you are blessed among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! How fortunate I am to have the mother of my Lord come to me. The babe that kicks within me is leaping for joy to hear your voice."

First the angel called me blessed, and now Elizabeth. Even her unborn baby knew! Looking at the smile on her face, I remembered Gabriel's words, "For nothing is impossible with God."

*(Action shifts back to Mary and Luke. Young Mary sits down.)*

Luke: Mary. I lost you again. For a few minutes you were a teenager once more. Excited, and puzzled too. What was life like in the household of Elizabeth and Zechariah?

Mary: Bizarre! A visiting teenager beginning to show signs of her pregnancy, a grey-haired old woman with a bulging belly and a husband – also old – who couldn't talk! There was lots of buzz in the community about all this. People didn't understand. And they didn't know that the young visitor from Nazareth was not married. If they had known.....

Of course, I explained to Elizabeth and Zechariah that I was a godly virgin, betrothed to Joseph, a godly man, who had nothing to do with my pregnancy and they believed me. Why wouldn't they? Gabriel was their angel, too. I helped Elizabeth until John was born and Zechariah got his voice back. Then I returned to Nazareth.

Luke: And to Joseph. Did he know what was going on? Did the neighbours know?

Mary: All that long journey home, I pondered what might happen when I got home. I might be stoned to death. My parents might live in disgrace. Had they told Joseph where I went and why? Was he angry? Worse, Joseph might reject me, even divorce me. That was the most painful and disturbing thought of all. I loved Joseph. He loved me. How could I explain Gabriel's message to him? Would he understand? I needed God's comfort – and Joseph's.

*(Fade to monologue #3 by Young Mary)*

### ***Monologue #3 by Young Mary***

Joseph came to talk to me today. He knew! He looked so sad, not angry. Sad. For himself. For me. For the baby. He was struggling. Wanting not to believe the gossip in the marketplace. Wanting to believe my story. Oh, how I need him to believe me! But he said that he could only believe his own eyes. I cannot understand why God has supposedly chosen me for the highest honour ever bestowed on a woman but has allowed my family and Joseph to reject me. If it were not for the evidence growing daily inside me, I would doubt the whole thing.

My father sold some of our animals recently and the rumour is spreading that he used the money to buy Joseph's silence. Joseph told me he was considering divorce. Then what would I do? I asked him. Where would I go? How could I and my baby be safe? Joseph didn't answer. He just walked away sadly. I wept.

*(Action back on Luke and Mary. Young Mary sits down. Mary appears to be weeping.)*

Luke: Mary. Mary. You had good reason to weep those many years ago. But what you feared did not happen. Joseph did not divorce you, did he?

Mary: No, bless him. But do you know why? Gabriel came to Joseph, too. In a dream. Gabriel was one busy angel! And so comforting. By that time, Joseph had decided to send me away quietly, to protect me from public disgrace – or worse! - he said. But Gabriel convinced him to take me to be his wife, that the baby I was carrying was indeed conceived by the Holy Spirit and one day he would save people from their sin just as the prophets foretold. Joseph came back to me and we were married. We were so happy. We had no idea what the future held. We knew it wouldn't be easy but we trusted God to take care of us – and the baby.

Luke: And God did. Again and again. You left Nazareth before your baby was born, didn't you? Why?

Mary: The emperor - I think his name was Augustus. He decreed that everybody must go to their ancestral town to be registered. Since Joseph was a descendant of King David we had to go all the way to Bethlehem, nearly the same long journey south to Judea that I had taken months before. This time it wasn't morning sickness but labour pains by the time we got there. The town was packed. We needed a place to stay – and quickly. There was no room anywhere. We finally settled for the back part of a cave where the animals were kept with a family living in the front part and soon my baby arrived. His bed was a manger. All went well despite the commotion. Shepherds and sheep and more angels, not just Gabriel but a vast choir, singing, "Glory to God in the highest." But that's another chapter in the story. I think you'll need to come back another time. I'm getting very tired.

Luke: I will indeed. I must get the story right.

Mary *(suddenly animated)*: My baby was great, just as Gabriel said. And he did great things when he became a man. Do you know that he once fed a hungry crowd of more than 5,000 people with a couple of fish and a few buns? And he took on the powerful, arrogant, religious

leaders who kept trying to trick him into saying something that would get him into trouble. But often they were the ones who got trapped. Then there was the rich ruler who came bragging about all the things he had done right, asking if there was anything more to do to make sure he'd get to heaven. Jesus told him to sell what he had and give the money to the poor. The man walked away sadly; he couldn't give up his wealth.

*(Mary stands up here, and becomes more agitated – but she is still an old woman!)*

My son Jesus cared about the poor, the sick and the outcasts, the people on the fringes who didn't fit in. He had such upside down ideas, ideas that could change the world. And God chose me, a lowly young girl, to have a part in making it all happen. What if I had said No!? Even after all these years, my mind spins. I'm overwhelmed.

*(Mary speaks as if in somewhat of a trance, looking up and off in the distance; Young Mary also stands and copies Mary's body movements but doesn't speak.)*

“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has looked with favour  
on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on  
all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud  
in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

*(Hold as a tableau for a few seconds. Young Mary then repeats the phrase “From generation to generation” several times as a kind of echo, fading away until nearly inaudible.)*