

Sunday 10 May 2015
Otumoetai Baptist Church
Women of the Bible: Mary

MARY - Her Story

(BLACK)

Before I tell you my story, I must warn you. Some of it you will find completely unbelievable. Some of it you will find absolutely amazing. And some of it you may find incredibly difficult to take. But this is my story and I want to share it with you. I hope that as I do, you will find yourself asking questions and wanting to know more.

It all started, well actually I don't really know where it all started, that information wasn't given to me, but I'll try my best to tell you what I know and I'll let you fill in some gaps where you need to.

I was quite young, around fourteen, fifteen. Life was going quite well and I guess I was at that stage where I was wondering, what's going to happen next? Who am I going to marry?

(SLIDE 1)

The other woman would run up to me and say "Mary, we hear that you have become a young woman. When are you going to get engaged?" Or they'd say things like "When is your father Joachim, going to make the arrangements for you?"

They were very flattering in their comments. My older siblings and aunt were a little more teasing in their comments. "Come on Mary, time's getting on ... where is your suitor?"

From those experiences there was a yearning inside of me. A yearning to find someone to spend my life with. Someone who would provide for me and take care of me. Someone who I could stay loyal to. Someone I could have a family with.

Well I still remember it like it was yesterday. My father arranged for me to meet this young man, a carpenter. He was good at crafting things, had a steady head on his shoulders, and seemed like a really nice guy. And guess what? He was a descendant of the great king David. This meant he was in a good family line.

His name was Joseph. Or Jo as I called him.

My father made all the arrangements and Jo and I got engaged. Now it was time to prepare for the wedding and marriage. How did I prepare? Well, it was mostly by sewing. I guess that sounds a little funny to you, but it's true. I sewed dishcloths, washcloths, towels – all the things that Jo would need in the kitchen of course! I sewed all my clothes for the wedding and marriage. I was a sewing machine.

Jo's prep was a little bit different to mine. He was a typical Jewish man who prepared for it by building. He started

constructing our future house.

The furniture, the rooms, the roof, our home. He lived with his parents during this time. We saw each other quite a bit though, as we started getting more acquainted with each other and our relationship blossomed.

And we took things very seriously too. During the engagement if God forbid one of us died, that would have meant the other would be a widow. If we separated, this would be a divorce. This was the culture of our times.

I guess you could say I was very excited, and also very nervous. I really didn't know what I was getting myself into. But I loved Jo and looked forward to what our life would look like together.

And everything was going so well, all the preparation was taking place. The arrangements were being made for the wedding. The house was looking great. Everything was falling into place, just how we planned it. We had the future mapped out.

It's funny isn't it that when we think we have everything figured out and we know what's going to happen next, something happens and the situation changes drastically. Sometimes for the worst, sometimes for the better.

This next bit still gives me goose bumps. I was sitting in my

bedroom at my parent's house, can't remember exactly what I was doing. When all of a sudden the entire room lit up and I saw someone standing there.

I was terrified. I mean, what would you think if someone just appeared in your room? I was about to scream when he spoke: "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you."

It didn't feel like I was blessed at that moment, let me tell you. I was dumbstruck and waited for him to continue.

"Don't be afraid, Mary. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God."

If I'm honest here I really didn't know what all this meant. I thought that maybe Jo was playing a pre-marriage trick on me. All I could think and say was, "But I'm a virgin, so how can this be?"

And you think it was weird before, well it just got weirder when this being said "The Holy Spirit will come on you and God's power will rest upon you. This holy child will be called the Son of God."

The Holy Spirit. Coming on me. God's power. Holy child.

As a young girl you just don't think you have to deal with this sort of stuff – especially with your wedding day fast approaching! That's stressful enough!

If I'm honest I didn't really understand all that was happening. Part of me thought this is just a dream. Time to wake up, Mary. But then there was another part of me that believed this to be true. You know when something happens to you and you can't explain it, but you know in your heart that it's true? Well it was like that for me.

At this stage I am feeling a little bit overwhelmed and wondering what will happen next.

It was an angel and the angel is not done speaking. He tells me that my old aunt Elizabeth is pregnant. Aunt Lizzie? Pregnant? How so? She is aged in years plus she and Zechariah had fertility problems. He seems to know my thoughts.

With God, nothing is impossible. God did the impossible in Creation, creating something out of nothing. God did the impossible in Aunt Lizzie. And Mary, God is going to do the impossible in you. It's just how He does things.

Wow, what do you say to something like that? The words left my breath before I even realised them ... "I am the Lord's servant, may it happen to me as you have said."

And then the room went dark again and I am left alone with my thoughts on this unbelievable encounter.

Why me? Out of all the Jewish girls God could have picked, why did he pick me? There is nothing special about me. I am a simple young woman who loves her family and is looking forward to my life with Jo.

What would Jo make of all this? How would he respond?

I decided I needed to go see my aunt. On the way there I was feeling all sorts of different emotions – there was fear, excitement, incomprehension.

I went to the land of Judah to find Aunt Lizzie and sure enough when I got there she was looking pregnant, for sure. I greeted her and then she looked at me and exclaimed, "You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"

After this the baby in her belly, who we now know as John, John the Baptist, kicked her a good one, as if he wanted to join in the celebration too! And couldn't wait to get out!

And then I burst into song. It was like all the emotions and praise welling up within me just exploded into a song of happiness praising my Lord.

I stayed with Aunt Lizzie for a few months and then returned to Nazareth. And it's about now that everything starts to sink in.

I am with child. But not just any child. This is the promised child that Israel has been waiting for. The God child. The one who would come to free his people from their sins. The saviour of the world. The one who would give his life as a ransom for many. The one who would enter the world as a little babe. The one who I would get to see grow up and develop into a fine young man.

And I loved him from *before* he was born. To all the mothers and women out there, I guarantee that you are keenly aware of how much you love this child before he or she is brought out into the world. My love for him was there at this time.

I loved him *at* his birth. This is another story in itself, which I won't go into here. Jo and I were in Bethlehem and we found no room except for a stable and it was in this most humble of circumstances that our son Jesus was born.

I still remember seeing him for the first time. He was a precious little boy with a twinkle in his eye. Did he cry? Of course he cried. Sometimes he would scream the house down!

Jo was a great dad. I forgot to mention before that he too had a visit from an angel in a dream, where the angel told him that the child was from God and to stay with me. Jo brought Jesus up in

the ways of carpentry, the family business.

And so Jesus grew into a young boy. We had him presented at the Temple and then we returned to Nazareth, our home town.

Jesus and I would have amazing conversations about God, whom He called His Father, which didn't upset Jo at all. And we'd talk about faith, about suffering, about salvation. Even as a young boy He would challenge me and help me to see life in a different way. That would really help me later in his life.

Jesus eventually became that fine young man and he set out to do his public ministry. Did I worry about him on the road? Absolutely. Did I believe he was safe and being looked after? Most definitely. Did I pray for him? Every day.

There were moments of his life when I was right by his side. When he performed his first miracle at the wedding of Cana, I was there encouraging him and seeing him excel in love and kindness. People thought it was just simply that he turned the water into wine. But he actually saved the host from a public disaster and it just went to show how much he cared about people and their feelings.

Some people have asked me, when did you know that your son was headed for a certain destiny? When did you know he was different to everyone else?

I guess there were lots of moments in his life when I knew this. Jesus was different. He was special. Unique. There was no-one like him.

I remember once that He was teaching the people around him and I arrived on the scene just wanting to see my son and one of the people said to him, “Look here is your mother who wants to speak with you.”

Jesus pointed at his disciples around him and said “Look here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does what my Father in Heaven wants is my brother, my sister, and my mother.”

I didn't take offence to that. He was really saying to them, my true mother or father is God Almighty, and whoever obeys God, this person is my true relative. He was saying, you are my family.

I was proud of him for saying something like that – knowing what the crowd would make of him and what they would do to him.

And here's where the story gets incredibly difficult to talk about.

See, my son made enemies. He never set out to do that, it was just the nature of what He was telling people and the teaching he was bringing to them.

If you claim to be God's Son, God's 'supposed' people are going

to kick up a fuss. They are not going to be too happy.

There were religious leaders, who conspired to get Jesus arrested and killed. I don't know the full extent of what went down, but they wanted to take him down – and reveal him to be a liar and blasphemer.

He hadn't done anything wrong. Yet he suffered. He suffered severely.

I was there and saw it all. First he was beaten. Then he was mocked. Then he was sentenced to death. Then he was nailed to a cross and crucified.

There are some things you as a mother are never prepared for. Watching your son die is one of them. Feeling completely helpless as you watch the life drain out of him. Feeling totally shattered as you realise he is completely innocent. Feeling unbearable pain as you could do nothing about it.

Even in dying he thought about others. He thought about me and the disciple he loved. He said to the disciple, “She is your mother.” And to me he said “He is your son.”

Jesus cared about us up until the end. HE was going through agonising pain and suffering, yet HE cared about my welfare. He wanted to make sure that I was looked after.

That I would be okay. He was reassuring me that even though his life was ending, my life would go on.

What kind of man can do that? What kind of a person has that much love for people and despite the personal anguish they are going through, seeks to meet the needs of those around them.

Jesus, my son, died that day. He was laid to rest in a tomb and a giant stone was rolled over the entrance.

I didn't sleep that night.

I wrestled with my thoughts and poured my heart out to God.

God had chosen me for a special purpose. Why me, I didn't know. Still don't.

God said I was the blessed amongst all women. Does being blessed mean you have to watch someone you love die?

God promised that He would save his people from their sins. That looks pretty bleak at this moment.

God allowed all of these things to happen. He must have a reason for it all.

BREAK CHARACTER

Mary certainly has an incredible story. Looking at her life has shown me how much God loves to use normal everyday people, just like you and me, in his master plan.

We have the benefit of the Bible and the Holy Spirit, and we know that Jesus did not stay dead. He rose again and appeared to his followers. On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given, Mary was there and she got to see her Son again.

Of course this time He was totally transformed. He was the true King and Saviour that Israel and the world had been waiting for.

Mary played a part in God's plan. She was a humble mother.

(SLIDE 2)

There is a quote that says "Just as Jesus was born in a humble stable, so Christ today is only born in humble hearts."

Proud people think they have no need of Christ; but those who humbly cry out to God need him in their life to heal, guide and forgive. We don't need to have beauty, brains or money to be used by God.

All He's looking for is a humble and willing heart.

(SLIDE 3)

Mary had these two things. And God chose her.

I believe that as God chose Mary, God has also chosen you and me. I further believe that you are seated here today in this church because God has chosen to use your life in His mission for the world. I also believe that God has chosen Otumoetai Baptist Church to be a light for Him. To be a people who would live like Jesus, love without measure, learn our faith, and lead to make a difference.

(SLIDE 4)

I believe that God has amazing work for us as a congregation to do together. And if you would dare to believe that, just as Mary dared to believe that in her own life, incredible things will happen in the life of this church and in our individual lives. Because we dare to believe that God has chosen us.

And God doesn't choose as the world chooses. HE doesn't look for the brightest or the best. He looks for those who are humble and willing.

In this series on Women in the Bible, we've looked at Esther, Ruth, Rahab, Abigail and now Mary.

All five women were used for God's purposes. But they had a responsibility as well. They had to be willing participants in His plan. Sure, they didn't see the impact of their participation, but we know that through their actions, through their courage, through their faith, through their humility, God was able to work

out His purposes and bring his saving action to the world.

May we be the Esther's, Ruth's, Rahab's, Abigail's, and Mary's of our world. May we be people who are humble and willing and may God work through us to accomplish His good purposes and bring his saving action to the world.

Amen.

SONG - 'Blessed be your name'