



Sermon, December 15, 2019  
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Cottage Grove and Junction City  
United Methodist Churches

## What's in a Name?

### An Interview with Mary

#### **Scripture: Matthew 1: 18-25**

<sup>18</sup> This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"(which means "God with us").

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

#### Host

Good morning, good morning! Welcome to the Sunday Show. This morning we have a very special guest with us. Every year about this time, stores and radios begin playing Christmas carols and songs about babies in mangers, angels and shepherds and so on. Or driving down the street you might see little figures on peoples' lawns with sheep, cattle, camels, and people dressed like refugees from a costume party. But have you ever wondered just what the story is behind all these songs and decorations? Who are these people, and how did they come to be on our greeting cards, our lawns and in our loudspeakers? Well, our guest today just happens to be someone who can answer these questions for us. Yes, you guessed it, we have with us today, Mary of Nazareth. Let's give it up for Mary!

*(Applause. Mary enters, greets the host and sit down)*

Well, well, what an honor to have you with us today. You have quite a story to tell. It has all the elements of a romantic mystery, or a made-for-TV drama: love, public scandal, an arduous journey across a desert,

## What's in a Name?

political intrigue, a murder plot, an eleventh hour escape. Not to mention some more fantastic things like visits by angels and astrologers - magi as they call them, right?

Mary

Yes. That's right.

Host

But I understand that you have a rather unusual story about your pregnancy. Is that right?

Mary

Well, I was outside hanging up the wash to dry, when suddenly out of nowhere this angel appears in front of me, and says, "Hail Mary, full of grace!" Or was it, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you?" Oh, well, at any rate, it took me a few moments to regain my composure. Then this angel, who was named Gabriel, by the way, told me that I would conceive and bear a son and this son was to be the Son of God, and would sit upon the throne of his father David, and a bunch of other crazy stuff. And then he left. Just like that.

No "think about it and call me in a week."

Just "this is the way it is. Have a nice day. Good-bye."

Host

Wow. An angel, huh? So how did Joseph take it?

Mary

Yeah, well, I was so excited, I went running to me and yelled out at the top of my lungs, "Joseph, I'm pregnant!"

"Great, Mary, " he tells me, dragging me in the doorway out of the street.

"Go ahead and tell the whole world about it. We aren't even married yet and you're pregnant? That's wonderful news!"

Host

You don't have to be married to get pregnant, you know.

Mary

*(Looks at him as if to say, "Do I look like an idiot?" Slight pause)*

Look, the point is that he knew for a fact that he wasn't the father.

So, he asks me, "Who is the father?" ...and I say, "The Holy Spirit."

Host

The Holy Spirit? You mean number three of the Three-in-One?

*(Mary nods)*

Mary

He just walked away in a daze. I didn't hear from him for several days. I was afraid of what he was thinking about me. I didn't know what to do. I

## What's in a Name?

prayed a lot, hoping that God would do something, anything. And then I heard from him. He came, and sat me down next to a table he had made for my family. He told me that he had decided to divorce quietly, maybe send me to another village where no one knew her situation, send me something to live on. It tore him up inside. I started to panic. But he tells me to hold on and hear the whole story.

He tells me that he fast asleep one night, and he had this amazing dream, and now it was his turn to see things like angels. And this angel tells him that I am telling the truth, that I am pregnant by the Holy Spirit and who is he to argue with God anyway?

Host

How could he argue with logic like that? And so you went ahead with the wedding, and nine months went by and your eldest son was born and you wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no room in the inn in Bethlehem.... Right. We've all sung the songs and seen the statues, we know the story.

Mary

But do you know how we decided to name him? Now this is an interesting story, as if talking with angels and virgin births are dull reading. I don't know how they left it out of the Gospel stories. Maybe it had to do something with the fact that we never told anyone about it.

Host

That could have something to do with it.

Mary

Near the end of the nine months, when I was, shall we say, great with child, we set out from Nazareth to go to Bethlehem to be enrolled. On our way to Bethlehem, we talked about a lot of things, but finally we got around to the subject of names. It had to be Hebrew, of course, and so we went through all the popular names like Adonijah, Obadiah, Shear-Jashub, Jechonidab, and Mattathias as well as some more obscure ones...

Host

Like Matthew, Mark, Luke and John?

Mary

Exactly. Finally, I stated my preference. I felt the child should be named "Emmanuel."

Joseph asks, "Why Emmanuel, for God's sake?"

I say, "Yeah, that's why,...for God's sake!"

"But isn't that a little pretentious?" He asks.

## What's in a Name?

But I was adamant. I can be like that, you know. I said, "I believe this child is a child of destiny, a child of promise - of God's promise. After all, didn't God send an angel to tell me about this birth?"

Host

How could he forget that, huh?

Mary

"And didn't an angel also visit my cousin Elizabeth and tell her that I would conceive, and didn't the angel tell me that Elizabeth, even in her advanced age, had conceived, and just a few months ago didn't she give birth to their son John just like the angel said?"

Host

Okay, so your child was a child of God's promise. Why Emmanuel?

Mary

Well, do you recall that passage in the book of the prophet Isaiah where it says a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and that his name shall be called Emmanuel?"

Host

Yes.

Mary

Well, so here I am!

Host

Wait a minute, I happen to know a little bit about Bible translations, and it only refers to a virgin in the *Greek* translation. The original *Hebrew* only says a young woman shall conceive and bear a son. It could refer to anyone. And besides, Isaiah was referring to a sign that would be fulfilled in the lifetime of King Ahaz. You were several centuries later than that.

Mary

I wasn't going to give up. I said, "Well, I like the name Emmanuel because it is also a statement of fact. Names mean something, and they carry a deep significance. Emmanuel means 'God with us,' and I believe that God is with us. I know that personally. God is with me. I felt it when the angel visited me and somehow I've felt it for the past nine months. Joseph, God is with us, and this child I'm carrying is a child of God. And not the way all of us are children of God, but this is a child of God in a unique way. I can't explain the way I feel. I just know that God is with us in a special way, and that God will remain with us in the years to come. 'Emmanuel' is our declaration of hope to Israel, maybe even to the whole world. What better time is there than now to tell people that God is with us? That God is with us here, now, on this world, somehow feeling our pain and sorrow,

## What's in a Name?

sharing in our hopes and dreams? Joseph, I can't explain it all, I just know it, deep down inside."

Host

It is hard for me to argue with this. But you didn't end up naming him Emmanuel. How did you come up with "Jesus?"

Mary

Well, Joseph had his own choice for a name: Joshua. In Hebrew, it's pronounced "Yehoshua," in Aramaic, "Yeshua," and in Greek, "Iesous." He reminded me that Joshua means "Deliverer" or "Savior." Or more precisely, "The Lord is salvation," or "the Lord will save." You remember the story of how Joshua the son of Nun led the Israelites out of the Wilderness into the Promised Land, don't you? Moses had changed Joshua's name from "Hoshea" to "Yehoshuah" to serve as a reminder to the Israelites that their salvation was from the Lord, not from their own devices or the might of their weapons or their military valor. Joseph didn't believe that our son's mission was military. He believed that he was to be a spiritual leader, and that he would save us from our sins. And then he added the clincher: the angel told him to name our son Joshua, so he couldn't think of a better reason. I couldn't argue with that. It is hard to argue with an angel, right?

Host

And besides, he was the papa and the papa always has the final word, right?! "Tradition!"

*(Mary looks at him with a coked eyebrow. Pause. Host clears his throat)*  
So, you finally agreed upon Joshua, or Iesous, Jesus.

Mary

Of course, both names were correct. We called him Jesus, "Deliverer," but he was in fact, "Emmanuel, God with us." And what a beautiful testimony, that when we need to be delivered from bondage to our selfishness and sinfulness, God comes in person to save us. "Jesus. Emmanuel."

Host

Wow. That's quite a story. But that is your story of what you came to call him.

(Out to audience)

What about the rest of us?

What do we call him?

"Rabbi?" Is he our teacher? Will we learn from him?

Or "Master?" Do we live as a servant of God?

## What's in a Name?

How about "Lord?" Does he reign supreme in our heart?

Mary

Or can you call him "Emman-i-el, God is with me?" and know deep inside, like I did, that God is indeed with you?

Host

A name is such a little thing, but it means so much.

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