**John 19:25-27** March 20, 2019

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Mid-Week Lent #3

*John 19:25Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” 27and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our meditations last week started looking at a series of people who watched Jesus go to the cross. Each of them, in their own way, is amazed to think that “*Cheerful* He to Suffering Goes.” We started with perhaps the most beloved Bible character, outside of Jesus, the apostle Peter. From the most beloved disciple, we move tonight to another Bible personality.

This person, more than any other in the Bible, could tell us things about Jesus that we wish we knew but don’t. I would love, more than any other person in the Bible, to have a conversation with this woman, Mary, mother of our Lord. Especially, I wish I knew what was going on in her mind when, ***“Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother…”***

Of course, her mind was filled with horror at the crucifying death of her son. But I wish I knew what else. The reason I wish I knew is because she was different from the rest of Jesus’ disciples. Those disciples were found by Jesus when he was 30 years old. They were different from Mary who had known him even before he was born. Those disciples hung on Jesus’ every word—until they didn’t. They listened, but failed to connect the dots. More than once the Scriptures say, *“After [Jesus] was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed [what] Jesus had spoken.”*

Mary was different. The Holy Scriptures assert that Mary was a keen observer. In the midst of strange happenings around her son Jesus, more than once we hear, *“his mother treasured all these things in her heart.”* Like a detective, she gathered the clues, the off-hand comments, the strange coincidences, and remembered them. She treasured them up, knowing that somehow they all fit together. I wonder how many of them she remembered at the foot of the cross.

I wonder if her mind went back to that day the angel Gabriel appeared and decreed a biological impossibility: that she would have a son. That son would rule on the throne of David and be called the Son of God. Young Mary had accepted those words with open-hearted faith, *“May it be to me as you have said.”*

When expecting Mary visited her relative Elizabeth, she too confirmed God’s wonderful message: young Mary, a young girl from peasant stock and a peasant village, would have the undreamt-of blessing and privilege of being the Messiah’s mother!

A few short months after getting back to Nazareth, her husband Joseph, who had also been visited by an angel, took her south to Bethlehem. There, far from family, hidden away in a stable, she gave birth to the promised child. These were probably not the surroundings she had imaged when that angel prophesied this birth. Yet within hours, strange shepherds knocked on stable door saying they had been sent by angels to find the Christ-child. How could strangers in this strange place know?!

About a month later Joseph and Mary took their precious child out into public one of the first times. They were taking him to the temple in Jerusalem to do what the Law required. On the path all the women looked and smiled. She answered the inevitable questions: “Is it a boy or girl?” “He’s so tiny! How old is he?” In the temple an old man looking the part of a prophet, took infant Jesus in his arms and said those words we sing, *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation…”* So familiar was Mary with admiration and compliments and angel messages that she was beginning to expect them. And then she got her first shock—a shock perhaps remembered while weeping at the cross—old man Simeon with the joy of her life in his arms said, *“This child is destined to… be a sign that will be spoken against… And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”* The sunny, happy background music of Mary’s life suddenly resonated with chords of darkness and woe. Any normal mother would have thought, if not said, “Give me my boy back, you strange, weird man!” And so Mary began to worry that it would not be as easy as she thought.

Back at home in Bethlehem, I wonder if Mary lost sleep over those words of Simeon. Then one night came the most outrageous guests of all, nearly as other-worldly as the angels: wise men from another land bearing gifts which these parents could not realize in a lifetime of toil: gold, frankincense and myrrh. They brought not baby gifts, but tribute to one whom they worshiped.

Then that same night, her husband woke her, telling her that they all needed to run, to flee, to fly far and fast. Bloodthirsty Herod had been alerted to the presence of this Anointed One. The soldiers were coming. How closely Mary carried that baby to her heart that night and in the following days as they fled through the desert of Sinai, losing themselves in the anonymity of the Jewish community in Egypt.

Mary daily looked at that child, whom she had once expected to bring only sunshine as the Lord’s Christ, the Savior, the Son of David, but there in Egypt she realized what Simeon had said was true. There she heard reports of what happened to dozens of other mothers near Bethlehem, how Herod’s soldiers had mercilessly slain their tender babies. And her mother’s heart would no longer let her sleep at night. A sword was piercing her own heart in her anxiety for this child great in God’s plans, whom Satan and the forces of darkness counted an enemy.

There was more that we have not the time to recount: that visit to the temple when Jesus was twelve; her presence at Jesus’ first miracle. When their hometown of Nazareth rejected Jesus, she moved out with him, down to the lakeside town of Capernaum.

Being near to Jesus through his ministry and on his last journey to Jerusalem, she had certainly heard Jesus’ predictions of arrest and crucifixion. One wonders whether Mary’s pondering heart, took it more seriously than the disciples with their silly selfish visions of grandeur.

And how much more than this Mary, mother of Jesus, knew about her dear son! Wouldn’t you love to ask Mary: What was his first word? What was Jesus’ favorite color? How did he get along with his friends, his siblings? Was he outgoing or creative or athletic or thoughtful? Mary knew. What did Jesus do when he got to be 20 years old, a member of the community. What did he do when he saw a beggar, when someone argued with him? When he heard someone pridefuly boasting, did a shadow cross his face? All known by his mother Mary. All reflected on by her as she watched her dear boy dying a most horrible death, and he said to his mother, ***“Dear woman, here is your son,”*** and to the disciple, ***“Here is your mother.”*** And she thought, “Just like my Jesus has always been. More concerned for others than himself.” She was not surprised, but she knew it was how he was. He could not be otherwise.

It wasn’t just that Jesus was a “good kid.” Jesus was who that angel had said, “Son of God, Savior, Immanuel.” She knew that, and perhaps Mary’s heart that had treasured up all these details over the decades, already was ahead of all the othres, and perhaps in some way she already understood that what was happening on that cross, was not just the death of her son, but the fulfillment of an angel’s message, *“And you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”* Amen.