

that she will conceive through God's extraordinary intervention of sending the Holy Spirit upon her, and this is the reason for calling Jesus God's son.

**For Reflection:** Have you ever been surprised by God as Mary was? How did you respond?

### Mary's Faith Response

It is difficult to even imagine what Mary was going through in these brief moments with the angel. The one response Luke does record is one of complete trust. Mary says, "Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). The phrase "let it be to me" in the original Greek is not passive but active. It expresses a desire on Mary's part. She positively desires and fully embraces God's call for her to serve as the mother of the Messiah.

**For Reflection:** When have you felt the Lord with you the way Mary did?



### Mary, a Model Disciple

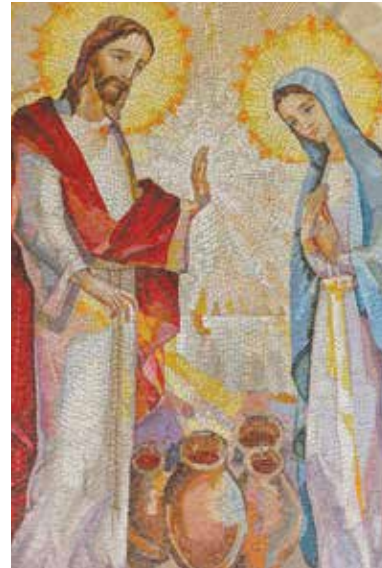
Further in Luke's Gospel, Jesus says that those who hear the word of God and keep it are blessed and included in his family of disciples (see 8:21). Mary fits this description. From the very beginning, she accepts God's word and calls herself the servant of the Lord.

When Mary visits Elizabeth as soon as she learns of her pregnancy, not only will Elizabeth call Mary blessed for believing God's word (see Lk 1:45), but Mary herself will say that all generations will call her blessed (1:48). Similarly, like a good disciple who hears God's word and keeps it, Mary will "keep in her heart" the angel's joyous message at Jesus' birth (2:19) and Jesus' words to her when she finds him in the Temple (2:51).

Luke shows us Mary, later in her life, as one of the faithful disciples, after her son's resurrection and ascension, who was present at Pentecost (see Acts 1:14). The same Holy Spirit who hovered over Mary at the Annunciation hovers over her at Pentecost.

In the Gospel of John, Mary is also presented as a disciple. This is seen in the story of Marriage Feast at Cana (see 2:1-12). She not only informs her son that they "have no wine" (2:3) but informs the waiters, "Do whatever he tells you" (2:5). Mary witnesses to Jesus not only by getting him to perform a sign (turning water into wine). She also encourages others to do what Jesus asks of them. Every would-be disciple of Jesus is called to do likewise.

**For Reflection:** How can modeling my life on Mary help me to become a better disciple of Jesus?



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# Meeting Mary in Scripture



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For Catholics, devotion to Mary is part of our heritage and the life of our faith. The sacred Scriptures remind us that Mary's acceptance of God's activity in her life is exemplary and serves as a model for all of us.

### Mary in the New Testament

Mary is referred to 137 times in the New Testament. She is in all of the Gospels (Matthew chapters 1 and 2; Mark 3:31-35, 6:3; Luke 1 and 2; John 2 and 19) and in the Acts of the Apostles (1:14). The Gospel of John calls her "the mother of Jesus" and "his [Jesus'] mother" (Jn 2:1-12; 19:25-27).



### Mary, a Jewish Woman

Mary's name in Hebrew is *Miriam*. As a member of the people of Israel, Mary inherited the Jewish belief in one living God, a belief stemming from Abraham and Sarah onward. She practiced her Jewish faith in her home — following the Torah, observing the Sabbath and festivals, reciting prayers, lighting candles, and going to synagogue — according to custom in Galilee. The most important prayer that she would have recited is the *Shema*: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Dt 6:4-5).

### Mary, a Peasant Woman

Mary lived in a Mediterranean rural village, Nazareth, whose population consisted of peasants working the land and craftsmen who served basic needs. She was married to the village carpenter. The village was part of an occupied state under the heel of imperial Rome. Mary and her family were of the peasant class, desperately struggling to make a living under the triple taxation of the Temple, King Herod, and Rome. Mary also lived in a patriarchal society, one in which men dominated and women practically had no rights at all. In such a society, men would have considered it shocking that God's revelation would come to a woman — in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Often what humans may consider shocking, God does not.

**For Reflection:** Who are the women of faith in your own life who have carried the presence of God to you?

*One of the most significant passages centered on Mary is in Chapter 1 of the Gospel of Luke, in which the birth of Jesus is foretold. Examining this passage tells us much about Mary.*

### Mary, a Woman of Faith

In the hectic situations that Mary faced daily, her faith sustained her. Mary's world radically changed when the angel Gabriel appeared to her saying: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" (Lk 1:28) (Some biblical translations render it, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.") Understandably, Mary was "greatly troubled." Luke's Gospel tells us that Mary is not startled by the angel's greeting but more by his message.

First, the angel says, "Hail, full of grace." No one else in the Bible has ever been honored by an angel with such an exalted title.

Second, the angel says, "The Lord is with you!" Often in the Old Testament the words "the Lord is with you" signal that someone is being called to a



daunting task. One of the most famous stories that illustrates this is when God calls Moses at the burning bush to confront Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Moses' response is fear and inadequacy. God then tells Moses the one thing he needs to hear: "I will be with you" (Ex 3:12). Similarly, when Mary hears the angel say to her, "The Lord is with you," she realizes that God is asking a lot of her. But, like Moses, she will not have to face this alone. God will give her the one thing she needs most: the assurance that he will be with her.

Third, we learn more of Mary's vocation as the angel says, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (Lk 1:30). The notion of finding "favor with God" would bring to mind the Old Testament covenant mediators of God's plan of salvation: Noah (see Gn 6:8), Abraham (Gn 18:2-3), Moses (Ex 33:13-17), and King David (2 Sm 15:15) — all of whom found favor with God. Like these great covenant

mediators, Mary has found favor with God. She will be an important cooperator in the divine plan to bring salvation to all the nations. She will bring forth her son, Jesus, who will mediate a new covenant.

**For Reflection:** When has your faith given you the courage to respond to God's call?

### Mary the Mother of God

Next, the angel Gabriel gets to the heart of the message and the nature of Mary's vocation. Mary will bear a son. "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall 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 for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1:31-33). Mary is to be the mother of the Messiah (the anointed one of God).

Surprised by this angelic announcement, Mary asks, "How can this be, since I have no husband [am a virgin]?" (1:34). Only now does Gabriel underscore the extraordinary type of motherhood to which Mary is being called. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (1:35). The phrases "Holy Spirit" and the "power of the Most High" are parallel expressions of God's power. The Spirit (wind) of God that moved over the chaotic waters to bring creation forth from the abyss (see Gn 1:2), now comes upon Mary to bring forth the new creation from her womb. Just as the cloud of God's presence overshadowed the tabernacle in the desert and the glory of God filled it (Ex 40:35), so too is Mary overshadowed. God's overshadowing presence fills the womb of Mary. Mary thus becomes a tabernacle of God's presence dwelling with God's people. She is the new Ark of the Covenant in whose womb dwells Jesus, the incarnate presence of God. How will Mary bear a child? Gabriel tells Mary

