

MIRYAM – WOMAN OF HOPE
CIB Symposium Reflection
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It is most appropriate that this 2010 CIB Symposium opens on this Feast of the Nativity of Mary. It is also the 51st anniversary day of my entrance to my community. May Mary, woman of hope, companion us during these Symposium days.

I must first confess that I have not always had a deep devotion to Mary. It was not until I visited the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City in December of 1991, that I began to appreciate and love and honor Mary.

I would like to tell the story of Mary – a WOMAN OF HOPE – as a result of my reflections throughout this year on a few familiar Scripture texts.¹ I will basically follow the story line of the Gospel of Luke, though you will find that I have also drawn some reflections from the other Gospels and even the Acts of the Apostles.

This will be a kind of Christian midrash on the life of Mary. Even so, “that is not to say that it is nothing. Midrash, Judaism teaches us, is what the heart knows has gone on between the lines of scripture that scripture did not detail for the mind: Noah’s fear, Abraham’s confusion, Miriam’s jubilation over the rescue of Moses, Joseph’s anxiety, Mary’s determination, Veronica’s empathic presence. They all live clearly in the human heart, the truth for which no truth is needed.”²

ANNUNCIATION Lk. 1:26-38

**“MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD;
MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR!” (Lk. 1:46-47)**

My name is Miryam. I lived with my parents in a small home, in northern Israel, in Nazareth, a town of Galilee. One day, I was busy about the house work, when suddenly, what looked like an angel, appeared to me. I was taken totally by surprise. I had never seen an angel before, though I did hear of them from my reflection on the traditions of my ancestors. The angel said to me, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.” (Lk. 1:28) I was deeply troubled and shook with fear. The angel tried to reassure me and even called me by name, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” (Lk. 1:30) How would this stranger know that?

Then came a very troubling message. “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and he will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and He will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Lk. 1:31-33)

I shook my head in disbelief. My seemingly quiet and ordinary life was being turned upside down by the angel’s message.³ I didn’t quite understand what was just said to me. I was to have a child? Even his name, Jesus, was already picked out.

I had heard of the coming of a Messiah. In fact, in our family, we had great hope for the coming of the Messiah, but I never dreamed that I would have anything to do with it, let alone be chosen as the mother of the Messiah. Would this be the Child of Hope for whom all creation yearned?⁴

¹ All Scripture quotes and the general story line are taken from The Catholic Study Bible, New American Bible (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1990).

² Chittister, Joan, The Friendship of Women, A Spiritual Tradition, (Erie, PA: Benetvision, 2000), p.37.

³ Hughes, Mary, OP., LCWR Update – December, 2009, p. 2.

⁴ Eckes, Lois, Pathways, Newsletter of the Duluth Benedictines, Vol. 21, No. 2, Advent, 2009, p. 2.

My heart was pounding! Taking a deep breath, I mustered up all the courage I could find deep down within me and I asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have had no relations with a man?” (Lk. 1:34) I was a virgin and expected to remain as such until my official marriage to Joseph.

Then the angel told me something even more astounding. “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.” (Lk. 1:35) I could feel a lump in my throat; a tightness in my chest. I wished that my mother, my father, – even Joseph, would show up. There I was all alone grappling with this astounding announcement.

Then the angel told me something amazing about my elderly cousin, Elizabeth. “Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.” (Lk. 1:36-37) Oh, my! This was all a bit much! I who was a virgin was to have a child by the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth – old and beyond child-bearing years is already pregnant for six months!

I didn’t know what to say! As I pondered these things in my heart, I thought about all that my parents had taught me about the ways of God, about always wanting to do the will of God, about unshakable hope in God no matter what is asked of me. I just kind of sat in profound silence my head in my hands, my heart pounding. Was “I willing to follow God no matter what, even when the road is marked by confusion, darkness, or less than desirable outcomes?”⁵ Could I be a woman of hope regardless of what was being asked of me?

Suddenly, a great calm came over me and I said quietly and reverently, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” (Lk. 1:38) ‘Yes!’ ‘Yes’ to what you’re asking of me. ‘Yes’ to God’s plan in my life – even if I do not fully understand it! ‘Yes’, ‘yes’, ‘yes’! When I looked up, the angel was gone.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS Matthew 1:18-25

I had to speak with Joseph. When I found him, I discovered that something mysterious had happened to him as well. Joseph was a good and upright man. He learned that I was pregnant and was very distraught by the news. He said that he was unwilling to expose me to the law, and decided to divorce me quietly. Such was his intention, he said, when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said to him, “Joseph, son of David, have no fear about taking Mary as your wife. It is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child. She is to have a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Mt. 1:20-21)

Joseph told me that when he awoke he, too, said ‘yes’. He told me that he was willing to take me into his home as his wife. What a dear, dear man. I was willing to marry him and to have him as my husband. Though the child I would have was not his, I knew that he would make a wonderful foster father. Did we really know what was happening? We hoped that what we both had said ‘yes’ to, would work out well for us. We had no idea what the birth of this child would mean for us or for the world at that time or forever.

VISITATION Luke 1:39-80

I told Joseph the news about Elizabeth and that I needed to travel to Ein Karem, “tucked away in the steep hills just west of Jerusalem,”⁶ to visit her and to help her out. Her husband, Zachary, was

⁵ Jones, Gloria Marie, OP, *The Occasional Papers*, “Elijah: Follow God No Matter What”, (Silver Spring, MD: Leadership Conference of Women Religious), Vol. 37, #2, Summer, 2008, p. 16.

⁶ Stuhmueller, Carroll, C.P., *Biblical Mediations for Advent and the Christmas Season*, (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 76.

elderly, too. He couldn't possibly be much help!

Joseph assisted me in preparing for the journey. It would be long and difficult, about 75 miles or 120 kilometers over very rugged terrain. Joseph kissed me good-bye and helped me get astride the donkey. He held my hand tightly. As we looked into each other's eyes, we said farewell to one another and he smiled tenderly at me. I would miss sharing with him the growth of the baby in my womb. I would miss his understanding and loving ways.

During the journey, I wondered what Elizabeth was thinking. How was she feeling? When I arrived at the home of Zachary and Elizabeth, I entered the house and greeted her. We held each other tenderly. Both of us knew something was different about each of us. This visit would be "a mystery of unalloyed joy."⁷ When I greeted Elizabeth, the baby in her womb leapt, and she grabbed her swollen stomach. Elizabeth's face was aglow. I knew she was filled with indescribable joy. I could tell by the glow on her face that it was other-worldly – even something divine. Could it be the presence of the Holy Spirit?

She held me in her arms. Elizabeth somehow knew that I, her young cousin, was bearing the Promised One that her people were longing for.⁸ She cried out in a loud voice, "Most blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb." (Lk. 1:42) How did she know about my being pregnant? Then she said to me, "And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy." (Lk. 1:43-44)

I had always known that Zachary and Elizabeth were people of great faith. I knew that they held out hope for the coming of a Messiah – a Savior of the world. I knew why they were childless, for Elizabeth was sterile and both were now "senior citizens", advanced in age and beyond the possibility of child-bearing. .

Then Elizabeth, in profound humility, before me her young relative said, "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." (Lk.1:45) That touched me deeply. We hugged again and patted each one's stomach which held a child. We cried; we laughed; we wondered; we hoped. All I could do next was pray a canticle that I had learned from my tradition from another woman, Hannah, who had hoped greatly in the Lord, and bore a son, Samuel. So, I used her words,

**"MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD;
MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR!" (Lk. 1:46-47)**

I stayed with Elizabeth for three months in Ein Karem. We discussed many things. She would name her child John. I would name mine Jesus. We wondered how they would grow up and if they would ever see each other given the distance we lived from one another. Would they get along together? She spoke to me of faith and trust even in the greatest moments of doubt and pain. She told me never to lose hope in God's mercy and fidelity. We prayed and sang psalms together. We praised the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel. For God was fulfilling his promises to the people.⁹

Everyday for three months we prepared for the birth of our sons. I became the housekeeper, cook and helper, as the two of us engaged in knitting and weaving¹⁰ wondering and hoping. Together we shared deeply and fully the story of God's activities in our lives. We gave one another strength as

⁷ Romero, Mary Jane, OSB, *Spirit & Life*, "The Most Joyful of the Joyful Mysteries", (Tucson, AZ: Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration), Vool. 105:1, May-June, 2009, p. 9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Romero, Op. Cit., p. 14.

¹⁰ Op. Cit., p. 9.

we pondered fulfilling God's request of us.¹¹ I had first hand experience of what I would look like in my sixth to ninth months of pregnancy. I marveled at how beautiful Elizabeth was – an old woman large and heavy with new life in her womb. These days, weeks and months together, “were filled with a shared joy beyond description.”¹²

When I returned home, Joseph was so happy to see me. He hugged and kissed me and held me closely for a long time. He brought me into the house for something to eat. I told him of my stay with Elizabeth and what she had said of my being blessed among women. We spoke of how we would get ready for the birth of the baby. We did so want everything to turn out well in the last months of my pregnancy.

THE NATIVITY Luke 2:1-20

Then, suddenly, everything seemed to be turned upside down. “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled.” (Lk. 2:1) There would be a census. We were to each go to our own town to be enrolled. Because Joseph was of the house and family of David, we would need to make the long trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem in Judea. The trip would be about 86 miles or 136 kilometers. Given my condition, it would take us a good week to get there. That night, I packed a few things for Joseph and me and some items in case my baby was born.

Early the next morning, we started out for Bethlehem. I was now nine months pregnant, and I found the ride that distance on a donkey very taxing on my body. I hoped that I could make it without delivering my baby along side of the road. Joseph was most solicitous. He would take my hand and walk alongside the donkey assuring me of his presence and love.

After many days we made it to Bethlehem. We knocked on a number of doors for lodging, but could not find a place because so many people had come down to Bethlehem for the census. We did find a deserted place – a kind of animal shelter. That would have to make due at least for the night. Maybe tomorrow, when it was light, we would be able to find a better place.

God again had other plans. There would be no more waiting. While we were there, the time came for me to have my child, and I gave birth to my firstborn son. It was not a difficult birthing and it did not take long. Joseph stood caringly by my side breathing and pushing with me. He was so dear. This was his first birthing experience as well. I knew for certain that he would be a good “foster father” for my son and a faithful spouse to me. I wrapped my baby in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, a kind of feeding trough for animals.

Joseph and I spent the night delighting in the baby, so tiny, so fragile, so vulnerable. Joseph would hold him for a while and walk around with him, with a smile on his face, enamored by whom he held. I would hold him and breast feed him. So precious! Such a miracle! Such a sacrament of Hope! And here I was the minister!

The next thing we knew, there was the sound of voices outside the door of the cave. Could this be the owners telling us that we were trespassing? Where on earth would we go with a newborn baby? When Joseph went to see who it might be, a group of very excited shepherds barged in. They knelt before me as I held the baby in my arms. All out of breath, they told us that “the angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them.” (Lk. 2:9)

Excitedly, and often interrupting one another, they told us what the angel said: “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord.” (LK. 2:10-11) The angel also told them where to find us and that they would be given this sign: “You will find an infant wrapped in

¹¹ Hughes, Op.Ciit., p. 2.

¹² Romero, Op. Cit., p. 9.

swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” (Lk. 2:12) Savior, Messiah, Lord – such profound titles for my little boy. What could all of this mean? With smiles on their faces, some toothless, dirty and smelly from their flocks, they left, bowing and backing out of the space where we were housed.

When we had a quiet moment together, Joseph and I spoke of the visit of the shepherds. We wondered about them, what their names were, what their families were like, would we ever see them again. We hoped that they were happy and successful as shepherds and able to provide for their families.

I kept all these things, reflecting on them in my heart. I shared my joy with Joseph. He, too, was overwhelmed with joy and reflected on these things in his heart. What would our future together be like? We had both been taught from our ancestors, never to give up HOPE. We strengthened one another in this assurance.

After eight days, according to the Torah, we had the baby circumcised and named him Jesus.

THE PRESENTATION (Lk. 2:22-40)

When the day came, we then took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. Since we were not well off, we offered a pair of turtledoves. There was a certain man there named Simeon. He was righteous and devout. Folks said he was awaiting the Messiah, and that the Holy Spirit was upon him. People said that “It had been revealed to him by the holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord.” (Lk. 2:26) When we came into the temple with Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, Simeon took Jesus “into his arms and blessed God” (Lk.2:28) and whirled around the sanctuary floor, staring at the baby in his arms, chanting over and over, “Blessed are You, O Lord, Our God; Your love endures forever.” (Ps.136:1) He had such a contented look on his face. When he gave Jesus back to me, he said that he could now die, for he had seen salvation with his own eyes. Simeon blessed Joseph, Jesus and me, and said that this child would be destined for the fall and the rise of many in Israel, and that he would be a sign that would be contradicted. Joseph and I were not only amazed at what he said about Jesus, we certainly did not understand the message. Then he came up close to me, and, looking directly into my eyes, he said, “and you, Mary, a sword will pierce.” What was he talking about? I could tell by the serious look on his face that this was not a happy message.

Anna, an elderly prophetess, was also in the temple while we were there. People said that she was a holy woman who never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. She came over to us, smiling, toothless, and clasping her hands together, she gave thanks to God. She kept repeating, “Blessed are You, O Lord, Our God; your love endures forever.” (Ps. 136:1) She was a delight and asked to hold my baby. She took Jesus in her arms and hugged and kissed him like a grandmother would do, and waltzed around the temple area with him. Here was this little old lady thrilled to be holding Jesus! After she returned the baby to me, she turned away and approached all the people gathered about the temple area. Turning back and pointing to the child in my arms, she exclaimed, “This is the Messiah”!

When we had fulfilled all of the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, Joseph and I made the long journey back to Galilee, to our home in Nazareth. I kept all these things in my heart, mulling over them, wondering what would become of us. I could only pray,

**“MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD;
MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD, MY SAVIOR!” (Lk.1:46-47)**

Back in Nazareth, Jesus “grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.” (Lk. 2:40)

THE BOY JESUS IN THE TEMPLE (Lk. 2:41-52)

Joseph and I began to experience an awakening in Jesus to his life's direction. He was growing up quicker than we would have liked. "When Jesus was twelve years old, about the age when a boy officially reached manhood (celebrated today in the Jewish *bar mitzvah* ceremony),"¹³ he did something that surprised us both. We didn't quite understand what he was up to.

Each year we would go to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. What a glorious celebration that was! So many of our relatives and friends would attend. It was good to see everyone and to journey together for the feast. It was like a great family reunion. When the festivities were finished, everyone would leave the city. This particular time, we did not know that Jesus had remained behind. We thought that he was in the caravan of our relatives and friends leaving the city.

After about a day's journey, Joseph and I started to ask around if anyone had seen him. Starting to panic, we returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days we found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. I checked with the teachers of the temple about what was going on. They told me they were "astounded at the depth of understanding that Jesus' questions and answers revealed." "This was not the level of engagement the rabbis typically encountered in one so young."¹⁴

When I saw him, I was astonished and ran to him, hugging him with joy and praising God that he had been found. I said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." (Lk. 2:48) He responded in a way that I did not expect. "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lk. 2:49) I did not quite understand what he said to us. Would I ever understand? Was this what Simeon meant when he said to me that a sword would pierce my heart? I could only hope that this would be the worst of what I would have to endure.

Joseph's and my love for Jesus would have to "make room for him to follow the path that will eventually take him from home and family to his death not far from this same Jerusalem temple."¹⁵ Joseph and I saw "that Jesus was beginning to move away from the intimate circle of our family toward the greater world."¹⁶ Yet, he went down with us to Nazareth, "and was obedient." (Lk. 2:51) I kept all these things in my heart mulling them over and over. That night when I prayed I put my child's future in God's hands. There was so much about my son that was mystery. I fell asleep praying,

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THE BAPTISM OF JESUS (Lk. 3:21-22)

Zechariah's and Elizabeth's son, John, went about the whole region of the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He was a strong and vocal young man. He was not afraid to announce difficult things. People flocked to him to be baptized – even tax collectors came. Many people wondered whether or not John was the Messiah.

I learned that John had also baptized Jesus. "While Jesus did not need baptism (a washing away of

¹³ Living With Christ, (New London, CT: Bayard Inc.), December, 2009, p. 19-21.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Mueller, Steve, "We are all gifts from God!", Living With Christ, (New London, CT: Bayard Inc.), December, 2009, p. 163.

¹⁶ Op.Cit., Living With Christ, pp. 19-21.

sin), Jesus added the presence of the Holy Spirit to the water.¹⁷ He added action! “According to the prophet Isaiah, ACTION is lighting up the world. ACTION is ridding the world of blindness. ACTION is working to set free so many people caught in their dungeons of selfishness and a lack of vision.”¹⁸

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS (Lk. 4:1-13)

Jesus returned from the Jordan. I could tell that there was something different about him. He seemed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He told me that he was being led off into the desert for a retreat to pray and fast for forty days, in the spirit of our ancestors, Moses and Elijah. I hoped that these would be graced days for him. He was getting ready to embark on his own course in life shifting from that of a carpenter’s son to his public identity as God’s son.¹⁹

He left for the desert. There was a heaviness in my heart. I wondered, as only a mother could, if he would be alright. The desert can be a formidable place. It is easy to become disoriented and get lost in the desert. There are no landmarks. There is no clear path, just the same rolling hills of sand and brush. Like our ancestors who wandered in the desert for forty years, my son would meet God there and face himself squarely to discern what lay ahead. There, God would speak to him. “When Jesus emerged from the desert, He knew there would be no turning back. He knew what he must do.”²⁰ He later told me that his time in the desert was the “Son of God” test by the devil. “If you are the Son of God...’ is how the test goes. ‘If you are the Son of God, you will fill your life with things you do not need.’ ‘If you are the Son of God, you will enslave yourself to power and privilege.’ ‘If you are the Son of God, you will not understand the human condition and blame every disaster and accident on God.’”²¹

I had taught him well. Formed by the creed and creativity of the Old Testament, Jesus responded to each temptation that beset him.²² These temptations did not defeat him, but strengthened him to discover exactly where he stood on everything and to defend his deepest values. His choices would reveal who he was to be – and strengthened that identity.²³ This desert experience would highlight the kind of ministry and leadership he would espouse. He would reject a false or easy style of leadership. He would not be someone who offers instant gratification, who seeks all-encompassing political power, or who dazzles his followers with cheap tricks. Instead, he would model compassion, gentleness, humility. He would be a servant-leader.²⁴ “He will establish a healing reign over sick bodies, tormented psyches, and a troubled cosmos.”²⁵

THE MINISTRY IN GALILEE (Lk. 4:14-22)

Jesus returned to Galilee and began his ministry. He was about 30 years old.

One Sabbath day, he was on his way to the synagogue. I went along with him and sat in the back with the other women. He stood up to read the Scriptures and was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, which said, “The Spirit or the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad

¹⁷ Franks, Rev. T. Becket A., OSB, “Show Them Where the Rocks Are in the Water!”, Homily given at Sacred Heart Monastery, Lisle, IL, January 10, 2010.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Hughes, Mary, OP, LCWR Update, March 2010, p.2.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Franks, Rev. T. Becket A., OSB, “All A Bunch of Lies!”, Homily given on February 21, 2010, Sacred Heart Monastery, Lisle, IL.

²² Holyhead, Verna A., With Burning Hearts, Welcoming the Word in Year C, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), p. 29.

²³ Living With Christ, (New London, CT: Bayard Inc.), February, 2010, pp. 18-21.

²⁴ Higgins, Krystyna, “In Jesus, we pass the test”, Living With Christ, (New London, CT: Bayard Inc.), February, 2010, p. 139.

²⁵ Holyhead, Op. cit., p. 29.

tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” (Lk. 4:18-19) He then said to all gathered there, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Lk. 4:21) What an amazing moment it was that day in the synagogue when Jesus made that announcement. Many spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. Well, not everyone. From the beginning of his ministry, there were those who were suspicious of him and tried to drive him out and even to kill him by throwing him off a cliff.

This was so hard for me to hear. My heart ached within me. I could not understand why some had such hatred for my son. What was going to happen to him? Would his opponents succeed in destroying him? Could this be what Simeon meant when he said that a sword would pierce my heart?

Jesus began to reach out and heal those who were possessed and sick: lepers, the blind and the lame – even raising the dead. He was not afraid to touch people tenderly to relieve their pain, infirmity or sickness. Great crowds came to him. They even placed their sick at his feet, and he cured them. He taught plainly and directly about love. He ministered to women and counted them among his closest friends. He spoke to the people about HOPE in someone greater than themselves. He taught in parables the good news of God’s reign. He welcomed sinners and ate with them. (Lk. 15:2) “The message that Jesus came to proclaim is just that – that God is near at hand, not far away and indifferent to our needs, but in our very midst, healing us and freeing us and loving us.”²⁶

One of the things that I will always remember about Jesus was that he loved to pray. I hoped that he had learned that from Joseph and me, for prayer was an important part of our daily family lives. I taught him to always proclaim the greatness of the Lord and to rejoice in God. (Lk. 1:46-47)

PREDICTION OF THE PASSION (Lk. 9:22)

Some of my friends began to say that Jesus was talking about suffering greatly and being rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes. They even said that he spoke of being killed. Rumors were circulating that he also spoke of being raised on the third day. What did he possibly mean?

I kept all of these things in my heart, pondering them frequently. Often I cried myself to sleep at night thinking of what might happen, worrying about his safety. He was gone for a long period of time. I missed him terribly.

JESUS’ VISIT TO MARY

Then, one day, Jesus stopped by to see me. I burst into tears with relief and joy when I saw him. We hugged one another for a long time as I held him close to my heart. But, I could tell by the look on his face that he knew his end was near. We spoke of many things and shared many memories. We spoke of his ministry among the people, of his many supporters, of those who hated him. He had an anguished look about him when we spoke of this. I could tell that “he was resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem.” (Lk. 9:51) Nothing I could say would prevent him from going.

We said good bye to each other. We held each other tightly. There were tears in both of our eyes. And then he left. I turned away and sobbed. Would I ever see him again? With much difficulty I prayed,

²⁶ Lux, Teresa Whalen, “We are God’s hands and feet”, Living With Christ, (New London, CT: Bayard Inc.), January, 2010, p. 143.

**“MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD,
AND MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR.” (LK. 1:46-47)**

THE LAST PASSOVER (Jn. 11:55-57)

The Passover was near. This was always a special time for us Jews. Some were wondering if Jesus would go for the feast. In fact, they asked me if I knew.

**PREPARATIONS FOR THE PASSOVER AND THE LAST SUPPER
(Lk. 22: 7-20)**

Jesus was going to celebrate the Passover with his twelve apostles and I would celebrate it with some friends in Jerusalem. One of the disciples later told me that, while they were at table, Jesus changed bread and wine into his body and blood, and asked them do the same in his memory. We would repeat this action every first day of the week when we met together for worship as a community.

THE WASHING OF THE DISCIPLES FEET (Jn. 13:1-20)

Another disciple said that while they were at supper Jesus rose and poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dried them with a towel. . What an example of servant leadership!

THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN (Lk. 22:39-46)

After the Passover meal, Jesus and the disciples went out to the Mount of Olives. They told me later that Jesus could be heard, praying, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.' (Lk. 22:42) My son always kept the Father's will as his priority.

THE BETRAYAL AND ARREST OF JESUS (Lk. 22:47-65)

In the morning, I heard that Jesus and his disciples were in the Garden of Olives, so I went there to see for myself. A crowd approached with Judas in the lead. Judas went up to Jesus and kissed him. It was a kiss of betrayal! One of his chosen Twelve, turned Jesus in to the authorities, and Jesus was arrested.

JESUS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN, PILATE AND HEROD (Lk. 22:66-71; 23:10-17)

They brought Jesus before the Sanhedrin and then before Pilate and Herod, where they interrogated him interminably. They brought charges against him for misleading the people, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, maintaining that he was the Messiah, a king, and inciting the people with his teaching. Neither Pilate nor Herod found Jesus guilty of the accusations against him.

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH (Lk. 23:18-25)

All around me I could hear the people angrily shouting, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us." (Lk. 23:18) Barabbas was an insurgent and a murderer. My son was neither of these! The people were shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (Lk. 23:21) It was so deafening, that I put my hands over my ears and sobbed! I could not believe that they wanted him crucified. What crime had he committed to deserve such a fate? Finally, Pilate gave in to the angry crowds. He released Barabbas and handed Jesus over to them to do as they wished.

Those who held Jesus in custody were ridiculing him and beating him. They blindfolded him and taunted him. They placed a crown of thorns on his head and beat it into place with clubs. Blood

streamed down his face. He was hardly recognizable. I know that they held these kinds of public executions here, but, I had never witnessed anything so horrible firsthand.

They dropped a large, heavy cross on his shoulders and made him carry it, sneering and shoving him through the crowds. The weight of the cross caused Jesus to stumble and fall many times. Every time he fell, the guards would kick him and pull him to his feet and shove him on up the hill.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

“I had managed to break through the crowd and was walking side by side with my son. I called to him through the shouting voices. He stopped. Our eyes met, mine full of tears of anguish, his full of pain and confusion. I felt helpless; then his eyes said to me, ‘Courage! There is a purpose for this.’ As he stumbled on, I knew he was right. So I followed and prayed silently.”²⁷

“Two others, both criminals, were led away with him to be executed.” (Lk. 23:32) Their mothers also watched in horror. At times we walked together, holding on to each other for support as we struggled up the hill.

THE CRUCIFIXION (Lk. 23:33-43)

When we arrived at Golgotha, they stripped him of his blood-soaked clothes and nailed him to the cross he had been struggling to carry. I shuttered violently as each nail was pounded into his hands and feet. Then they stood the cross upright, the weight of his body tearing his flesh in the place of the nails. There he hung with the two criminals crucified on either side of him.

I heard Jesus say in a weak and trembling voice, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” (Lk. 23:34) Some people stood by and watched, weeping. Others sneered at him and said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God.” (Lk. 23:35) One of the criminals reviled him. The other said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” (Lk. 23:42) Jesus replied to him, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Lk. 23:43) I wished that I could have died with him as well, and be with him forever in Paradise.

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS (Jn. 19:17-30)

Pilate had an inscription written and put on the cross. “It read, ‘Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews’”. (Jn.19:19) The soldiers took Jesus’ clothes and divided them among themselves. They cast lots for his seamless tunic. I wanted to gather up his blood-soaked clothes and take them with me, but I was not allowed to do so.

Several of the women huddled together below the cross. With me were my sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, my good friend, Mary of Magdala, and the mothers of the other two criminals. When Jesus saw me and the disciple there whom he loved, our friend, John, he said to me in a weak and raspy voice, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’ (Jn. 19:26) “Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’” (Jn. 19:27) John came over to me and put his arm around me as I sobbed into his chest. “That kind and wonderful young man, John, has made a special place for me in his life now. He has not left me alone in my grief. Being with him is a blessing. But I am also worried for him. I must look for ways to console him”²⁸ as he consoles me.

THE DEATH OF JESUS (Lk. 23:44-49)

It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. With all the strength he could muster, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commend

²⁷ Furley, Richard, G., *Mary’s Way of the Cross*, (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984), Fourth Station.

²⁸ *Living With Christ*, (New London, CT: Bayard Inc.) April 3, Holy Saturday, 2010, p. 109.

my spirit.' When he had said this he breathed his last." (Lk. 23:46)

"[I] lost my son not to death caused by illness or accident (sorrow enough in itself), but to a cruel and bloody death brought about by public execution. The violence of his death victimized [me] as well, as the mothers of any victims of political violence could attest. [I] suffered the anguish of grief, and of the pain of oppression as occupying soldiers crucified [my] child. [I] was precisely a sorrowful Jewish mother, one who would be in a long line of countless Jewish mothers who had lamented their cruelly murdered Jewish children."²⁹

"What greater pain is there for a mother than to see her son die right before her eyes! I, who had brought [him] into the world and watched him grow, stood helplessly beneath his cross as he lowered his head and died. His earthly anguish was finished, but mine was greater than ever."³⁰

THE BURIAL OF JESUS (Lk. 23:50-56)

The crowd dispersed, some crying, some beating their breasts, others stunned by the events they had just witnessed, still others staggered away laughing and cheering as if drunk on what they had schemed.

Joseph of Arimathea, a virtuous and upright man, went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. After he had taken the body of Jesus down from the cross, he placed his lifeless body into my arms. I sobbed as his blood soaked into my clothing. I wanted to hold him closely to my heart one last time. Now I knew. This IS what Simeon meant when he hold me that a sword would pierce my heart. I could barely pray, and yet, I knew I had to,

**"MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD;
MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD, MY SAVIOR!"** (Lk. 1:46-47)

Joseph then wrapped the lifeless body of Jesus in a linen cloth and together we laid him in a rock-hewn tomb in which no one had yet been buried. I arranged the burial cloths carefully. I took one last look at my son, and then walked out. Joseph closed the tomb. I stood by silently, my heart heavy with grief.

I didn't sleep all that night. Visions of what transpired that day were swirling through my mind. That Sabbath day was so eerily quiet. "I don't know that I will ever be able to absorb the horrendous things that have happened. I have never known such pain as I have known these past days. I cannot make sense of what has happened, I pray with all my heart to God, 'Your will be done in me, merciful and gracious God. Bless me with hope and light and peace as I try to live for your glory and honor!'"³¹

My friends, the passion and death of my son are not the end of the story. On that Sabbath day, I was remembering and hoping as I reflected on what our Prophet Hosea had said, "He will revive us after two days; on the third day he will raise us up, to live in his presence." (Hosea 6:2)

"Only two days later that emptiness was filled beyond belief – he had risen! [He] had opened the doors to a new life. His undying love would not stop at anything less."³² Into my grief and broken heart, and that of the whole world, God brought new and unexpected life. Alleluia! I prayed excitedly,

²⁹ Johnson, Elizabeth, "Reconstructing a Theology of Mary", *Mary, Woman of Nazareth*, Ed. Donnelly, Doris, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 83, quoting from Flusser, David in *Mary: Images of the Mother of Jesus in Jewish and Christian Perspective*, with Jaroslav Pelikan and Justin Lang (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 7-16.

³⁰ Furley, Op. Cit. Station 12.

³¹ *Living With Christ*, (New London, CT: Bayard Inc), April 3, Holy Saturday, 2010, p. 109.

³² Furley, *Ibid.*, Fifteenth Station.

**“MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD;
MY SPIRIT FINDS JOY IN GOD, MY SAVIOR!” (Lk. 1:46-47)**

THE APPEARANCE TO MARY OF MAGDALA (Jn. 20:11-18)

My friend, Mary of Magdala was the first to see Jesus when she went to the tomb early in the morning, on that first day of the week. “The stone is rolled back and the tomb is empty; resurrected life cannot be contained. Who can comprehend such a paradox? But then, who goes to a tomb expecting to find life? History has been broken open and is now filled with the resurrected presence of Christ.”³³

Mary of Magdala ran to tell the disciples. He appeared to them, too, and opened their minds to understand the scriptures. Even Thomas finally saw and believed! The Spirit was moving in wild and wonderful ways. As word got around that Jesus had risen, an energy and excitement about the news spread throughout Jerusalem and Galilee. As hearts burned, the disciples caught on fire fueled by the Spirit! Nothing could stop them from proclaiming the Good News: “Jesus is in our midst: holding out to us the wounds of his risen body, breakfasting with and befriending those [of us] who had deserted him; calling us by name to follow him as our Shepherd Protector; lingering long with us at the table as the Host who gives us, his friends, the love commandment; promising us the gifts of the Spirit, the memory and future of the Church, breathing into the chaos of our lives his own peace that the world cannot give. Then, ascended to his Father, Jesus sends upon [us] the wind and fire of Pentecost that shakes [us] into the world with burning urgency to proclaim to the ends of the earth that Christ is risen, he is truly risen.”³⁴

My friends, do not be afraid. Never lose hope! From now until Jesus comes again, the Spirit will companion you. “[You] are not orphans. [You] are not wanderers anymore. [You] are not left to wonder now about what is really [your] fate. You already know it. You have already seen it among [you]. There is nothing to wait for now except for the waiting to be over. It is a matter only of allowing the Spirit to transform [you] so that [your] life and the life of Christ do finally merge, do really melt into one another, do truly become one, are united both here and hereafter. Sing ‘Alleluia’ – ‘Praise the Lord’ – over and over and over again. It is a time of unbounded assurance and a sense of limitless liberation. It is hope and faith and trust all bound into one in [you].”³⁵

My dear Benedictine women, be witnesses of HOPE wherever you are. “Speak the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:31) “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.” (Mk. 16:15) Go! Tell everyone you meet about my son, Jesus, the Christ, and, when you do, remember me, your Mother, a WOMAN OF HOPE!

**“MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD;
MY SPIRIT FINDS REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR!” (Lk. 1:46-47)**

³³ Bergant, Diane, with Fragomeni, Richard, *Preaching the New Lectionary*, Year C, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 168.

³⁴ Holyhead, Op.Cit., p. 59.

³⁵ Chittister, Joan, *The Liturgical Year*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), p. 174-176.

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