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If Mary were here, what would she say to us?

Text: Luke 1:39-55

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A Sunday school teacher challenged her class to take some time on Sunday afternoon to **(Click)** write a letter to God. **(Click)** They were to bring back their letters the following Sunday. One little boy brought in his letter and read it to the class: **(Click)** Dear God, "We had such a good time at church today, wish You could have been there!" Joey.

The Christmas story is such a magnificent one, so full of tenderness and love, that we might wish God had been there.

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So is God here? **(Click)** Mary did not make that mistake. She knew that God was working in her life, and in the life of her cousin Elizabeth. **(Click)** Elizabeth knew God's presence too and greeted Mary **(Click)** "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb." **(Click)** Mary answered Elizabeth with a song of her own. She sang **(Click)** "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name."

We would do well tonight (this morning) to spend a few moments with this charming maiden, named Mary, wise beyond her years. Her experiences of Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection are the most intimate one of all – after all – she was his mother.

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But I can't help but wonder, what Mary would say to us if she were here. Perhaps the first thing she might say is that **(Click)** Life is hard. We only have to look at the family's early travels, how their pilgrimage to Bethlehem was anything but enchanting. As we retell that ancient story, it takes on a beauty and specialness that I don't think the original story had at all. We pass over it so quickly as we tell the Christmas story. Hear it anew, imagining you are that pregnant maiden, traveling with your engaged husband. **(Click)** And Joseph also went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be taxed with Mary, his wife, being great with child."

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Travel in those days was not easy. There were no superhighways or our wonderful cars and trucks to ride in. Mary and Joseph had to travel on foot. One would normally think they would have **(Click)** struck a “B” line to Bethlehem, about 95 miles south of Nazareth. While that would have been the shortest route, **(Click)** it would mean traveling through the land of the Samaritans, and for orthodox Jews that would have been a no-no. **(Click)** So good Jews would have gone around Samaria, traveling along the Jordan River, crossing by Jericho, on to Jerusalem, and south of Bethlehem, a trip of about 120 miles. So how long would a trip of this length take? Well, traveling at about 7-12 miles a day, **(Click)** it would have taken Mary and Joseph about 12 days to get to Bethlehem. Now you know where the title of the Christmas song “The Twelve Days of Christmas” comes from.

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We sometimes think Mary should have known that her life would be no picnic. But really how could she have known? **(Click)** She would never have imagined the harrowing experiences surrounding the birth of this child. To give birth in a strange land, amongst strangers and in the poorest of all surroundings. Who would have thought. **(Click)** There are mothers today who can give hair-raising details of how their son or daughter entered this world. There was a young mother in my congregation in Waupun, Wisconsin, who gave birth to her son in the cab of a pickup truck. After the hospital attendants got mother and child on a stretcher, heading in the hospital, the nurse tried to comfort the distraught mother by saying, “Honey, don’t you worry none. We had a lady that gave birth to a baby right in the middle of the Hospital lobby.” The new mother looked up at the nurse and said, “Yes, I know. That was me.” That young mother had three children and each time she never went into labor. She went into delivery! **(Click)** We are not sure of the timing, but this young family is forced to flee to Egypt to escape King Herod’s wrath. So, once again, Mary and Joseph are on the move, running away in the dead of night to protect the life of their son. **(Click)** Two major trips; Two different lands; Moving is no fun. Anybody here like to move.

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Martin Luther, in commenting on Mary and Joseph’s travels remarked, “All the artists give her a donkey to ride. The Gospels do not!” Instead, they probably had to trudge on foot over the hills and valleys, and probably in winter, either carrying her baby in her womb, and later, nursing her precious child while leaning on her beloved husband Joseph for support. The only good thing about this late night trip to Egypt was **(Click)** they did not have to see the

carnage and killing of all those boy babies in Bethlehem. Unfortunately, the lives of little children did not mean much years ago either.

(Click) The next dozen, or so years, for Mary and Joseph were good ones. They would settle in Nazareth and have five more children. While they were never rich, Joseph was an able provider in his carpentry business and their oldest son, Jesus, was turning into a fine young man, growing in stature and in favor with God and man.

And then something happened. **(Click)** We think Joseph died. Joseph is never mentioned again on the pages of Scripture. In that harsh way that life often deals with people, **(Click)** Mary finds herself a young widow, having a raise six children alone. As the oldest son, Jesus would take his father's place in the carpenter's shop, a role he would fill until his 30th birthday, when he began his ministry.

But the loss of Joseph would not be the last one for Mary. She would have to endure the most grievous blow that can befall a mother – she watched as her eldest son died on a cross as a common criminal. Can you feel the hurt and the pain as she endured the torture of crucifixion. **(Click)** Life can be very hard.

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You may not recognize this man, but let me tell you some things about his life, which may help you guess who he is. **(Click)** He was puny and very sickly from birth on; **(Click)** Later, as a Pastor, he was often too sick to perform his ministry duties for his congregation; **(Click)** So, as a way to minister to his people, he would write them letters of encouragement and uplift; **(Click)** He often complained about the archaic hymns they had for worship, so one day, one of his members challenged him to write some hymn; **(Click)** Well, he did. He wrote some 600 hymns before he **(Click)** finally died in 1748. Do you know who he is? The man's name is **(Click)** Isaac Watts and his most famous of all hymns is **(Click)** "Joy to the World."

But I wonder, could Isaac Watts have written so many beautiful hymns if his life was full and healthy? Or could it be that his struggles and ill-health through the years enabled him to write these wonderful lyrics? I don't know and can't say for sure. But I have observed that people who have everything in life are often big spiritual zeroes, while those who struggle through life have souls with depth and meaning.

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If Mary were here, she would say, “Yes, life is hard, but God is so GOOD! This is how she said it in her own words **(Click)** “God has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is His name.” **(Click)** Like Mary, we are humbled and overwhelmed by God’s attention and love for us. In Mary’s mind, only a kind and good God would bypass the wealthy and powerful of this world and choose a peasant girl to bear His son. Just think of the billions of people in this world, better people than any of us, and yet God choose us to new His Son Jesus. We could have been born in a Muslim country or a Buddhist country. There are certainly many more of them than there Christian. God is so good. **(Click)** And like Mary, we respond with gratitude and praise, bowing our heads and praising Him “God is Great & God is Good!”

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If Mary were here, she would also say that love and life are stronger than hate and death. Yes, there are times both in her life and in ours where it seems that hate and death have the upper hand. **(Click)** It certainly did in Bethlehem with the slaughter of all those children; **(Click)** It certainly did in Newtown CT with the slaughter of those 20 school children and 6 teachers; **(Click)** It certainly did as Mary stood before her son, watching him breath his last on that terrible cross. **(Click)** But did hate and death have the last word? **(Click)** Absolutely NOT!

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Love and Life are stronger than Hate and Death. **(Click)** King Herod and Pilate are dead and buried. **(Click)** But Mary’s Son, Jesus lives still. **(Click)** And that Jesus will come again to take us out of this veil of tears to that wonderful new home where the true victors will rise Love and Life.

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Mary Ann O’Roark tells about a Christmas when she had a heart full of disappointment and cynicism. She had found a few minutes of peace by stopping to view a nativity scene in front of a local church. But her peace was soon interrupted by a homeless woman nearby who was screaming a cursing. Once again, Mary Ann’s Christmas spirit disappeared.

A few days later, Mary Ann was passing by that same church when she noticed **(Click)** that the Christ figure was missing from the nativity scene. She wondered who would do such a thing. This only confirmed her cynicism and disappointment with Christmas. But as she

turned the corner, she saw that some homeless woman from the day before. She was holding the Christ figurine in her arms. The old lady had wrapped her own dirty blanket lovingly around the figurine, and as she rocked the Christ child, she sang ever so softly, "Silent night, Holy night..." Mary Ann O'Roark wrote, "I knew without a doubt that the spirit of the Christ child had never really been mission. It just might be where I least expect it, but it was never far away."

God has come into this world in His Son Jesus Christ and with His coming He brings love and life because He knows our world so needs them.

Mary would tell us this Christmas:

1. Yes, Life is Hard;
2. But God is Good;
3. And Love and Life are stronger than Hate and Death. Merry Christmas. Amen.