CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

Mary: Did You Know?

The Seven Joys of Mary

Chris Armstrong

Spot the seven

Hans Memling (ca. 1435 -1494) was a Flemish master painter who studied under Rogier van der Weyden (pp. 22-23). His "Seven Joys of the Virgin" depicts a series of Marian moments drawn (like the Rosary; see p. 30) from medieval devotions to Mary.

Her seven joys are the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi, the Resurrected Christ's appearance to Mary, Christ's Ascension, Pentecost, and Mary's own (as tradition had it) bodily Assumption into heaven.

Free will's shining moment

Jaroslav Pelikan reminds us that the Annunciation to Mary can be seen as God's ultimate validation of free will. Mary's obedience to the angel's message "was no less voluntary in its affirmation than the disobedience of Eve had been in its negation." (***Mary Through the Centuries***, p. 87)

O holy night

As have Protestants since his day, Martin Luther affirmed the Ephesus Council's formula that stated Mary was truly the "mother of God": "God did not derive his divinity from Mary; but it does not follow that it is therefore wrong to say that God was born of Mary. ... She is the true mother of God. ... Mary suckled God, rocked God to sleep, prepared broth and soup for God, etc." (***On the Councils and the Church***, 1539)

The Magi and the Mama

Christian literature's most ancient hymn to Mary, the so-called "Akathist" hymn (late 5th or early 6th century), makes Mary one focus of the Magi's praise: "The children of the Chaldees seeing in the Virgin's hands him whose hands made men, and knowing him as Lord ... cried out to her who is blessed: Hail! Mother of the unsetting Star. Hail! Splendor of the Mystic Day. ..."

Snatching life from death

Peter Chrysologus (ca. 380-ca. 450), bishop of Ravenna and defender of the Ephesus Council's ***Theotokos*** formulation, identified "the other Mary" who accompanies Mary Magdalene at the tomb as the mother of the Lord. Then he portrayed the Virgin Mary as the second Eve, come now in the fullness of time to meet the resurrected Christ and undo the disobedience of the first Eve: "She who had taken perfidy away from paradise hurries to take faith from the tomb; she, who had snatched death from the hands of life, hastens to snatch life from the hands of death."

Birth of an assumption

While Scripture reveals nothing about Mary's death, tradition soon filled in the blank. Most influentially, John Damascene (d. 749) reported a story reportedly told at the Council of Chalcedon (451) that Mary had died in the presence of the Apostles, but when they opened her tomb they found it empty, "wherefrom the Apostles concluded that the body was taken up to heaven." From this root developed a widespread belief that Mary was assumed bodily and now tastes the Resurrection for which Christians hope.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

Mary: From the Editor

Mary and the Flabbergasting Fact

Chris Armstrong

It's a sleepy Wednesday night and I'm the only one left in the office, on the top floor of CTI's modest Carol Stream, Illinois facilities, across from the Aldi's grocery store and the MacDonalds restaurant. I've been looking through the images on the layouts for this issue—picture after picture of scenes starring Mary, the mother of Jesus—until they have all begun to blur together in one big scene; kind of like Memling's "Seven Joys of Mary" on our opening pages.

And I'm wondering: Do I know the mother of Jesus—the ***theotokos***, or in Jaroslav Pelikan's phrase, "the one who gave birth to the one who is God"—any better now than when we started this issue?

I'm just not sure. Part of me still feels like a kid in a museum: The Renaissance masterpieces, the Byzantine icons, the 15th-century German wood carvings ... these are all too lofty and alien—something from a different age and a different religious sensibility. Can all of this really ***mean*** anything to me: a college-educated twenty-first century suburbanite, an "evangelical," used to thinking of Mary for only a few days around Christmas?

Honestly, I'm a bit frustrated with myself: I'm a historian—I should be able to leap these distances and penetrate to the meanings and emotions beneath. I should be able to peel away the shell of historical particularity and get to the nourishing kernel of my spiritual heritage, enriching my devotional life.

At least, that's the burden of most of our authors. And it has been mine since we began to work on this issue. Yet for some reason, I'm just not quite able to jump the confessional fence and embrace Mary in even pale imitation of my Catholic and Orthodox brothers and sisters.

Although I haven't become any more "Catholic" through my close journalistic encounter with the Blessed Virgin Mary, I ***have*** been captivated again by the central, flabbergasting fact of Christianity: that God himself came down and chose to be conceived, and carried to term, and born the son of a real, living woman.

As the church historian Timothy George said to me in conversation, "God didn't have to do it that way. He could have descended from heaven as a little fresh baby God just made and plopped down on earth."

But he did choose to do it "that way"—the normal, ***human*** way. Aside from the divine conception, he came the same way we all do: through pregnancy, labor, birth, infancy. ... And that fact elevates not only all humanity, but especially all womankind. In the Incarnation, as in all human births, nothing happened without the loving, sacrificial participation of a woman. "Be it unto me according to thy word," said Mary.

The angel called her "highly favored." Elizabeth called her "blessed among women." And Mary, in her paean of faith, the ***Magnificat***, cried out: "He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name."

But what should all this mean for us, today? At the very least, I hope "meeting" Mary will face you, as it has me, with the extraordinary truth of the Incarnation. Look: Here is the flesh-and-blood woman who

bore our savior, suckled him, clothed him, taught him, and followed him. Then, at the Cross, she sorrowed over him. And then at last, in the Upper Room, she participated in the birth of his church. No wonder his church has dwelt on her so lovingly.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

A Kinder Inquisition, Name That Tomb, and Chunky Monks

Compiled by Ted Olsen

How the Inquisition Saved Lives

"Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition," goes the popular Monty Python sketch. But everyone believes that the Inquisitions rate among the all-time worst sins of the Christian Church. An 800-page report issued by the Vatican in June 2004, however, suggests that conventional wisdom is wrong. "Recourse to torture and the death sentence were not as frequent as was long believed," said Agostino Borromeo, professor of church history at Sapienza University.

In fact, only about 1 percent of the 125,000 brought before the Spanish Inquisition were executed. But the unheard story, says St. Louis University's Thomas F. Madden, is that "the Inquisition was not born out of desire to crush diversity or oppress people; it was rather an attempt to stop unjust executions. It was the secular authorities that held heresy to be a capital offense, not the Church." The Inquisition "saved uncounted thousands of innocent (and not-so-innocent) people who would otherwise have been roasted by secular lords or mob rule." As the Inquisition "slipped out of papal hands and into those of kings," practices varied by region. This, coupled with attempts to stifle Protestantism, gave rise to the more popular view of the Inquisition.

"There is no doubt," says the report, that Inquisition procedures "were applied with excessive vigor and in some cases degenerated into real abuse." The report arose from John Paul II's desire to apologize for the abuses. "Before seeking pardon," he said, "it is necessary to have a precise knowledge of the facts. The image of the Inquisition represents almost the symbol ... of scandal."

Looking good at 500

Fans of Michelangelo's biblical sculptures had a good summer, especially if they were in Florence. First restoration work finished on David, which turns 500 this year. "David is still itself, only what has changed is his luminosity," said Cinzia Parnigoni, who oversaw the cleaning of the six-ton marble statue (applying distilled water and cellulose pulp wrapped in rice paper). Elsewhere in town, the Horne Museum displayed a small wooden carving of Jesus, the latest Michelangelo discovery. The artist reportedly carved the 41cm (16 in.) figure in 1495, when he was 20, using a fresh corpse from a monastery as a model. About one or two Michelangelo "finds" turn up each year, The Guardian reported, but this one appears to be authentic.

Name that Tomb

Since early Christian historians agree that Mark the Evangelist was burned after his martyrdom, who is buried in his Venice tomb? Historian Andrew Chugg has one theory that is gaining support: the remains at St. Mark's Basilica, he argues in the July 2004 issue of ***History Today***, belong to Alexander the Great. He'll give greater detail in ***The Lost Tomb of Alexander the Great*** (Periplus, forthcoming), but the case goes like this: After the Macedonian conqueror died in his early 30s around 323 B.C., he was buried in Alexandria. But by the 4th century A.D., his remains were gone. Chugg says "somebody in the Church hierarchy, perhaps even the Patriarch himself, decided ... to pretend the remains of Alexander were those of St. Mark" to protect them from being destroyed during an uprising. The Venetians who stole "Mark's" body in 828, then, were the victims of a ruse. "Both bodies were ... mummified in linen,

and one seems to disappear at the same time that the other appears—in almost exactly the same place, near the central crossroads of Alexandria."

Bach's Earliest Cantata—Or Not

According to some texts—including Albert Schweitzer's biography of J. S. Bach—this year marks the 300th anniversary of the composer's first cantata. But scholars now doubt that the German composer actually wrote the Easter Cantata based on the text "For Thou will not leave my Soul in Hell." Still, in 1704 Bach was the organist at Arnstadt, and some scholars believe that during this time he did write his first cantata: ***"Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich"*** (Psalm 25: "Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul"). In commemoration, the cantata will be performed at the Bach Festival in Leipzig, as well as by groups worldwide including the Hong Kong Chamber Orchestra, the Calgary Bach Festival Society Choir, Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington, and Boston's Emmanuel Music.

To hear Bach in more historical surroundings, travelers to Arnstadt can still visit the church (now named The Bach Church), which has been recently renovated and its organ restored to its condition of 300 years ago. The original keyboard is on display, and the church hosts an organ festival each summer.

Even more shrouded in mystery

Authentic burial cloth of Christ or medieval hoax, the Shroud of Turin is undoubtedly one of the most sensational relics in all of church history. And its long, strange story just got even more mysterious: ***The Journal of Optics***, from London's Institute of Physics, reports that the image of a man's face also appears in the back of the linen. "Though the image is very faint, features such as nose, eyes, hair, beard, and moustache are clearly visible," Giulio Fanti, professor of Mechanical and Thermal Measurements at Padua University, told the Discovery Channel. But the image apparently isn't the result of paint seeping through from one side to another. "One extremely superficial image appears above and one below, but there's nothing in the middle. It is extremely difficult to make a fake with these features," he said. The shroud, first publicly displayed in 1355, won't go public again until 2025.

Chunky Monks

Martin Luther was relatively svelte before he left monastic life and married. Benedict ordered his monks to avoid gluttony and indigestion, "for there is nothing so opposed to Christian life as over-indulgence." Several rules governing Celtic monasteries commanded, "Take not of food till thou art hungry."

Still, today's stereotype of a medieval monk is the corpulent Friar Tuck. Now Philippa Patrick, who has been studying the hefty subject for her Ph.D. at the Institute of Archaeology at University College London, says the stereotype is broad but not grossly inflated.

"They were taking in about 6,000 calories a day, and 4,500 even when they were fasting," she told ***The Guardian*** during the International Medieval Congress in Leeds. "Their meals were full of saturated fats. They were five times more likely to suffer from obesity than their secular contemporaries, including wealthy merchants or courtiers." That's because, she says, they were eating suet, lard, and butter "in startling quantities."

Patrick bases her conclusions upon 300 sets of skeletons at three London-area monasteries (Tower Hill, Bermondsey, and Merton). The monks, she says, evidenced much more obesity-related arthritis than was the norm. Several suffered from a degenerative form of arthritis called DISH (diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis), also known as Forestier's disease. "The marks of DISH keep appearing on their skeletons," Patrick told ***The Guardian***. "It forms a coating on the spine, like candlewax dripping down the side."

Every Early English Bible in One Place

This year, the complete ***Holman Christian Standard Bible*** was released. The last few years have also seen the full ***English Standard Version*** (2001) and ***The Message*** (2002), and the full ***Today's New International Version*** is due out in 2005. With this glut of English versions, it's easy to forget how radical the first translations were. However, since 2004 is the 400th anniversary of the Hampton Court Conference (birthplace of the King James Version), early English translations are getting some attention. Of particular note is "The Bible in English" exhibit, appearing at Southern Methodist University, Princeton University, and England's University of Manchester. The exhibit includes William Tyndale's rare Pentateuch (only nine remain), two Wycliffite New Testaments, Miles Coverdale's 1535 and large 1539 Bibles, a 1560 Geneva Bible, and the highly illustrated Bishops' Bible of the 1570s. SMU's David Price and Charles C. Ryrie created the exhibit and its companion book, ***Let It Go among Our People*** (Lutterworth).

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

Eyewitness

The spark that lit the Welsh revival

Thursday, September 29, 1904. The stirrings of a spiritual awakening had already begun among the youth in several towns of South Wales when Evan Roberts, a 26-year-old excoalminer training for the Calvinistic Methodist ministry, attended a mission conference led by the evangelist Seth Joshua. For years, Roberts had been longing for the Holy Spirit to set his heart on fire. Joshua, meanwhile, had been praying that God would raise up a man from the coal mines or fields to bring revival to the churches. Both men found answers to their prayers that morning in Blaenannerch. Roberts described the moment:

The 7.00 am. meeting was devoted to asking and answering questions. At the close, the Revd Seth Joshua prayed, and said during his prayer, 'Lord, do this, and this, and this, etc and bend us.' He did not say, 'Oh Lord, bend us.' It was the Spirit that put the emphasis for me on 'bend us.' 'That is what you need,' said the Spirit to me. And as I went out I prayed, 'Oh Lord, bend me.' On the way to the 9.00 [am.] meeting, the Revd Seth Joshua remarked, 'We are going to have a wonderful meeting today!' To this I replied, 'I feel myself almost bursting.' The meeting, having been opened, was handed over to the Spirit. I was conscious that I would have to pray. As one and the other prayed I put the question to the Spirit, 'Shall I pray now?' 'Wait a while,' said He. When others prayed I felt a living force come into my bosom. It held my breath, and my legs shivered and after every prayer I asked, 'Shall I now?' The living force grew and grew, and I was almost bursting. And instantly someone ended his prayer—my bosom boiling. I would have burst if I had not prayed. What boiled me over was that verse, 'God commending His Love'. I fell on my knees with my arms over the seat in front of me, and the tears and perspiration flowed freely. I thought blood was gushing forth. Mrs Davies, Mona, New Quay came to wipe my face. On my right was Mag Phillips and on my left Maud[e] Davies. For about two minutes it was fearful. I cried, 'Bend me! Bend me! Bend us!' Then, 'Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!' and Mrs Davies said, 'Oh wonderful grace!' 'Yes,' I said, 'Oh, wonderful grace!!' What bent me was God commending His love, and I not seeing anything in it to commend. After I was bent a wave of peace came over me. Oh wonderful, this is life! You've heard it said of joy being felt by men to the tops of their fingers. Yes, it is literally true. And the audience sang, 'I hear thy welcome voice!' And as they sang I thought of the bending at the judgment Day, and I was filled with compassion for those who would be bent on that day. And I wept.

In the months that followed this dramatic "baptism of the Holy Spirit," Evan Roberts carried his message throughout Wales with a youthful, unconventional zeal that vaulted him to celebrity status. He soon became the controversial hero of a rapidly spreading revival characterized by spontaneity rather than liturgical order, open prayer and confession rather than formal preaching, and obedience to the promptings of the Spirit rather than human direction. The ***revival brought an estimated 100,000 new converts into the churches and sent shock waves throughout Britain and beyond—even as far as Los Angeles, where reports of the Welsh awakening contributed to the birth of Pentecostalism in 1906. Evan Roberts' simple prayer, "Oh Lord, bend me," blossomed into the theme of the revival: "Bend the Church and save the world." —Jennifer Trafton***

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

Recovering a Protestant Mary

A conversation with Timothy George

Timothy George is dean of Beeson Divinity School, an interdenominational, evangelical theological school within a Baptist university (Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama), and an executive editor of Christianity Today***. He is author of the article "The Blessed Evangelical Mary" in the December 2003 issue of*** Christianity Today***, which is a short version of a chapter from*** Mary: Mother of God***, edited by Carl E. Braaten (Eerdmans, 2004).***

In your article, you suggest that Protestant believers have cut themselves off too hastily from Mary, a biblical figure who was at the forefront of the church's imagination from the post-apostolic period through the Reformation and beyond. Could you say a little about this?

I take my bearings from the Reformers. On the one hand, they were very critical of what they considered Marian excesses, and they talked at length about some of the ways in which Mary was given too much veneration, too much almost idolatrous worship, substituting her for Christ himself in some ways at the popular devotional level. On the other hand, they themselves had a very explicit devotion to Mary, especially Luther but also Zwingli and Calvin in their own way. They wanted to give honor to Mary. They wanted to remind the church that she was to be called ***blessed*** in every generation. They honored her as the vehicle of God's grace in giving Jesus to the world and an example of justification by faith alone, because she believed so purely in the gospel. I think we need to go back and reclaim something of the Reformers' more positive view of Mary, insofar as it really is biblical. It really is a part of our own Protestant heritage.

How did Martin Luther's regard for Mary manifest itself in particular beliefs or practices?

Luther continued to celebrate three of the great Marian festivals-Purification, Annunciation, and Visitation. He also continued to use the Ave Maria prayer; that is, the first part of it: "Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." The latter part, "Pray for us sinners in the hour of our death," actually came later, added by the Carthusians after the Reformation. All the Reformers, even the relatively radical Zwingli, continued to say the first part of the ***Ave Maria***. Of course, they did not say it as a prayer to Mary—they made that very clear—but as an acknowledgement of the fact that God's grace was so manifest in the virginal conception and her giving birth to Jesus.

Also, Mary is prominent in some of the hymns that come from the Lutheran Reformation. And if you take it to the next century, obviously this continued with, for example, Bach's ***Magnificat*** and so forth surrounding both the Advent of Christ and also Mary at the cross. So in worship, in liturgy, in theology, despite the Reformers' critique, Mary continued to have a prominent place for early Protestants—I think an appropriately prominent place.

Sometimes there would also be religious plays. This is the one part of the Marian devotion that we still practice, in a way, with the Christmas pageant. That is really a remnant of medieval Marian devotion: it enters the Christian tradition with St. Francis's devotion to the crèche (pp. 22, 24). So today, even we good old-fashioned Southern Baptists always have a Christmas pageant: one of the young ladies dresses up like Mary; sometimes she carries a live baby. This is a good thing, to keep this part of the tradition. But sometimes that's the only acknowledgement that we have, and even that is often done without serious reflection on the meaning of the Incarnation, which is what Advent and Christmas are all about.

If the Christmas pageant is not enough, how else can Protestants *re-connect*, without buying into some of the non-canonical doctrines?

I think a good place to start—perhaps the best place for today's Christians—is with Mary under the cross. Many people over the past year have started here, as they have viewed Mel Gibson's powerful movie, ***The Passion of the Christ***. Here we see the events of the passion through the ***mater dolorosa***, the weeping Mary, witnessing her son's death, cradling his corpse. This Mary stands in solidarity with all believers who also live under the shadow of the Cross, including many whose lives are at risk today because of their witness for Christ.

This Mary was the one disciple of Jesus who didn't flee when all the other disciples fled, but who stayed and accepted the burden of being under the cross to the very end. When we suffer or are persecuted, we can look to this Mary who remained faithful and obedient even in that grim moment. That's the Mary that you see in the famous Gruenewald painting, for example.

But Mary at the cross is important even for those of us not under persecution. Wendell Berry puts it well in his poem "The Way of Pain": "Unless we grieve like Mary / at His grave, giving Him up / as lost, no Easter morning comes."

Is this a sense in which the traditional view of Mary as a forerunner and symbol of the whole church is on the right track?

Yes, Eastern iconographers have it right: they never depict Mary alone, but always with Christ, the apostles, and the saints. The New Testament portrays her as bridging the Old and New Testaments at Jesus' birth, and then at the end of Jesus' life, Mary is both among the last at the cross, and among the first in the Upper Room, for the birth of the church at Pentecost.

And it has not been just the Eastern Orthodox or the early and medieval fathers who have seen Mary as a representative ***par excellence*** of the church. The Reformers noticed that when all of the disciples had fled in fear, Mary remained true to Christ and his word. Her fidelity unto the Cross showed that the true faith could be preserved in one individual. And the Reformers honored her for this, considering her the mother of the (true remnant) church.

What other traditional moments or characterizations of Mary can be helpful for us today as Protestants?

There are two statements that Mary makes in the Gospels, both of which I think are absolutely exemplary for the Christian life.

The first is this: "Let it be unto me according to your Word." This act of surrender, submission, standing in awe before the presence of the Holy, is the very posture of humility and surrender all of us are called to take before God. And Mary's words anticipate Jesus' statement in the garden, "Not my will but yours be done."

Mary's second exemplary saying comes at the wedding at Cana. First Jesus has this little, almost, tussle with his mother, saying, "Woman, my hour has not yet come"—which sounds a little bit gruff, Jesus speaking to his mama like that. But then she says to the wine stewards, "Whatever he says unto you, do it." Well, again, this is the call to, as evangelical Protestants sing, "trust and obey." So from the lips of Mary you've got probably the two most salient words of counsel for living the Christian life.

But there is, especially among Roman Catholics, a continued fascination and popular devotion focused on Mary—prayers to her, apparitions, miracles, and so forth. What's the root of that?

I think much of this falls under the heading of "folk" Catholicism rather than "official" Catholicism. Because when you talk to Catholic theologians often they're, if not embarrassed, a bit reticent to endorse

this. The church itself is very careful not to weigh in on the authenticity of all these apparitions. It will say, "It is ***possible*** Mary may be coming here. Go in faith." But the church doesn't give its approval to all these stories of apparitions.

This cautious attitude stems from Vatican II. At that watershed council in the 1960s, there was a debate over whether Mary should be given a separate chapter on her own in the documents coming out of the council. And it was decided that Mary would be treated in the context of ***Lumen Gentium***, the council's statement on the doctrine of the church. Mariology, in other words, was treated as a part of ecclesiology, rather than being given prominence in a separate doctrinal document. And so I think this reticence about Marian apparitions and miracles stems from this effort to be faithful to the spirit of Vatican II, over against the swelling, surging devotion to Mary that sometimes overwhelms this reticence at places like Lourdes and Fatima.

If Mary is simply a historical figure, dead and gone, why should she be considered part of believers' prayer lives?

Well, I believe that the Virgin Mary is alive and aware in heaven. I don't pray to Mary, but it's not inconceivable to me that Mary knows what's going on—as all the saints and blessed departed may. It's quite possible that they could all be praying for us. But the Bible doesn't say.

Somebody once wrote a letter to me and wondered why evangelicals didn't pray to Mary. And my response is we need all the prayers we can get: Mary, the saints, everybody. But we don't have any biblical warrant for asking for them. And we already have direct access to Jesus. If Mary and the saints want to pray for us in heaven as our friends do here on earth, then wonderful. But there's no biblical warrant for us incorporating this into Christian piety.

But can we learn from that passage in Hebrews 12 about the "cloud of witnesses" that, first, we are being "watched" and, second, Mary and others who have gone on before may be appropriate examples in the faith?

Absolutely in both cases. Yes. Where our tendency may simply be to focus on the flesh-and-blood saints around us, there may be reasons to meditate and be aware of those who have gone before. And Mary is, I think, to be included among the saints in heaven who we should remember and honor and learn from.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

Hail Mary

Her moment of obedience triggered two millennia of reverence.

David Lyle Jeffrey

In the sixth month of her elderly cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy, a young, betrothed Jewish girl was astonished by a visit from an angel. It was the angel Gabriel, and he greeted the girl Mary with a reverential "Hail" and announced that she had "found favor" with God and was to conceive and bear a child to be called Jesus. Shocking enough; but there was more: the conception would occur not by natural means, but by the agency of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35-37).

Mary responded in obedience. She called herself the Lord's "handmaiden" (Luke 1:38)—a humble title that set the tone for the rest of the New Testament accounts and became the foundation for centuries of Marian devotion.

Mary recognized that she had become, like Enoch (Gen. 5:22) and Noah (who "found grace in the eyes of the LORD" [Gen. 6:8]), one "highly favored" by God (Luke 1:28). She saw that she would forever after be recognized as one "blessed ... among women" (28, 42). This blessing was not for her alone, as she sang in her ***Magnificat*** (Luke 1:46-55), but for all God's children. She was the one woman, out of all women, through whom God would fulfill his covenant love and promise.

How improbable! This obscure Jewish girl became, through the work of the Holy Spirit and her willing obedience, the instrument of divine grace. Through her, the majesty and unapproachable holiness of God joined the frail impermanence of fallen humanity. She was the chosen vessel of the Incarnation, at the pivot point of God's saving plan. How could Mary ***not*** loom in the imagination of the church?

The woman and the Word

Although Mary the mother of Jesus is of almost unrivaled importance in historic Christianity, and although her role in salvation history is central, she has a comparatively modest role in the Bible itself. Even where Mary does appear in the Gospels, she often has only a cameo, and in several instances, she does not even get a speaking part.

The gaps and silences in the biblical texts have invited speculation, and writers of a number of apocryphal books (p. 18) purport to reveal details of her biography not found in the canon, inspiring much art and even some doctrine.

The central importance of Mary in Christian tradition, however, is rooted in the Bible. It is in her role as the "mother of Jesus"—or, in Elizabeth's words, "mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43)—that we meet her in the Gospels' pages.

Luke, of course, tells her story most fully (1:26ff; cf. Matthew 1:18ff). There we find not only Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary, but also her poetic response, the prayer-song known as the ***Magnificat*** (because it begins ***"Magnificat anima mea Dominum"*** or "My soul magnifies the Lord").

The Magnificat reveals Mary as, like Miriam and Hannah before her, a divinely inspired poet. This trait

she also shares with her ancestor David. Indeed, her spontaneous poem recalls the Psalms (especially Psa. 111:9), just as Elizabeth's words of greeting to her, "Blessed are you among women," echo : "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly."

The ***Magnificat*** soon entered the liturgy of the church. Among Anglicans it continues to be recited daily at evensong, and Catholics use it in worship, where it is often sung rather than spoken, as in the beautiful version of the Franciscan singer and liturgist John Michael Talbot. In this context all of the congregation joins Mary in praise: "Holy is his name."

Mary's Visitation to Elizabeth, whose fetal child John the Baptist "leaps for joy" in her womb at Mary's approach (1:39-56), completes the story of the Annunciation. Along with Gabriel's ***Ave Maria*** and Mary's ***Magnificat***, the Visitation confirms that the events Mary is caught up in are indeed God's fulfillment of "all that the prophets had spoken." Not surprisingly, along with the plethora of artworks dedicated to the Annunciation, Christian artists have created many images depicting this portentous visit.

Mary the Bible student

Because of the doctrine of the Incarnation, Mary is associated with the fulfillment of the Word of God and thus with Scripture. In many Renaissance paintings the Angel Gabriel finds her reading the Bible. It is historically unlikely that Mary would have had access to a scroll of Torah. Yet artists seeking to symbolize her faithfulness pictured her as a careful student of the Word of God. This attentiveness to God's written Word was not only a sign of her obedience, pious artists thought, but also a preparation for her coming role as the receptacle for his Word made flesh in Jesus.

Moreover, Mary's supposed study of Scripture would make her a model for all those who would seek to harbor Christ in themselves. So, in Roger van der Weyden's (ca. 1400-1464) Annunciation, Mary's bedroom is imagined as a church sanctuary, and her hand is shown raised over the Bible. This makes visual her verbal words of faith and obedience: "Be it unto me according to thy Word" (Luke 1:38). Following this line of thought, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), among others, spoke of Mary as the model and patron saint of all those called to study Scripture.

No painting of the Annunciation captures this theme so well, perhaps, as that of Robert Campin (1375/80-1444), sometimes called "The Master of Flemaille". We see Mary seated on the floor rather than on the bench, absorbed in reading Scripture. Another book, perhaps a commentary, lies on the table beside a kind of book bag and some notes. Behind her hangs the ***talit***, or prayer shawl—presumably of her father Joachim. The vase on the table holds a lily; on it are visible Hebrew letters; the vase symbolizes Mary's virgin womb. The angel Gabriel has just entered the room; the beating of his wings has snuffed out the candle, and Mary is captured, by the painter's brilliance, just as she is beginning to shift her eyes toward Gabriel. Intent upon the Law, she is about to be surprised by Grace. The Scripture cradled in her arms has its binding protected by a cloth, an allusion to the swaddling cloths in which she will wrap the newborn Jesus: this touch renders powerfully transparent the link between the Word and the Word-made-flesh.

She who was foretold

Christians seeking links between Jesus' birth and Old Testament prophecies focused early and often on Mary's unprecedented virgin conception (cf. Luke 1:34). In this, they followed the New Testament sources. Matthew, in his telling of Jesus' birth (1:22-23), brings the promise in Isaiah to bear on Jesus —"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (7:14). The virginity of Mary became one of the crucial tokens for early believers that Jesus was "the Christ" long expected.

Christian readers of the 1st century would have expected Mary herself to be about 12 years of age—the age ascribed to her by two apocryphal gospels and the common age of betrothal. Mary's youthful virginity was nonetheless theologically important, as was her lineage as a scion of the root of Jesse, the house of David. These matters, along with the spare canonical narratives, gave rise to apocryphal accounts of her childhood and parentage.

References to Mary are in other respects slight in the first centuries of the Church. From the time of Irenaeus (d. A.D. 200), Christian apologists combated gnostic heretics by pointing out Mary's significant place in salvation history. This allowed them to clarify the biblical case for Christ's human as well as divine nature, over against the gnostics' spiritualizing of Christ. The formula offered by Irenaeus, that Mary is a "second Eve," becomes standard in Marian literary typology.

In 2nd-century frescoes from Roman catacombs, we see Mary represented as the fulfillment of the "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14. Such representations amount to a statement about the two natures of Christ and the purity of his birth—a statement verbalized and made binding in the Apostles' Creed, the Chalcedonian Council, the Old Roman Baptismal Creed (Hippolytus), and the Niceno-Constantino-politan Creed (A.D. 381).

The trouble with Mary

By the 4th century, apocryphal Mary narratives had become popular among sects such as the Collyridians, whom Epiphanius (310-403) denounced for offering sacrifices of cakes to Mary, saying: "Let Mary be held in honor. Let the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be adored, but let no one adore Mary." Ambrose (ca. 339-397) similarly cautioned that worshippers must not divert to Mary the adoration due only to God: "Mary was the temple of God, not the God of the temple. And therefore he alone is to be worshipped who is working in his temple."

Later controversy concerning Mary's role led to various attempts by the Fathers to clarify her specific virtues. Virginity was already a high ascetic ideal for Jerome (340/2-420), Ambrose, and Augustine (354-430), each of whom readily celebrated Mary as the premiere example of virginity as a spiritual vocation. Jerome wrote his influential ***De perpetua virginitate Beatae Mariae adversus Helvidium*** (A.D. 383) as a reply to Helvidius, who maintained that mention in the Gospels of the "sisters" and "brethren" of Jesus, as well as the statement that Joseph "knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn son" (Matthew 1:25), suggests that the virginity associated with Jesus' conception and birth had evidently given way subsequently to a normal marriage relationship between Mary and Joseph.

Concerned that such a view might rank virginity lower than matrimony, for Jerome an impossible reversion to the patriarchal system of the ancient Hebrews, he uses the ***Pseudo-Gospel of Mary*** and the ***Protevangelium of James*** (ca. 180) to argue three positions that subsequently became central to Marian literature: (1) that Joseph was only apparently, not actually, the husband of Mary—in particular, that he was elderly and remained a virgin (3-8); (2) that the "brethren" of the Lord were actually his cousins, children of another Mary, the wife of Cleophas (9-17); and (3) that virginity is spiritually preferable to wedlock, which entails many hindrances to prayer.

Perpetual Bride

Since very early in the history of the church, Christians have dwelt devotionally on Mary's virginity—often insisting that that virginity was never violated throughout her life. Like other Marian themes, this one had its heyday in the medieval period. Anthony of Padua (1195-1231), who saw Mary as the natural human channel for devotion to the Passion of Christ, championed and codified the idea of the "virgin bride"—a common theme in medieval iconography. Anthony found "types" of Mary's perpetual virginity in many places in Scripture: the burning bush of Moses that burned without being consumed (Exodus 3:2); the fleece of Gideon that, as a sign of God's election, remained untouched by the night-time dew

(Judges 6:37-38); and the "closed gate" of Ezekiel 44:2, which after being entered by "the LORD God of Israel" was never again to be used.

Anthony also found Mary's virginity prefigured in the mountain from which, without hands, is hewn the little stone that destroys the empires of this world (Daniel 2:34) and the "rod out of the root of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1) which, like Aaron's, miraculously blooms.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) had written, in his commentary on the Song of Songs and in a Marian hymn, of the ***"rosa sine spina"***—the rose without thorns. After Bernard, this became as frequent a symbol for Mary's loveliness as the lily was for her purity (as the medieval carol goes, "A roose hath borne a lilly white"). Finally, in one of the most important papal announcements of the Middle Ages, the ***"Unam sanctam"*** of Pope Boniface VIII (1302), Boniface made the bride of Song of Songs 6:8 stand officially for Mary as representative of the church, thus coloring and amplifying much of the other typology.

Especially after the later Middle Ages, Christians saw Mary as a representative of the church in heaven—the "church triumphant"—to whom prayer might be addressed. Even so strict a biblicist as the "morning star of the Reformation," John Wyclif (1324-1384), thought it "impossible that we should obtain the reward of heaven without the help of Mary. There is no sex or age," he wrote, "no rank or position of anyone in the human race which has no need to call upon the help of the Holy Virgin."

Perhaps if England had been more influenced by Wyclif and Luther than by Calvin and Cromwell, even Reformation poets might have shied away less sharply from Mary as a subject for poetry. Calvin's central contention that Mary's "virtues and all her excellences are nothing other than the generosity of God" (***New Testament Commentaries*** 1.22) leads him to say that "to this day we cannot enjoy the blessing brought to us in Christ without thinking at the same time of that which God gave as adornment and honor to Mary, in willing her to be the mother of his only-begotten Son."

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Where'd that come from?
A number of venerable beliefs about Mary originate in a little-known book.

Even those who know little about the veneration of Mary in church history have probably encountered a number of beliefs about her that can't be found in the gospel accounts: the names of her parents, for example, or her supposed "immaculate conception" (birth without sin). Many of these come from a single source: the ***"Protevangelium"*** or ***"Gospel of James,"***

Although rejected as uncanonical in the 6th century, this book provided the material for many of the most important medieval legends, artistic representations, and ultimately theological beliefs about Mary. A Jewish-Christian work of the 2nd century, it is an infancy narrative with extensive elaborations attesting to the sanctity and special powers of Mary.

A very Old Testament birth

"James" tells the story of how Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne, childless in their old age, were blessed by the birth of this special child. If the story has a familiar ring, it is because it closely parallels the biblical account of Isaac.

The ***Protevangelium*** also portrays Joseph as an old man, a widower with grown children, at the time of Mary's espousal to him. Recognizing, her extraordinary purity and set-apartness, Joseph becomes more of a caretaker than a husband to Mary.

A number of early church fathers, including John of Damascus and Sophronicus, cited or commented on this account of Mary's conception, birth, and life, and it evolved during the Middle Ages into various other Lives of Anne. Other apocryphal gospels contributed material, including the ***"Mary" Gospel of Pseudo Matthew***. These narratives focus on Anne's childlessness through 20 years, at which point Joachim became a recluse, for shame. The couple's prayers were eventually answered: an angel appeared to each individually, promising a child who will become known to the whole world. Joachim and Anne were reunited at the Golden Gate (the subject of a painting by Dürer), and eventually the child Mary was born.

In the ***Protevangelium;*** the story resembles that in I Samuel 1, concerning the barren Hannah, whose prayer for fruitfulness is likewise answered ("Hannah" and "Anna" or "Anne" are variants of one name), and Mary is similarly sent up to the temple to be raised as a virgin (an historical improbability), there to help weave a new veil with "true purple," the royal color.

Pure from the first

The ***Protevangelium*** also contributed to the belief in Mary's "immaculate conception": from the first moment of her conception, she was preserved from the stain of original sin. The ***Protevangelium*** draws a parallel between Mary's conception and that of John the Baptist, sanctified in Elisabeth's womb (Luke 1:15), seeming to suggest that the conjugal begetting of Mary was somehow devoid of sinful taint.

While some more elaborate justifications for a "sinless Mary" have been offered, especially in the later Middle Ages, this is still essentially the position of the modern Catholic church: "Sanctifying grace was given to her before [original] sin could have taken effect in her soul."

This view, though often challenged, has had notable champions. In refuting Pelagius, Augustine is among those who declares that while all those justified by grace have known sin, he cannot, "for the honor of the Lord." even question whether Mary might have sinned (***Nature and Grace***, 100.36).

The term "Immaculate Conception," relating strictly to Mary's own conception, appeared in the formal liturgy first in 1854 (Pius IX), though the feast was adopted for the entire Latin church in 1476 (by Sixtus IV).

—David Lyle Jeffrey

Second Eve
Since Christ stands alone as our redeemer, what is Mary's role?

In the late 1990s, some Catholics urged that Mary be acknowledged as I co-redeemer with Christ. The Vatican wisely resisted this move. Doing so would have unduly encroached on Jesus' unique role. There is, however, a middle ground—hinted at by the 2nd-century theologian Irenaeus:

In his work ***Against Heresies***, Irenaeus developed an idea called "recapitulation," based on Paul's words to the church at Ephesus: "To bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:10, NIV). Christ, said Irenaeus, recapitulates the first Adam and replaces sin and death with righteousness and life (see Rom. 5:12-21).

Irenaeus compared the garden events with the cross events in detail, developing a rich typology. Of Christ, he writes, "he by his obedience on the tree renewed and reversed what was done by disobedience in connection with the tree."

Irenaeus related the disobedience of Eve to the obedience of Mary: "The knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith."

For this reason, Irenaeus observed, Mary has become "the cause of salvation, both to herself and the human race."

How are we to interpret the word "cause"? Irenaeus views "cause" as a metaphor and not a doctrine of Mary as co-redeemer. He unequivocally places Christ alone in the role of redeemer of humanity: "He therefore completely renewed all things. ... as our race went down to death ***by a man who was conquered*** we might ascend again to life ***by a man who overcame***."

Perhaps evangelical Protestants need to recognize Mary's rightful place. Certainly she is not the co-redeemer, but with Mary's "May it be to me as you have said" (Lk. 1:38), an act of obedience undid the disobedience of our first parents. So with Elizabeth, evangelicals cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear" (Luke 1:42).

This confession is more than a Protestant neglect but less than the profession of those Catholics who would make her the co-redeemer. Perhaps it is even biblical.

—Robert Webber

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

That Most Familiar Story

How certain details of the nativity became tradition.

Sarah E. Dahl

On a warm, bright Christmas morning in early 16th-century Spain, Thomas of Villanova completed the gospel reading and advanced to the pulpit. The Augustinian friar was preaching on the nativity story found in Luke:

"The simple hasten eagerly to see the newborn king lying in a manger ... they adore and rejoice and mingle their artless praises with the heavenly hymns. ... How the Virgin rejoiced at the devotion of these simple folk! How delighted and gladdened she was by their praises! For by his own announcement God had begun to make known to human beings the mystery of divine condescension which had occurred in her womb for their salvation."

Throughout the Christian era, rich traditions have arisen surrounding the nativity of Jesus, and these traditions have given a prominent role to Mary. As the mother of the Christ, the "Word made flesh," Mary plays a special role in God's plan of salvation. Although Christians differ on this role, she has been honored throughout history for being the handmaiden of the Incarnation over 2,000 years ago.

Place of birth?

Matthew and Luke give few details about Jesus' actual birth. According to the Gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke, Mary was a young Jewish woman, possibly still a teenager, betrothed to a man named Joseph. Although the Gospels say nothing about his age, the church has traditionally viewed Joseph as much older than Mary, in part because of his apparent death before Jesus' ministry.

Whatever their ages (Luther boldly asserted Mary was 15; the early church thought 12), we do know that the couple traveled to Bethlehem, Joseph's ancestral hometown, for a census. Upon their arrival, it became clear that Mary would soon give birth, and yet they could not find a place to stay. The "inn" of most English translations need not be a hotel—it could refer to a relative's home, for instance.

It is likely that Jesus was born not in a wooden barn but in a cave or a shelter built into a hillside. The hills around Bethlehem were dotted with small caves for feeding and boarding livestock. Joseph probably had to lead the donkey bearing Mary down a rocky, jagged path into the mouth of one of these caves as she was experiencing labor contractions. The gospel writers do not mention if anyone else was present, and although Martin Luther, for example, imagined a scandalous lack of help (p. 25), self-delivery was not uncommon in 1st-century Palestine.

The exact site of Jesus' birth is unknown, but by the 3rd century, tradition had established a probable cavern. Constantine's mother, Helena, erected the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem over the small space. Nearby is the Milk Grotto, a small cave with chalky white rocks, where it is believed Mary nursed the baby Jesus as they fled from Herod's soldiers. The story goes that she spilled a few drops of milk that whitened the rocks. To this day, Christian and Muslim women visit the Milk Grotto and ask Mary to help them conceive and nurse.

Migrants and astrologers

The birth of the Messiah was heralded by two unlikely groups. Shepherds were often feared as a dangerous migrant group on the margins of society. The Magi were probably eastern astrologers who had followed their pagan calculations to the birthplace of the Jewish Messiah. Mary welcomed these visitors and the praise they brought to her newborn baby; Luke tells us she "treasured" their words and "pondered them in her heart."

Early Christians were quick to identify the nativity scene as a reversal of Isaiah 1:3. The prophet announced that "the ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." Origen and Augustine, among others, affirmed that in the guise of the shepherds and the wise men, humanity had literally returned to its master's crib.

Mother of God—or only of Jesus?

Although the story of the nativity makes clear that Mary is the physical mother of Jesus, the nature of her motherhood was hotly disputed in the Christological controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries. Was she in fact the Mother of the second person of the Holy Trinity, or was she simply the mother of Christ's ***human*** nature?

How were Christians to honor her?

As early as the 2nd century, Bishop Irenaeus wrote, "the Virgin Mary ... being obedient to His Word, received from the angel the glad tidings that she would bear God." Two centuries later, Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria taught that the Word of God was "inexpressibly, inexplicably, incomprehensibly and eternally ... born in time here below, of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God."

However, in the early 5th century, the influential Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius, began to challenge this way of speaking about Mary. Around 428 he preached a famous sermon attacking the use of the term ***Theotokos***, or God-bearer, to describe the mother of Jesus.

It would be more fitting, Nestorius alleged, to call her ***Christotokos***, the one who bore the man Jesus Christ. To refer to her as the Bearer of God was to exalt her unduly. A human woman could not possibly birth the eternal Word: "No one can bring forth a son older than herself!"

Nestorius' position was rejected at the Council of Ephesus in 431, which decreed that Mary was in fact the one who gave birth to the second person of the Trinity in history. The bishops claimed it is fitting and proper to call her the ***Theotokos***, not because she was the "origin" of God, but because the baby she delivered in Bethlehem possessed a human nature mysteriously joined to the eternal nature of God. To reject the term "Mother of God," they argued, is to deny the full divinity of Jesus.

Catholic and Orthodox believers continue to celebrate this understanding of the nativity on the first of January with a feast honoring the ***Theotokos***.

Painless labor and the Christmas crib

Once Mary's status as Mother of God was firmly established within the church, devotion to her and contemplation of her earthly life increased among pious Christians. Mystical visions and art celebrating the nativity spread, elaborating on the biblical story.

Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373) experienced mystical visions of the nativity which she recorded in her ***Revelations***, and which fueled popular representation of the nativity from the 14th century through the Renaissance.

Bridget described Mary's labor as painless: since Mary had been cleansed of original sin in the Immaculate Conception, she did not suffer from Eve's curse. Rather, "in an instant, she brought forth her Son, from whom there emanated such an inexpressible radiance that the sun could not be compared with it." Renaissance paintings of the nativity, which show Mary and her child shining in the center of the canvas, owe much of their visual appeal to Bridget's revelations.

St. Francis of Assisi had his own mystical experience of the nativity when he celebrated Christmas mass in a small cave in Greccio, Italy, using a crib for an altar. As he preached over a carved image of the baby Jesus, Francis experienced a vision of the Christ child in the flesh and was awed by the mystery of what Mary experienced at the moment of the Incarnation. Because of her obedience, the world received the presence of God encased in the helpless flesh of a baby. As the story spread, so did the tradition of placing cribs in Christian homes at Christmastime.

Still highly favored

In Protestant churches after the Reformation, Mary played a less central role in celebrations of the nativity, despite the fact that Luther and Calvin maintained a high view of her place in salvation history. Emphasis was increasingly placed on the Christ child alone, rather than on his mother who birthed God into the world.

Nevertheless, all Christians appreciate the important role Mary played in the life of Jesus. Though he was fully God, Jesus was born from Mary and it was from Mary that he received his humanity. She experienced intimately, in her own body, the mystery of the Incarnation. In a dank cavern, recovering from labor among the straw and squalor of penned animals, the "highly favored" Mary became the first human creature to touch the face of God.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

Mary & Her Baby: Luther's View

The Reformer loved to dwell on the nativity. Here are a few of his thoughts.

Mary & Her Baby: Luther's View

On the whole Nativity story: "We must both read and meditate upon the Nativity. ... There is such richness and goodness in this Nativity that if we should see and deeply understand, we should be dissolved in perpetual joy. Wherefore Saint Bernard declared there are here three miracles: that God and man should be joined in this Child; that a mother should remain a virgin; that Mary should have such faith as to believe that this mystery would be accomplished in her. ... Truly it is marvelous in our eyes that God should place a little child in the lap of a virgin and that all our blessedness should lie in him. And this Child belongs to all mankind. God feeds the whole world through a Babe nursing at Mary's breast. This must be our daily exercise: to be transformed into Christ, being nourished by this food."

On Mary: "There was a poor young wife, Mary of Nazareth, among the meanest dwellers of the town, so little esteemed that none noticed the great wonder that she carried."

On the journey: "How many great ladies and their daughters there were at that time, living in luxury, while the mother of God, on foot, in midwinter trudged her weight across the fields! How unequal it all was!"

On the birth: "There she was without preparation: no light, no fire, in the dead of night, in thick darkness. No one came to give the customary assistance. The guests swarming in the inn were carousing, and no one attended to this woman. ... There was the maid of fifteen years bringing forth her first-born without water, fire, light, or pan, a sight for tears!"

On the newborn Jesus: "They must have marveled that this Child was the Son of God. He was also a real human being. Those who say that Mary was not a real mother lose all the joy. He was a true Baby, with flesh, blood, hands and legs. He slept, cried, and did everything else that a baby does only without sin."

On Mary after the birth: "Think, women, there was no one there to bathe the Baby. No warm water, nor even cold. No fire, no light. The mother was herself midwife and the maid. The cold manger was the bed and the bathtub. Who showed the poor girl what to do? She had never had a baby before. I am amazed that the little one did not freeze. Do not make of Mary a stone. It must have gone straight to her heart that she was so abandoned. She was flesh and blood, and must have felt miserable-and Joseph too-that she was left in this way, all alone, with no one to help, in a strange land in the middle of winter. Her eyes were moist even though she was happy, and aware that the Baby was God's Son and the Savior of the world."

"Mary was not only holy. She was also the mother of the Lord. With trembling and reverence, before nestling him to herself, she laid him down, because her faith said to her, 'He will be "the Son of the Highest."' No one else on earth had this faith, not even Joseph, for although he had been informed by the angel the word did not go to his heart as to the heart of Mary, the mother."

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

Mary in the Imagination of the Church

Mary in the Bible

- Gabriel announces her election as mother of the Messiah (Luke 1: 26-38)
- she visits Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56)
- she travels to Bethlehem and gives birth to Jesus (Luke 2:1-20)
- she presents Jesus at the Temple to Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:21-39)
- she discovers Jesus discoursing in the Temple with the elders (Luke 2:40-52)
- she asks Jesus to help the wine stewards at the Cana wedding (John 2:1-11)
- she visits Jesus with his brothers (Matt. 12:46; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21)
- at the foot of the cross, she hears her son's last words to her (John 19:26-27)
- she experiences Pentecost with the apostles (Acts 1:14)

Apocryphal Books

early 4th c.: Earliest manuscript of the ***Protevangelium of James***. Tells the events preceding Mary's birth through the Massacre of the Innocents.

5th century: Earliest accounts of the Death of Mary or ***Transitus Mariae***. Appeared in Latin as the ***Pseudo-Melito*** and the ***Pseudo-Joseph of Arimathea***.

7th or 8th c.: The ***Gospel of the Pseudo-Matthew*** appears, with the ***Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*** following in the 9th century. These amplify the ***Protevangelium*** with miracles and teachings. Pseudo-Matthew was the principal source for medieval French and English mystery plays.

high medieval period: Whole cycles of "the Life of Our Lady" develop, condemned at Trent (1545-1563).

Theology

2nd century: In his ***Against Heresies***, Irenaeus depicts Mary as a "second Eve," a foundational statement for the later development of Christian theology especially on Mary as a representative or symbol of the church.

431: Against Nestorius, who called Mary only "***Christotokos***"—mother of Christ—the Council of Ephesus affirms that Mary is "***Theotokos***"—mother of God. This supports and extends the devotional cult of Mary in the church.

early 8th century: Germanus of Constantinople (d. 733) says, "There is no one to whom the gift of grace is given except through Mary." This is the earliest explicit testimony to the idea that Mary dispenses graces to the church on earth.

8th century: The title Mediatrix, as applied to the Mother of God (indicating a belief that Mary shared in the saving mission of her son), is first used by Andrew of Crete (d. 740), Germanus of Constantinople (d. 733), and Tarasius (d. ca. 807).

9th century: From the East, the title "Mediatrix" is introduced into the West through a translation by Paul the Deacon of the ***Life of Theophilus***, in which the term is used. From the 12th century on, it is applied to Mary with ever-increasing frequency until it becomes generally accepted in the Roman Catholic Church in the 17th century.

12th century: Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) popularizes the teaching that Mary is dispenser of grace to Christians, which becomes widely accepted during the Middle Ages. His statement "God has willed that we should have nothing that did not pass through the hands of Mary" was oft-repeated in that period.

late 14th century: The title "Coredemptrix" first appears in Catholic literature.

1477: Sixtus IV, in his apostolic constitution ***Cum praecelsa***, becomes the first pope to allude to the "spiritual motherhood" of Mary: as she was mother of Christ, she remains the mother of all members of his "body."

19th century: Cardinal Newman rediscovers Irenaeus's image of Mary as the new Eve, leading to renewed attention to the Mary-church analogy and typology.

1954: Pius XII orders the universal observance of Mary's queenship (and dispensing of all graces to the faithful) on May 31.

1956: In his encyclical ***Haurietis aquas***, Pius XII affirms that "in bringing about the work of human Redemtion, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was, by the will of God, so indissolubly associated with Christ, that our salvation proceeded from the love and sufferings of Jesus Christ intimately joined with the love and sorrows of His Mother."

1963: Vatican Council II votes against dealing with Mary in a separate document, deciding instead to speak of Mary in the document on the Church (***Lumen Gentium***). The title of her chapter, "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church," placed her in close relationship with her Son and with his Mystical Body.

Devotion

1st through 7th century: Marian devotion focuses on reverent admiration of Mary's holiness as Mother of God (***Theotokos***)

2nd century: "Born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary" used in baptismal creeds.

2nd-4th century: Art of the catacombs and the early apocrypha testify to the increasing veneration of the Mother of Jesus.

4th century: Greek manuscript fragment asks the "Mother of God" for protection.

4th century: Some churches, including Nazareth's Church of the Annunciation, are dedicated to Mary.

4th century: Athanasius (d. 373) proposes the Virgin Mary as an example to dedicated virgins, and Ambrose (d. 397) devotes a series of writings to Mary as model of Christian virginity.

early 5th century: Severian of Gabala (d. after 408) calls the praise of Mary a daily custom-she is called on before the apostles and martyrs.

early 5th century: Sixtus III (432-440) rebuilds St. Mary Major in Rome to commemorate the Ephesus Council's ***Theotokos*** decision.

early 5th century: St. Nilus (d. 430) says the praise of Mary is found in every land and language.

5th and 6th century: Lead seals bear the inscription ***servus Mariae***-servant (or slave) of Mary.

5th century: A "remembrance of Mary" feast is inaugurated, corresponding to the ***dies natalis*** (birthday into heaven) of the martyrs. Part of the Christmas liturgy, perhaps on December 26 at first, then on January 1.

mid-6th century: Feast of the Annunciation (Mar. 25) inaugurated.

late 6th century: Feast of the Nativity of Mary (Sept. 8) inaugurated.

late 6th century: Emperor Maurice (d. 602) makes universal in his territory the feast of the "falling-asleep of the Mother of the Lord," the later Assumption feast (Aug. 15).

Early 7th century: Eastern homilist Sophronius (d. 638) extols Mary's power of intercession.

7th century: Eastern monks introduce the main Marian feasts to the West.

8th century: Presentation of Mary feast inaugurated in the East.

8th century in the East: The feast of the "conception of St. Anne" celebrated; later developed into the Immaculate Conception in the West.

Late 8th c.: Alcuin promotes Saturday as Mary's day.

12th c.: Marian devotion increasingly focuses on Mary's compassion on Calvary and, based on the doctrine of her assumption into heaven, her present assistance to all Christians.

12th c.: The "Hail Mary" prayer first used, and paired with the Rosary.

12th-13th c.: "The Age of the Virgin": a sharp increase in literary and artistic treatments of Mary, associated with a focus on the unity of the church on earth and in heaven (the saints) and a growing emphasis on the humanity of Jesus-the passion, his real presence in the Eucharist, etc.

13th c.: Cathedrals dedicated to Mary.

13th c.: Francis and Dominic start special devotion to Mary.

13th c.: Mary figures prominently in the theology of Bonaventure (d. 1274), Albert the Great (d. 1280), Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) and Duns Scotus (d. 1308).

Late 14th c.: Feasts of the Presentation of Mary (Nov. 21) and the Visitation (July 2; now May 31) introduced in the West.

15th c.: The "Hail Mary" attains its current form.

15th c.: Meditation on the life of Mary, as on the life of Jesus, increasingly prominent, along with increased attention to attaining a deep, rich inner life.

16th c.: The Reformers do not completely reject veneration of Mary, but limit it to imitation of the humble, obedient, Virgin Mother of the Gospels. The Reformers did reject calling upon any saint, including Mary, for assistance.

1545-1563: Council of Trent defends the cult of Mary and the saints, including the idea that they can intercede for Christians.

16th c.: Marian associations begin to develop: the first is the Sodality of Our Lady, founded under Jesuit guidance in 1563.

17th century: Especially in Spain and France, new focus on Mary's "queenship" and imitation of the child Jesus in his dependence on Mary (sometimes called "slavery" to Mary and practiced complete with chains).

17th and 18th c.: Popular exaggerations of Mary's intercessory role lead to dispute within the Catholic church.

19th c.: Apostolic zeal recognized as an authentic manifestation of dedication to Mary. Missionary orders founded, dedicated to Mary.

19th and 20th c.: Shrines to Mary appear at Lourdes (1858) and LaSalette (1846) in France and at Knock (1879) in Ireland. In the 20th c., this continued with Fatima (1917) and others. Other sites of claimed revelations were rejected by the church and public devotions there forbidden. A warning on these matters was issued in 1951.

World War I: Benedict XV addresses many appeals to the Queen of Peace.

1931: Pius XI commemorates the 1500th anniversary of the Council of Ephesus.

20th century: The Catholic church holds many Marian congresses and sponsors pilgrimages to many Marian shrines.

Iconography
Eastern types:

The ***Odigitria*** or Our Lady Guide of Wayfarers, reputedly Luke's portrait of Mary, shows Mary standing with a Christ child who blesses the viewer, or enthroned, often with an angel on either side.

The ***Orans*** or Praying Madonna is both ancient and widespread.

In the ***Deesis***, Mary is at the right and John the Baptist at the left of the enthroned Christ ***Pantokrator***-that is, "all powerful." These are often found in apses and in tombs.

Other Eastern types that are more folkloric-appearing less in churches than in the folk art-include the Nursing Madonna or ***Galaktotrophousa***, which appears early in Egypt-an adaptation of Isis nursing Horus; the ***Eleousa*** or Virgin of Tenderness; and the ***Glykophilousa***, depicting the Christ child kissing his mother.

Western types:

The West often borrowed its types of Mary from the East.

The ***Maria Regina***, showing Mary crowned as an empress, originated in the West in the 6th century.

The ***Majestas Mariae***, Virgin in Majesty, is found enthroned in Roman churches' apses and in Romanesque statuary, and on the tympanums of cathedrals.

In the High Middle Ages (12th-13th c.), the Italian masters increasingly portrayed Mary as the epitome of idealized womanly beauty. Their treatments are so numerous that the term "Madonna" has been adopted in other languages.

Other Western types are linked with a place, group, or church. She has been treated symbolically as a representation of the church, ***Ecclesia***, and the Woman of the Apocalypse.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

Temple & Sword

At the temple, long before the cross, her son's cruel death pierced Mary.

Sarah Hinlicky Wilson

Luke's elegant two-volume literary work, the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, is shaped, plot-wise, like a 45 degree angle. At the vertex, the point of departure, is a Jewish girl of a Jewish family, keeping the feasts, expecting the consolation of Israel. She lives within pilgrimage distance of Jerusalem, not obligated like the men to attend the thrice-yearly observances in the holy city, yet pious and devoted to the God who brought her ancestors out of Egypt. Their collective story long antedates the occupying Romans, who are but another checkmark on a long list of oppressors—at this point, anyway, no worse than Philistines or Assyrians or Babylonians.

The temple of the Jews dates back 1,000 years (as the center of righteous worship, if not the building itself), and it is this temple that marks the distance along Luke's angle-shaped story, as the one axis veers further and further from the other. By the end of the historian's tale, the temple, soon to be obliterated, has been left behind by persecuted Christians who are driven away from the center of Israel's faith in order to convert the nations. The angle opens wide into an embrace that must, of necessity, include all the Gentiles. But trace its lines back, back before the expulsion, before the trial of the Messiah, the cleansing and the controversies, and you find the young Mary with her husband Joseph, presenting the child Jesus, just as Zechariah prophesied in that same Temple months before.

A temple-dwelling girl

In the popular imagination of the church, this is not Mary's first visit to the temple. Apocryphal though they are, the 2nd-century Greek ***Protevangelium of James*** and its 8th-century Latin copycat the ***Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*** fill in details of Mary's early life that all the canonical documents pass over in silence. In these colorful tales, Mary's parents Anne and Joachim suffer the typical childlessness of an Old Testament couple. When they are at last granted a daughter, they gratefully dedicate her to the Lord's service. The festival of ***her*** presentation in the temple was brought to the Western church from the East in 1372 and is still celebrated on November 21st. The three-year-old heroine dances at her presentation and then moves in. Actually, this is historically unthinkable, though Jewish propriety once more gains the upper hand when, at the age of 12, Mary is moved out again lest her womanly issue contaminate the holy precinct's purity.

Meanwhile, during her residence, the ***Protevangelium*** reports that Mary is fed by an angel, spins thread, and weaves scarlet and purple cloth for the temple veil, the same veil that will be torn in two when her son dies. ***Pseudo-Matthew*** contributes the fresh detail of her weaving the seamless tunic that Jesus wore, first fitted for childhood and then magically growing along with the young Savior's body. Just as Mary clothed Jesus in flesh in her womb, so she clothed him in garments of lesser metaphysical import. As a result, iconography occasionally depicts Mary with spindle in hand. Even the floating balloons of gossamer that transport newly hatched spiders are called in French ***fils de la Vierge***—the threads of the Virgin (which includes a nice pun, since ***fils*** also means "son").

Bringing the burning ember

But back to the canon. At the time of Mary's son's presentation, the family of three assembled, most likely, at the gate of Nicanor, on the eastern side of the Court of Women. There the wives of Israel came for their

ritual purification after childbirth, at the limit of the temple grounds extended to women. Mary's devotion is evident, in good Jewish fashion, according to her keeping of the law: "And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest ... a burnt offering and ... a sin offering, and he shall offer it before the Lord and make atonement for her. Then she shall be clean from the flow of her blood" (Leviticus 12:6-7). The offering, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons," betrays her poverty, for she cannot afford a year-old lamb.

Certainly Mary knows already that her son is set apart for the Lord, conceived in her virginity and birthed to a choir of angels. But even according to the law, without the celestial fanfare, her son is deemed holy, spared from the hand of death as a contrast to Pharaoh's eldest. Thus spake the Lord: "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine" (Exodus 13:2; cf. vv. 12, 15). Out of the nine times in the whole gospel that Luke uses the expression "the law of the Lord" or the "law of Moses," five of them appear in this report of Jesus' presentation and early childhood. The message cannot be mistaken: Jesus is a Jew and the son of Jews. His prophetic career begins where it ought, in the Temple, in his mother's arms, dedicated to the service of the Lord. In Orthodox churches, this is expressed by the image of Mary's arms as a pair of tongs, handing the holy burning coal over to the prophet, as in Isaiah's vision. As Joseph the Hymnographer wrote, "Thou camest to the temple like mystical tongs, bearing the mystical Ember, O all-pure one." Here, as of yet, there is only the obedience and faith of the covenant, no controversy.

The seven maternal sorrows Of course, there is a hint of what is to come. Joyful Simeon blesses the Lord that at last he may depart in peace, but he warns the parents that no such peace awaits them and their compatriots. This child is destined for the rise and fall of many in Israel, a "disputed" sign, hard to explain, impossible to ignore, exposing many secret thoughts. The faith of the mother does not grant her immunity from the trial ahead. A sword will pierce your soul also, your very life, the prophet warns her.

"Dear Mary, you have borne a Son. The world, the flesh, and the devil will be against him," paraphrases Luther, adding his own remark, "What a congratulation this was to offer a mother of six weeks!"

The evocative power of this one verse (2:35) eventually led to the piety of Our Lady of Sorrows. From the end of the 11th century through the 14th, the cult of the ***mater dolorosa*** flourished in Italy, England, France, Spain, and the Netherlands. In time, Pope Paul V (1605-1621) fixed the number of the Virgin's sorrows at seven—they had previously ranged in number from 5 to 15-the first of which was Simeon's prophecy.

The iconography, suitably, shows the virgin mother with seven swords embedded in her heart. The same sacrifice of her son, presiding over his presentation in the temple, has also led to the image of Mary as a priest.

She not only presents a pleasing offering to the Lord in dedicating her son to his service, but makes God present in creaturely matter within her womb, much like the priest making the divine body and blood out of the eucharistic bread and wine.

In Luke's telling, the sword piercing Mary's soul arrives far sooner than the crucifixion—in fact, there is no mention of Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross in the third gospel at all. It occurs in the very next scene, the single account of Jesus' boyhood in the New Testament. If the presentation foreshadows Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, his loss and re-discovery in the temple mirrors the resurrection.

It is Passover—the boy will not return to Jerusalem until his final Passover as a grown man—and after the feast, the child is lost and sought for three days. Mary scolds him for his disappearance, complaining of how they have been seeking him all this time. Jesus responds that she should have known where to find him, just as the angel chides the women at the tomb for seeking the living among the dead. In Luke's parlance, being found is the same as being saved from death: the father says that his prodigal son "was

dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

Already Mary must learn that the salvation to be brought by her son means a loss to herself. The 2nd-century apocryphal infancy gospel of Thomas interpolates into this story (after a long and disturbing series of episodes in which a malicious little Jesus kills off anyone who so much as bumps into him on the road) praise to Mary from the temple rabbis: "You more than any woman are to be congratulated, for God has blessed the fruit of your womb! For we've never seen nor heard such glory and such virtue and wisdom." But these teachers who are now amazed by his wise answers will someday turn on him.

It is no light burden to be the mother of the Messiah. The cross casts its shadow on the infant's earliest days, and so inevitably on his mother as well. Even the temple, the dwelling place of the Most High God, is no refuge. Although the angel called Mary "full of grace," she is truly a lady of sorrows as well.

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What is the rosary and how does it work?
This early Marian practice is really more about Jesus than about his mother:

The old story goes like this: during the fight against the Albigensian heresy in Toulouse, St. Dominic (1171-1221) saw an apparition of Mary while praying. Mary told him to meditate on the life, death, and glory of her Son, which would remedy the evils he lamented. Dominic did so, eventually formalizing the prayer as the rosary.

Most historians believe, however, that the rosary was actually developed in the 11th and 12th centuries. As the medieval church dwelt more on the events of Jesus' life and death, they elaborated prayers on these events.

But devices similar to the rosary date back to' the 2nd and 3rd century, when the desert monks used first stones, and eventually beads on a string, to count their prayers.

How it's done

Since the second Vatican council in the early 1960s, the rosary's popularity has dipped significantly, and many Catholics under age 50 rarely if ever use it in prayer. Some don't even know how it's done. Books like Alice Camille's ***The Rosary*** (Acta, 2003) and Scott Hahn's ***Hail, Holy Queen*** (Doubleday, 2001) offer easy-to-follow instructions, and Catholics eager to learn more about their heritage are turning them into best-sellers.

The rosary is essentially a group of guided meditations, called "Mysteries," on the lives of Christ and his mother. The mysteries come in four categories: ***joyful*** (Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Presentation, and finding in the Temple), ***luminous*** (baptism, miracle at Cana, proclamation of the Kingdom, transfiguration, and Eucharist), ***sorrowful*** (agony in the garden, scourging at the pillar, crowning with thorns, carrying of the cross, and Crucifixion); and ***glorious*** (Resurrection, Ascension, descent of the Holy Spirit, assumption of Mary, and crowning of Mary). Eighteen of the twenty mysteries are about Jesus and are based on the Gospels or the book of Acts. Five—the "luminous"—were added in 2002 by Pope John Paul II.

To pray the rosary, the worshiper first makes the sign of the cross; then, while holding the crucifix at one end of the rosary, she recites the Apostles' Creed. From then on, whenever she encounters a large bead, she prays the Lord's Prayer. Small beads signify the Hail Mary, woven from the words of Gabriel and Elizabeth: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus," with the latter addition: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of death." The space following a small bead stands for the doxology: "Glory to the Father,

and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever." That is the basic form, though many Catholics add favorite prayers.

A Christ-centered practice

What do the mysteries have to do with the Hail Marys? The pray-er ***thinks*** about the biblical scenes while ***saying*** the prayers. A rosary includes five decades, or sets of ten small beads, each preceded by a large bead and followed by a space. After saying the Lord's Prayer at the beginning of each decade, the pray-er announces the mystery for meditation. Then, while repeating ten Hail Marys, she focuses her attention on one of the 20 scenes, moving on to the next mystery when she comes to the next decade. By the time she completes the circle, she will have meditated on five episodes in Jesus' life. Catholics are encouraged to meditate on one set of mysteries each day-the joyful mysteries on Mondays and Saturdays, the sorrowful mysteries on Tuesdays and Fridays, the glorious mysteries on Wednesdays and Sundays, and the luminous mysteries on Thursdays.

Catholics maintain that authentic devotion to Mary is praise of her Son. The rosary helps believers focus on the life of Christ with the help of his mother and her perspective. When we pray the rosary, writes Catholic educator Alice Camille, "we seek the engagement of thought, imagination, emotion and desire in order to move from the state of simple reflection to union with Christ. Since Mary was the first person to experience that union, who can more perfectly show us the way?"

—the editors

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

The Hidden Years

What did Mary do during the youth and ministry of her son?

Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner

At the announcement that Jesus would be born, at his birth, and then again at his crucifixion, Mary of Nazareth is a central figure. Indeed, though she has become almost invisible to many Protestants today, she was clearly the most important woman in the life of Jesus. The doctrine of the Incarnation—accepted by Protestants as by all Christians—reminds us just ***how*** important.

During the years of her son's ministry, however, Mary recedes into the background. Between Mary's losing-and-finding of Jesus as a boy at the Temple and the scene of her son's Crucifixion, she appears only twice: at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-10) and at the teaching of the multitudes (Matthew 12:46-47; Mark 3:31; Luke 8:19).

These Biblical narratives are the only canonical witnesses to Mary's whereabouts during this period, and they offer only brief sightings of her. At this point in the Bible narrative when Mary is seemingly most invisible, however, we still find her continuing to play an indispensable role.

The teacher's teacher

Throughout his ministry, Jesus functioned as a teacher in a classroom without walls. "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you," the scribes and Pharisees remarked in Matthew 12:38. Jesus refrained from giving them a decisive sign of his identity at this time. Rather, he taught with parables and with visuals. He taught by healing a person with a withered hand, by curing another who was blind and mute, by stilling a storm. He used familiar, everyday things in his teachings: a lamp under a jar, a sower and some seeds, a tree and its fruit, weeds among wheat. Jesus was a mesmerizing ***Rabboni***. How did he develop this compelling, down-to-earth style of teaching?

In meditating on this question—and the larger issues related to Jesus' humanity (for example, What did he know and when did he know it?)—some have dwelt on Mary's role as Jesus' first teacher. Rembrandt depicts Mary leaning over the crib of the infant Jesus with a copy of the Torah in her hand (facing page). A 15th-century engraving titled "The Holy Family on the Way to School"(above) shows Mary holding Jesus' hand as he carries a tablet with the words, "I am Jesus, Holy One, Savior." Tellingly, Joseph walks in the background, but it is Mary who pulls Jesus along to school, perhaps to the synagogue. Jesus may have learned carpentry skills from Joseph, but it is reasonable to think that he learned some things about teaching from Mary, as well as from the rabbis in the local synagogue and in the Jerusalem temple.

After he "grew in wisdom and stature," Jesus left the care of his mother, as did all young Jewish men. Yet he did travel with her at times—to the wedding at Cana, for example. Mary was the primary invited guest at the celebration, but "Jesus and the disciples had also been invited" (John 2:2). And this became a teaching moment for Jesus, with Mary serving as a catalyst or a prompter.

"Do whatever he tells you"

The story is familiar: The wine ran out, and Mary turned to Jesus for his help. She recognized the need of the assembled wedding guests, possibly the embarrassment of the bridegroom, and she interceded on

their behalf. Jesus' response to Mary was cryptic, confusing—seemingly harsh: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come" (2:4). This retort is similar to the one Jesus gave the scribes and Pharisees when they asked for a sign. Jesus was saving his sign for the moment of the Resurrection; his death would be "his hour."

Mary obviously knew Jesus was teaching, even through this curt response. She also knew something else was about to happen, because she commanded the servants of the bride and bridegroom: "Do whatever he tells you." Jesus asked the servants to fill six stone jars with water. Upon drawing out the liquid, the steward declared the new wine to be better than the previous. Mary's importance in the scene was this: she served as a go-between or mediator to her son, on behalf of a needy people.

Some Christians continue to view Mary today as a mediator (or, using the feminine, "mediatrix")—an intercessor between Christ and humankind. For these believers, Mary is an advocate for people's needs today, just as she was in Cana of Galilee. They see her in the cloud of witnesses mentioned in Hebrews 12:1-2, encouraging Christians to continue in the race set before them. Some traditions place her in a special category among the cloud of witnesses and pray directly to her.

Mary's extended family

All children are embarrassed with their parents at some point in their development. When Jesus' mother and brothers came to him as he taught the crowds, he did not claim them as family. Rather, he said: "My mother and brothers [and sisters] are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:19; Mark 3:31; Matthew 12:46-47). Was Jesus trying to disassociate from them?

Once again, Jesus the Teacher is offering a lesson that is at the heart of the gospel message. Jesus is inviting those who hear and do the word of God to become members of a newly constructed family. This family is constituted through God's gracious adoption of those of us who accept Jesus as Firstborn of this family. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance. We are adopted as sons and daughters of God. In some ways, Mary was used as a foil or as a prompt for Jesus to introduce this new image of family. Biological children had always been the norm for family. In the Hebrew Scriptures, having children was a type of resurrection. Childlessness or barrenness was a curse and a type of death. From the Cross, Jesus connected Mary and John as mother and son. This was another visual aid to illustrate a new kind of family—the spiritual family that Jesus was birthing through his death.

Educators know today that there are different types of learners: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile. We witness Jesus, perhaps out of his experience learning at the knee of his physical mother, Mary, reaching out to all forms of learners to help them understand these life-changing truths.

Where is the mother?

While I was preparing for my New Testament doctoral exam, I was discussing the family imagery in Ephesians with Professor Oscar Cullmann of Basel, Switzerland. This clever New Testament scholar listened to me talk about the father, son, children imagery in the Greek text of Ephesians. The imagery of God is as a Father who adopts children. There are children of light, sons of wrath, sons of disobedience, household codes, and a family of faith. Professor Cullmann got very quiet. Then he said, "Where's the mother?"

To put in context the absence of "mother" language in the book of Ephesians, we must remember how the cult of the Great Mother dominated religious devotion in the Mediterranean area before and during the time of Christ. One manifestation was the worship of Artemis, the many-breasted goddess, mentioned in the book of Acts. Paul himself was accused of interfering with Artemis worship. It is probable that the absence of the feminine dimension in Ephesians' "family of faith," for example, is an

attempt to uplift the Great Father (Ephesians 3:14) from whom every family comes.

It is reasonable to believe that as 1st-century Christians reacted to the Mediterranean cult of the Great Mother, they downplayed the role of the mother of Jesus. Her importance as the mother of God was certainly a "given" to 1st-century Christians. And later believers continued to meditate and expand upon her role, placing her at the center of the disciples—eventually, in an exalted role as symbol and epitome of the church—even where Scripture was silent.

Reacting against the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox elevation of Mary, we Protestants have lost a real dimension of the gospel tradition. As we seek to understand more deeply Jesus' person, his teachings, and his spiritual family the church, we may need to find again this woman who is sometimes hidden from us. We do not have to elevate Mary to the Trinity. We do need to remember and enunciate that she is blessed among women.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

Mary at the Cross

From three little verses in John has come a rich tradition of song and art.

Patrick Henry Reardon

Along with Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:26-38), her Visitation to Elizabeth (1:39-56), and Jesus' birth and infancy (2:7,16; Matthew 2:11), one other biblical scene depicting the mother of Jesus is especially prominent in the history of Christian art: Jesus' death on the cross (John 19:25-27).

Alone among the evangelists, it is John who informs us that "standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (ESV).

Tender meditations

Over the centuries this scene of immense tenderness immediately preceding the death of Jesus has inspired, not only many Byzantine ikons, works of statuary beyond count, and numerous paintings in every generation, but also a wealth of hymns penned and sung by Christians in both East and West. The poetry and imagery of these diverse hymns share the common purpose of bringing the Christian imagination into a vivid awareness of the pain and dereliction of Jesus' mother standing by his cross, as he entrusts her to the care of "the disciple whom he loved."

What has prompted Christians to think so long and lovingly on this theme?

The emotional impulse to dwell on the sorrow of Jesus' mother at the foot of the Cross had its root in the very love symbolized by the Cross. Simply put, Jesus died because he loved us. And such sacrificial love elicited a responding love from the believing heart. Christian emotional response to the sufferings of Jesus, then, has traditionally been deep and abiding. We sense this in the devout tenderness of Paul's assertion, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who ***loved me*** and gave himself ***for me***" (Gal. 2:20 ESV). Paul was one of the first of those Christians who, from the very beginning, have demonstrated a sustained, overwhelming disposition to "survey the wondrous Cross where the young Prince of Glory died."

Christians have always known, of course, that the victory of the Cross is inseparable from the Lord's Resurrection. They have never been in doubt that Jesus was "***raised*** for our justification." Yet, their warmest sentiments have traditionally been directed to the harsher fact that He "was ***delivered up*** for our offenses" (Romans 4:25). From the beginning, that is to say, they were disposed to dwell in imagination, distress, and deep empathy on the thought of what Jesus endured on their behalf. Even his wounds were treasured, because He "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sin, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

Entering the sorrowful scene

What did this sort of reaction look like in the early church? We have an answer from the eyewitness account of the nun Egeria, a pilgrim from Gaul who recorded her experience of the Good Friday services in Jerusalem probably held around 381-4:

"The entire time from the sixth to the ninth hour is occupied by public readings. They all concern the things that Jesus suffered; first they have the psalms on this theme, then the Apostolic Epistles and Acts which deal with it, and finally the passages from the Gospels. In this way they read the prophecies about what the Lord was to suffer, and then the Gospels about what He did suffer. Thus do they continue the readings and hymns from the sixth to the ninth hour, showing to all the people by the witness of the Gospels and the writings of the Apostles that the Lord actually suffered everything the prophets had foretold. They teach the people, then, for these three hours, that nothing which took place had not been foretold, and all that was foretold was completely fulfilled. Dispersed among these readings are prayers, all fitting to the day. It is impressive to see the way all the people are moved by these readings, and how they mourn. You could hardly believe how every single one of them weeps during those three hours, old and young together, because of the way the Lord suffered for us" (***The Travels of Egeria***, 37).

If such were their own emotions when they pondered the price of their salvation, it is no wonder that Christians were also disposed to take note of the internal suffering of Jesus' mother. When they found themselves in devout imagination at the foot of the Cross, it was impossible that they would not observe the mourning mother who stood there with them. If they themselves wept (for three hours, said Egeria!) at the vivid remembrance of Jesus' suffering, how could they not take note of the sorrows of Mary? In any case, it is an historical fact that they did. The history of Christian art testifies to the fact in great abundance. Among the four canonical evangelists, John's Gospel dominates traditional portrayals of the scene on Calvary. When paintings and statuary portray sorrowing figures gathered at the foot of the Cross, these figures are invariably the ones listed in John's Gospel, which alone records the presence of Jesus' mother and "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

"... stood the mother, weeping"

John's account also dominates the hymns both East and West that deal with the crucifixion. And so here, too, Mary is prominent. Compared to the East, Western hymnody on the theme of Mary's sorrow at the sufferings of Jesus is sparse, with the one notable exception being the immensely popular ***Stabat Mater***. It is nearly impossible to exaggerate the fervor and devotion this hymn has inspired since it was first sung in the 14th century.

Composed in three-line segments (***terza rima***), the hymn establishes its theme in the first of its nineteen stanzas: ***Stabat Mater dolorosa/ Juxta crucem lacrimosa/ Dum pendebat Filius***, commonly paraphrased as "At the cross her station keeping/ Stood the mournful mother weeping/ Close to Jesus to the last." Through the subsequent stanzas the hymn keeps repeating the same theme, meditating on the sword that Simeon predicted would pierce the heart of Mary. The hymn then beseeches Mary herself, "Let me share with thee his pain/ Who for all my sins was slain/ Who for me in torments died." As though to identify its singers with that beloved disciple who stood beside her at the cross, the hymn addresses Mary as "mother."

We observe in these lines the same impulses Egeria had described 1,000 years earlier: a strong, emotive appreciation of Christ's love as he died in torment and a craving to be united to that love ("let me share") in personal devotion. This is how Christians traditionally interpreted Paul's assertion, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

Although its ascription to the leader of the strict Franciscan "Spirituals," Jacopone ("Crazy Jim") da Todi (1230?-1306?), is dubious, the ***Stabat Mater*** does seem to have been particularly popular among his fellow Franciscans. We find it in several missals (Mass books) of the 14th century, and in 1727 the hymn appears for the first time in the Roman Breviary (the daily prayerbook for monks and clerics), where it is assigned to a special liturgical feast instituted at Rome that year, The Feast of Mary's "Seven Sorrows."

Outside of that limited liturgical usage, the ***Stabat Mater*** is perhaps more often sung as part of the popular practice of the Way of the Cross, a devotional service that traces the path of Jesus' sufferings through fourteen "stations" (stopping places) from Pilate's tribunal all the way to Jesus' grave. Following the prayers and meditations associated with each of these "stations," it has long been customary to sing a stanza or so of the ***Stabat Mater***. Indeed, since that hymn was removed from the Roman Mass by the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, it is likely that many Catholics do not often sing it any more outside of the Way of the Cross.

Hymns of the Christian East also dwell tenderly on Mary's presence at the foot of the cross. In the East, however, this image of Mary beside the cross is usually woven into the larger story of the Lord's passion, rather than—as in the West—isolated in individual hymns. Probably the best examples of this thematic weaving are to be found in the "Lamentations" sung in the Byzantine rite of Matins (morning prayer) for Holy Saturday, though by long custom it is invariably chanted on the night of Good Friday. In this lengthy liturgical service (lasting three hours and more in an average Orthodox congregation), these Lamentations set the tone.

Although this lengthy hymn (185 stanzas!) does not directly address the mother of Jesus, it repeatedly describes her sorrow, dwelling on her wrenching empathy with the sufferings of her Son. We find such lines as "Thy virgin mother mourned, sighing 'Woe is me, O Light of the world! Woe is me, mine Illumination! O most beloved Jesus,'" and "Thy pure mother, O Savior, in thy death lamented with thee mourning," and "The virgin mother, the bride of God, cried out: 'Who will give me the water for tears, that I may weep for my sweet Jesus.'"

The Hour, the Glory, and the Woman

Such riches of music and art, all inspired by three little verses in the Gospel according to John. What, we may ask, was in John's own mind as he wrote about Mary at the cross of her son?

Let us step back to another scene near the beginning of John's gospel; namely, the wedding feast of Cana (John 2:1-12). These two portrayals, both found only in John among the evangelists, have several things in common. First, Mary does not appear in John's Gospel outside of these two places. Second, in both places she is called only "the mother of Jesus" and never named. Third, in each instance Jesus addresses his mother as "Woman" (***gyne***). Fourth, in both cases a "new family" is formed—in the first scene by the wedding itself, and in the second scene by a kind of adoption, in which the beloved disciple "took her to his own home."

John's "mother of Jesus" does play an important part near the beginning of his account of the Lord's ministry, in "the first of his signs," wherein he "manifested his glory" at Cana (John 2:11). In the dialogue leading up to this manifestation, Jesus seems at first to bridle at his mother's hint that he relieve the shortage of wine at the wedding feast. He explains to her, "My ***hour*** has not yet come" (2:4). These words closely tie this scene at Cana to the scene at the cross later on. When the "hour" of the passion does finally come, it will once again be in reference to the manifestation of Jesus' ***glory***: "Father, the ***hour*** has come. ***Glorify*** your Son, that your Son may also glorify you" (John 17:1). John uses similar language of Jesus' mother, telling us that it was "from that ***hour*** the disciple took her to his own home" (19:27). When the ***hour*** arrives for the King to be identified upon the throne of the cross (19:19), John is the only one of the evangelists to speak of the King's mother (p. 38) standing beside it (19:26).

Another feature linking John's depictions of Cana and the cross is the word "woman," by which Jesus addresses his mother in both places. Though this bare expression strikes the modern ear as impolite, perhaps even harsh, it was in fact a formal and decorous way for women to be addressed in biblical times (see, for example, Matthew 15:28; Luke 13:12; John 4:21; 8:10; 20:13).

Mary the symbol of the church

In John's Gospel the word "woman," ***gyne***, seems especially significant. Besides at Cana and at the Cross, the Lord elsewhere uses this same word "woman" to portray the coming "hour" of His own passion: "When a ***woman*** is giving birth, she has sorrow because her ***hour*** has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world" (John 16:21 ESV). This sorrow of the childbearing "woman" is likened to the sorrow experienced by the disciples of Jesus at his coming passion: "I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. ... but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (16:20, 22 ESV). The "woman" facing the hour of the Lord's passion, then, is identified with the Messianic congregation itself, rather as we find in chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation.

If the community of faith can symbolize the mother of the Messiah, then the physical mother of the Messiah can certainly symbolize the community of faith. Indeed, this symbolic development is hardly surprising. The mother of Jesus, after all, is portrayed in much of the New Testament as the model Christian. According to Luke, she "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19 NKJV). She declared herself "the maidservant of the Lord," eager for God's will to be accomplished in her life (1:38 NKJV). Indeed, in the whole New Testament she is the first to speak of "God my Savior" (1:47). If all Christians feel in their depths the love of Christ poured out for them upon the Cross, would this not be supremely true of his mother who stood in faith beside it?

Consequently, John places the mother of Jesus within the company of Christian believers, herself even serving as a sign and symbol of that community. Luke, we recall, portrays Mary in the midst of the church in the upper room, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). John for his part depicts her within that even smaller church gathered beside the cross to bear witness to the Lord's redemptive death, clinging there to the "disciple whom Jesus loved" and who now takes her into his own home. Together they both bear witness as Jesus, "bowing his head, handed over the Spirit" (***paredoken to Pneuma***— 19:30).

That scene has haunted generations of believers since the church's birth. Through song and art, worshippers have entered the deep sorrow of Mary and the beloved disciple, and bathed with them in the blood and water that flow forever from his sacred side.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

The Queen Mother?

John seems to tap a Hebrew political tradition to show Mary in an exalted role.

Patrick Henry Reardon

Uniting John's portrayal of Mary at the wedding at Cana (the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry) and at the foot of the cross (the end) is what we might call "the theme of the royal mother." John stresses Mary's maternal relationship to Jesus; his use of the term "mother of Jesus" seems to convey a certain reverence, much as it does in Luke's portrayal of the nascent Church gathered in the upper room, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14).

"Hail, King of the Jews!"

This maternal relationship of Mary to Jesus is linked to John's emphasis on Jesus' kingship, particularly in the context of his passion. Many Bible scholars have noted how John goes to some length to stress that Jesus died as a king. Unlike the other evangelists, John shows how Jesus' claim to kingship was made a major component of his trial before Pilate (18:33, 36-37). The Roman soldiers mock Jesus with the words, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (19:2) At the last it is Jesus' assertion of his kingship that becomes the decisive charge leading directly to his condemnation (19:12-15). Although the other gospels do speak of the sign over Jesus' cross identifying him as "King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38), only in John does this designation become a point of controversy between Pilate and Jesus' accusers (John 19:18-22), thereby drawing more explicit attention to it. In John's account Jesus is even buried in a garden (19:41), like His royal ancestors, the covenanted kings of Judah (2 Kings 21:18, 26). Jesus' cross, then, is inseparable from his kingship.

Now it is in connection with Jesus' kingship on the cross that John speaks of "the mother of Jesus" (19:25). In placing this description of Mary in this context of kingship, John summons to mind the biblical tradition of the queen mother. Biblical kings sometimes had numerous wives, but they had only one mother, and she was a person of considerable prestige and power. Described as wearing a crown (Jeremiah 13:18) in the royal court (22:26; 29:2), the king's mother, the ***gebira***, was regarded with reverence by his subjects.

"Mother of my Lord"

To gain a proper sense of the difference between a biblical king's wife and his mother, one need only compare two scenes found close together in the First Book of Kings. In the first of those scenes, Bathsheba "bowed down and did homage" to her husband David (1:16); in the second, however, her son Solomon "rose up to meet her and bowed down to her, and sat on his throne and had a throne set for the king's mother; so she sat at his right hand" (2:19).

Such regard for the queen mother was most conspicuous in the line of the covenanted Davidic kings, Solomon being the first. We observe that in the passion accounts Jesus is not called the "King of Israel," but specifically "the King of the Jews." It is the royal house of Judah that is envisaged. Now in all but two instances the Books of Kings explicitly name the mothers of the kings of Judah, in striking contrast to the uncovenanted kings of Israel. John's simple reference to "the mother of Jesus," then, evokes this ancient institution of Judah's royalty. Mary takes her place as the last and greatest of the queen mothers

of Judah. (In Luke this evocation is conveyed by the expression "mother of my Lord" in 1:43).

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

Mary: Recommended Resources

A few good places for Protestants to explore the church's thought on the mother of our Lord.

Steven Gertz and Chris Armstrong

Those looking for a starting place for a thoughtful modern Protestant reclamation of Mary may wish to browse ***Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary***, a compact set of scholarly essays on the subject edited by Beverley Roberts Gaventa & Cynthia L. Rigby, eds. (Westminster John Knox, 2002). For those wishing to cut straight to the most highly contested points of Marian doctrine, a stimulating read is Mary: ***A Catholic-Evangelical Debate*** (Brazos Press, 2003), by an articulate and sometimes passionately opposed pair, Dwight Longenecker & David Gustafson.

Four historical explorations

There is no better place to start an in-depth study of Mary's place in the historic church than Jaroslav Pelikan's magisterial ***Mary Through the Centuries*** (Yale University Press, 1996). Every chapter brims with insights—a few of our favorites are "The Second Eve and the Guarantee of Christ's True Humanity," "The Face That Most Resembles Christ's," and "The Model of Faith in the Word of God." Pelikan's interpretation of Mary in the history of faithful art and devotion—East as well as West—brings the subject alive in a way familiar to readers of that author's ***Jesus Through the Centuries***.

What did the Fathers think about Mary? Did they plant the seeds of devotion that would grow up around her? Luigi Gambero has served well those readers seeking an accessible, comprehensive collection of the Father's sayings about Mary, with his ***Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin in Patristic Thought*** (Ignatius, 1991). Arranged in chronological order, this 400-plus page book begins with the apostolic age of Ignatius of Antioch and ends with John of Damascus (d. ca. 750), providing brief introductions and salient quotes for each figure.

Rachel Fulton's exhaustive study of medieval Marian piety, ***From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ & the Virgin Mary, 800-1200*** (Columbia University Press, 2002) links the evolution of devotion to Mary with the monastic imitation of Christ's suffering and Mary's grief at her son's passion. As clerics meditated on and imagined the passion of Christ, they also dwelt on "the compassionate mother who suffered in spirit all the physical pains of her Son." Readers may find the sheer mass of Fulton's book forbidding, but her attention to narrative makes for engaging reading.

In ***The Magnificat: Musicians as Biblical Interpreters*** (Paulist Press, 1995), biblical scholar Samuel Terrien begins by asking, Was Mary, in fact, the originator of Luke's Magnificat? and Was the ***Magnificat*** originally composed in Hebrew or Greek? Showing command of both the intricacies of Hebrew poetry and the theology communicated by the ***Magnificat***, he goes on to analyze the interpretations of Mary's song by both Renaissance and modern composers.

Three theological takes

Considering the papacy's role in declaring controversial doctrines as dogma (Mary's bodily assumption into heaven and her role as "Mediatrix" or "Coredemptrix"), why should Protestants attend to ***Mary: God's Yes to Man—John Paul's Encyclical Redemptoris Mater*** (Ignatius Press, 1988)? Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger answers the question in his introduction, "The actual importance of this encyclical stems not the least from its encouragement for us to rediscover the female line in the Bible with its

specific significance in salvation history." Readers will want to note John Paul II's clarification of Mary's mediatorial role as subordinate to that of Christ—the sole bridge reconciling humanity to God.

Two assessments of Mary rooted in women's studies, very different yet equally engaging, are Maria Warner's ***Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*** (Knopf, 1976) and Elizabeth A. Johnson's ***Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*** (Continuum, 2003). Raised a Catholic, Warner trains an appreciative yet critical eye on Mariology. From Mary the Intercessor to Mary the Queen of Heaven, Warner studies beliefs about Mary in their historical context. Her conclusions about Mary's cult are pessimistic: that the twin, paradoxical virtues of virginity and motherhood embodied in Mary will not survive modernity but "be emptied of moral significance."

Johnson's book argues for a Marian theology rooted in both Scripture and a feminist historical criticism. Readers will want to pay special attention to chapters 7-9, an intriguing discussion that looks at Mary in the context of 1st-century Jewish life, as well as chapter 10, a detailed analysis of the Mary of the Gospels. The latter chapter has appeared in revised form, with an added bibliographic essay, as ***Dangerous Memories, A Mosaic of Mary in Scripture*** (Continuum, 2003).

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

People Worth Knowing

Discovering devotional masters

Richard Foster

Few people have called today's Christians back to the witness of the "devotional masters" more enthusiastically and consistently than Richard Foster. Author of the classic Celebration of Discipline***, Foster has consistently brought us into contact with the "riches old and new" of 2,000 years of Christian spirituality. Here, Foster tells how he learned deep lessons on Christian virtues from three very different but equally "devoted" Christians.***

Juliana of Norwich: Enfolded Love

I was teaching a university class in which we were reading the writings of many of the great Christians: Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas a Kempis, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, and more. For one particular session I innocently assigned Juliana's ***The Revelations of Divine Love***, thinking only that it was appropriate for us to read this first book written by a woman in English. When we gathered the next week, however, I found students in an uproar. We had discussed many great writings with intelligence, reason, even good humor. But this was different. Everyone was speaking, debating, even shouting. Some loved the book, others hated it, but all were passionately engaged.

As I sought to referee the discussion, I searched for a reason for this turn of events. How could a book whose only concern is the love of God cause such intensity? It espouses no political or social agenda. It embraces no questionable doctrine. It was, I thought, an unlikely book to cause controversy.

The Revelations of Divine Love (sometimes titled simply ***Showings***) is the mature reflection upon 16 visions that were given to Juliana on May 8, 1373 when she was 30 years of age. Our classroom controversy centered around her passionate language of love. These students were not unfamiliar with such language—contemporary movies, books, and television shows have an abundance of it—but they clearly were unaccustomed to hearing it used in Christian devotion. Juliana writes, "The Trinity is our everlasting lover, our joy and our bliss, through our Lord Jesus Christ." On another occasion she speaks of Jesus as "our clothing. In his love he wraps and holds us. He enfolds us for love, and he will never let us go." Meditating upon the passion of Christ she writes earnestly, "I desired to suffer with him."

Well, you can begin to understand the debate that was going on in the class—and in me. Is such language (and experience) appropriate for the life of Christian devotion? If not, why not? If it is appropriate, what difference should it make in the walk of faith? Our class began to realize that contemporary culture had conditioned us to think of passionate love exclusively in erotic and sexual terms. We all found Juliana illuminating many biblical passages such as the story of John—"the one whom Jesus loved"—laying his head on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper. At the same time, we found it hard to believe that this relationship of deep, holy intimacy could be right, could be true, could be ours.

That day in that classroom Juliana was freeing us to look at God's love for us and our response of love with new eyes. No longer could we view the crucifixion in detachment and endlessly debate theories of the atonement. No, she drew us near to see "the body plenteously bleeding ... the fair skin ... broken full deep into the tender flesh with sharp smiting all about the sweet body. So plenteously the hot blood ran out that there was neither seen skin nor wound, but as it were all blood."

No longer could we recite the Apostles' Creed as an intellectual affirmation only. Instead, those words of faith drew us close to the heart of Jesus where "praising him, thanking him, loving him and blessing him forever" became our preoccupations. These were some of the lessons Juliana taught us that day—lessons I am only beginning to learn.

Francis of Assisi: Buoyant Joy

I have found that one obstacle above all keeps people from the old writers—namely, that they are old. That obstacle never hindered me, for I had long since rejected the modern heresy of contemporaneity (i. e., if it is newer, it must be better). But I did fear one thing: I was concerned that they might corner me into a cold, heartless religion devoid of laughter and good sense. It was this very fear that led to my most unexpected and delightful discovery, and no one corrects that misconception better than the poor little monk of Assisi, St. Francis. I was simply not prepared for his buoyant joy and radiant life.

Paul Sabatier, perhaps the most authoritative biographer of St. Francis, wrote of Francis's missionary zeal, "Perfectly happy, he felt himself more and more impelled to bring others to share his happiness and to proclaim in the four corners of the world how he had attained it." Francis sent out his Brothers Minor—Little Brothers—all over Europe with the task to "revive the hearts of men and lead them into spiritual joy." He called this humble band "God's jugglers."

These 13th-century Friars Minor not only preached but also sang. With the soul of a poet, Francis would improvise their hymns. Best known is his "Canticle of the Sun" with its celebration of Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brother Wind and Sister Water—a joyous adoration of God as the Creator of all things. In ***The Little Flowers of St. Francis***, stories abound of how these early Franciscans were often caught up in ecstasy as they worshipped.

A joyous trust characterized their lives. Francis once gathered 5,000 friars in an open plain for something akin to a camp meeting. St. Dominic and several other prominent people had come to watch the event. Francis rose and delivered a moving sermon, concluding with the command that they not have "any care or anxiety concerning anything to eat or drink or the other things necessary for the body, but to concentrate only on praying and praising God. And leave all your worries about your body to Christ, because He takes special care of you."

Hearing this, Dominic was distressed at the seemingly imprudent order. However, within a short period of time people from all the surrounding towns began arriving, bringing with them generous supplies of food. A great feast followed as the monks rejoiced in this gracious provision of God. Dominic was so moved by the scene that he meekly knelt before Francis and said, "God is truly taking care of these holy little poor men, and I did not realize it. Therefore I promise henceforth to observe the holy poverty of the Gospel."

St. Francis and many like him have permanently marked my understanding of true spirituality, teaching me that joy, not grit, is the hallmark of holy obedience. I have found that the walk of faith is a merry abandonment to divine providence.

I hope you understand that I am not referring to the silly, superficial "joy" flaunted in modern society which produces laughter at the expense of others. No, through St. Francis and others like him we learn of a deep, resonant joy that has been shaped and tempered by the fires of suffering and sorrow—joy through the cross, joy because of the cross. Blaise Pascal once wrote in his journal, "Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy." It was the experience of Pascal, and St. Francis; it can be ours as well.

John Woolman: Compassionate Service

But joy is not the whole story. As I continued my journey with the devotional masters, they kept pushing me to expand my horizons beyond a preoccupation with myself and my own spiritual state to a concern

for the bruised and broken of humanity. In an odd twist, I found that these old writers brought new insight into my understanding of contemporary social issues. And no one did this more than John Woolman.

This Quaker tailor from New Jersey in the 18th century penned a journal that remains the most contemporary of all the religious journals. The issues he pinpointed are the issues we still face today: racism, consumerism, militarism.

I gained many things from John Woolman, but by far the most important was an understanding of the profound social implications of the Christian walk. After reading his journal, I could never again separate love of God from love of neighbor, for Woolman rightly saw them as one commandment and not two. A faith that does not drive me to the hurting and bleeding of humanity is a false faith.

Woolman led a groundswell of anti-slavery conviction that assailed and eventually abolished the practice of slaveholding among Quakers. This strong social action took place nearly 150 years before the American Civil War! John Woolman had perceived the dire consequences of America's bondage to racism and oppression. "I saw a dark gloominess hanging over the Land," he wrote. If people were not willing to "break the yoke of oppression," he saw that "the Consequence will be grievous to posterity."

The combination of a gentle spirit and a tough nature permeates Woolman's journal. Out of toughness, he refused to use the products of slave labor, including sugar, and dye for clothing. Out of tenderness, he experienced "inward sufferings," knowing that his actions would distress and anger those who opposed him.

One story from the journal illustrates the kind of impact he had. On November 18, 1758, Woolman preached a powerful sermon against slavery, and afterward was taken to the home of one Thomas Woodward for dinner. As he entered the house he saw black servants and asked about their status. Upon learning that they were slaves, he quietly got up and left the home without a word. The effect of this silent testimony upon Thomas Woodward was enormous. The next morning he freed all his slaves—in spite of his wife's objections.

Woolman gave the first, small congregation I pastored a model of an all-inclusive community of loving persons. He also helped us by his example of mighty wrestling over the issue of consumerism. We were struggling with our responsibilities, obligations, and privileges as part of a highly affluent culture. Woolman dealt with very similar issues on a personal level. A businessman, a tailor, and a nurseryman, he soon found that his trade "increased every way, and the way to large business appeared open, but I felt a stop in my mind."

Woolman was not tempted by an affluent life-style. Early in his life he had, as he says, "learned to be content with a plain way of living." Rather, for him the problem was twofold. First, there was the issue of marketing items that catered to people's vanity more than they served real needs. When he sold such a product, he felt it weakened him as a Christian. The second and deciding issue was the need to be free from "cumbers" in order to give full attention to the Lord's call upon him. In the end, he decided to cut back his business, which freed him to engage in a remarkable traveling ministry.

Woolman's ***Plea for the Poor*** is a tract for our times. Addressed to affluent Americans, it asks us to tender our hearts to the needs of the poor. It includes many practical suggestions on how we can identify with the poor and needy of the earth, especially those who "labor for us out of our sight." Woolman even recommends that we take up the work of the poor for a time in order to feel their burdens.

Woolman not only warned our little fellowship of the large idolatries; he also nurtured us in the small fidelities, whether we were dealing with the problem of overcommitment or the ethics of business conduct. In all these matters Woolman taught us to have our hearts "enlarged in love."

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

Turning Point

The Day God Settled the Bible Question for Billy Graham

Collin Hansen

With his 1949 Los Angeles crusade fast approaching, Billy Graham was the one in need of revival. Outwardly his career seemed to be on the upswing. Two years earlier at age 29, Graham became the youngest university president in America when he succeeded fundamentalist patriarch William Bell Riley at Northwestern Schools in Minneapolis. Now after a number of successful smaller crusades, he readied for his biggest challenge yet—Los Angeles

Yet inwardly Graham's faith wavered. Reading Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth, he began to question the "old-time gospel" he embraced as a young man. At issue was nothing less than the reliability of Scripture. The Bible's seeming contradictions haunted Graham.

"I was not a searching sophomore, subject to characteristic skepticism," he said of the awkward timing of his doubts. "I was the president of a liberal arts college, Bible school, and seminary—an institution whose doctrinal statement was extremely strong and clear on this point."

The duo divided

While shaken by the neo-orthodoxy of Niebuhr and Barth, Graham was much more severely disturbed by the doubts of his evangelist friend, Charles Templeton. During the 1940s Templeton and Graham were Youth for Christ's dynamic duo. Though Graham routinely induced better results with his altar calls, Templeton was widely considered the more gifted preacher. Handsome, suave, intelligent, and charismatic, Templeton lacked only a formal education to validate these talents.

So in 1948 he decided to enroll at Princeton Theological Seminary and invited Graham to join him. Graham acknowledged his own lack of education—this university president had only a Wheaton College bachelor's degree—but he balked at Princeton's liberal reputation. He made a counteroffer: "Chuck, go to Oxford and I'll go with you."

But Templeton had his eyes set on Princeton alone. The following winter they met in New York City to discuss Templeton's first semester. Princeton clearly had a profound impact on Templeton.

"Billy, you're 50 years out of date," Templeton prodded. "People no longer accept the Bible as being inspired the way you do. Your faith is too simple. Your language is out of date. You're going to have to learn the new jargon if you're going to be successful in your ministry."

Templeton's training in theological liberalism exposed Graham's intellectual shortcomings. But Graham was not prepared to surrender just yet. "Chuck, look, I haven't a good enough mind to settle these questions," Graham said with characteristic humility. "The finest minds in the world have looked and come down on both sides of these questions. I don't have the time, the inclination, or the set of mind to pursue them. I have found that if I say, 'The Bible says' and 'God says,' I get results. I have decided I am not going to wrestle with these questions any longer."

Templeton's instinct for persuasion kicked in. "Bill, you cannot refuse to think," he chided. "To do that is

to die intellectually. You cannot disobey Christ's great commandment to love God 'with all thy heart and all thy soul and all the ***mind***!" Not to think is to deny God's creativity. It is to sin against your Creator. You can't stop thinking. That's intellectual suicide."

Foothills of faith

Despite his assertion to the contrary, doubt continued to haunt Graham. In August, Christian educator Henrietta Mears invited him to address an audience at her Forest Home retreat center, located east of Los Angeles. Graham's shaken faith gave him pause, but he nonetheless obliged.

Mears was a phenomenon in Southern California's celebrity culture. Impeccably dressed, jewel-adorned, and wealthy, she grew up in William Bell Riley's Minneapolis church. After moving west, Mears transformed First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood's Sunday school program, increasing enrollment from 450 to 4,500.

While he prepared to speak at Forest Home, Graham and Mears spoke about his doubts. She understood liberal theology. But unlike Templeton, she found the arguments unconvincing. The ease and authority with which she wielded Scripture comforted Graham.

Still, many of Graham's questions remained unanswered. Did Noah actually build an ark to survive a great flood? Could a whale really have swallowed Jonah? Pondering these miracles, Graham roamed into the foothills of the nearby San Bernardino Mountains. With the moon shining, he wandered off the trail, opened his Bible on a tree stump, and took his concerns to God. Inexplicably, the burden lifted.

"Father, I am going to accept this as thy Word—by ***faith***!" Graham proclaimed. "I'm going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be your inspired Word."

Tears streaming down his face, Graham returned to Forest Home. Though he didn't have an explanation for every biblical oddity, for the first time in months he felt powerful intimacy with God and renewed confidence in the Scripture he proclaimed.

The road not taken

As for Templeton, he finished his graduate work at Princeton, then became an evangelist for the National Council of Churches. Princeton's dean even considered him "the most gifted and talented young man in American today for preaching mission work." But it wasn't long before Templeton admitted that he no longer believed in any sort of meaningful Christianity. He left the NCC and ultimately moved to Toronto where he became a prominent media personality, writing newspaper columns and providing television commentary.

For much of his life he remained friends with Graham, but Templeton never returned to the faith of his youth. Just two years before his death in 2001, he published a critique of Christianity titled ***Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith***.

Graham's life needs no such explanation. Mere months after his breakthrough in the mountains, Graham's Los Angeles crusade made him a household name in America and launched an extraordinary evangelistic career. Today a simple bronze plaque marks the spot where Graham submitted once and for all to the authority of Scripture.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church

The Doctor Who Followed Jesus to Africa

Dr. Timothy Johnson

As medical editor for ABC News, Dr. Timothy Johnson has worked in the secularized realms of media and medicine. In his Finding God in the Questions ***(IVP, 2004), Dr. Johnson talks about how "meeting" Dr. Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) has revolutionized his life, challenging him to make more time in his life to serve Christ in others.***

This remarkable man has captured my imagination. Born January 14, 1875, in the German province of Alsace, by age 30 Albert Schweitzer had accomplished more than most of us could imagine doing in several lifetimes. He was an amazingly productive scholar with doctorates in philosophy and theology. He was an ordained minister, a professor at the University of Strasbourg, a concert organist, a world authority on J. S. Bach, a recognized expert on organ building and remodeling, and a prolific writer and author. But then he made a decision that stunned his friends and family: he went to medical school so he could become a doctor and go to Africa to work as a physician.

Seven years later he and his new wife, Helene, went to Lambarene in West Africa, where he set up a hospital in the jungles along the Ogowe River. For the next 52 years, he dedicated himself to the people of that place, helping to build an expanding medical compound that would eventually feed, house and treat an average of 1,000 Africans a day! Periodically, he returned to Western civilization to give lectures and fundraising organ concerts. In 1952 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and he donated the prize money to help build a hospital for lepers about a half mile from the main hospital grounds. Schweitzer died in Lambarene in 1965 at age 90.

Schweitzer was captivated by the life and teachings of Jesus, and applied his scholarly training to finding out who He really was. At 31 he published the theological bombshell ***The Quest of the Historical Jesus***.

The seminal work of today's often skeptical search for clues to the historical Jesus, this book posed difficult intellectual and spiritual questions that were also deeply personal questions for its author. And it did not provide easy answers. In essence, Schweitzer was forced by his research to hold on to faith even in the midst of many doubts. And he expounded this paradox in his book's famous last chapter, "Results":

"It is not Jesus as historically known ... but the spirit which goes forth from him and in the spirits of men strives for new influence and rule ... which overcomes the world. He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side. He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is."

Though I disagree with some of Schweitzer's conclusions, I have been deeply influenced by his personal commitment to serve Christ in others. As a result, I have decided, after my current contract with ABC, to rearrange my life so that I have much more time than I do now to give in direct service to those in need. I don't know how or where that will happen, but I know that for me it must happen if I am to be true to myself and my deep desire to be a follower of Jesus.

Adapted from **Finding God in the Questions: A Personal Journey** ***(copyright 2004, InterVarsity Press).***