she listens to Gabriel. All she knew was that an angel told her she was going to have a baby. She didn’t know *why.* She certainly didn’t know *how* since, as she told Gabriel, she’d never slept with anyone.

We, too, are often confused as to why we are in our present predicaments. We ask ourselves, “How long am I going to be working at this dead-end job?” “Why am I still in this relationship?” “When am I going to figure out what to do with my life?” Often, like Mary, we are clueless. The good news is that *it’s alright to be clueless.* God has this annoying habit of dealing with us on a “need to know” basis. Sometimes we don’t need to know what lies ahead; atleast not yet. One of the hard things about being a follower of Jesus is that, often, there’s a sort of built-in ambiguity. We live with uncertainty. We cannot see what God is doing. Our thoughts are not God’s thoughts, and our ways are not God’s ways. And that is just as it should be. Mary probably suspected that uncertainty would be the new normal for her as she moved ahead from this watershed moment.

**Mary Didn’t Know That She Was “Favored.”** Verse 48 reminds us of her favored status: “For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.” The Bible doesn’t tell us why, specifically, Mary was chosen for this role from among scores of other possible candidates. Mary did have a heart inclined toward God. She possessed a remarkable willingness to risk everything, even her life, to comply with the will of God. She was ready to step out in faith, even when that step was terrifying and life changing. “Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word,” she said (v. 38).

Yet Mary is not favored because of her perfection or unwavering faith; rather she is favored because of the faithfulness of God. God invites Mary to be part of the divine plan not because of her achievements, her status, or her goodness, but because God chose to uplift the lowly, to extend God’s mercy, and to fulfil the promise of a Savior (Luke 1:52). Mary had the good sense to see the hand of God in what was happening to her. She did not bemoan her circumstances; she rejoiced in them, knowing that what looked like a calamity to others, was a sign that God was paying special attention to her!

**Mary Didn’t Know How She Was Going to Suffer.** Most parents don’t. She didn’t know that from this point on, her house would be a mess. She didn’t know that her son would be brilliant. She didn’t know that there would be an endless stream of questions. She didn’t know that things wouldn’t always go according to plan. She didn’t know that she’d have trouble bonding with this child. She didn’t know that from this day forward, she would worry constantly. She didn’t know that she’d make many parenting mistakes. She didn’t know that the night before delivery was the last night in a month of Sabbaths that she’d get any sleep. She didn’t know that the laundry never ends. She didn’t know if her friends and relatives would be there to help.

Mary didn’t know what it would be like to raise a gifted and talented boy. Once, when Jesus was 12, they family went down to Jerusalem for Passover. They were there with a contingent from Nazareth. When they left to return home, they did so without Jesus, thinking he was with some of his friends and their parents. But he wasn’t. She’s just lost the Son of the Most-High God! She and Joseph raced back to Jerusalem. It took them an entire day to get back to the city. Once in the city, they looked everywhere. They contacted the police and filled out a Missing Person Report. An Amber Alert was issued. No Jesus.

It took Mary *three days* to find her Son and regain custody of the Messiah, the One who would “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). He was in the temple! She must have been relieved and furious at the same time. Three days in the city hunting for this child! I imagine her saying to Jesus, “What? You’re the Son of God and you couldn’t figure out a way to let me know where you were?” “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” His parents probably just stared at him, for “they did not understand what he said to them” (2:49). Mary suffered, but she also “treasured all these things in her heart” (2:52).

Years later, Mary and Jesus attended a wedding in Cana, not far from Nazareth (John 2). When the wine ran out, she had a sharp exchange with her son. They clearly were not on the same page. And less than a thousand days later, she stood at the site of a crucifixion, where she witnessed what no mother should witness. Mary had no idea the suffering she would face because she said “yes” to God’s invitation.

But Mary *did* know certain things. **Mary knew she was a “Servant of the Lord.”** In those words (v. 38), we learn much about a woman who is otherwise something of an enigma. As one scholar has noted: “The Bible is over 95 percent male oriented. Of 1,426 names in the Bible only 111 names are women’s.…Mary of Nazareth, however, is among the women most mentioned in the Bible, that is, in the New Testament. She is an exception to the rule and almost for that reason an exceptional woman.”

As a *woman*, Mary was a second-class citizen (at best!), and with her people subjects of imperial Rome. She was Jewish, the daughter of Joachim and Anna, and therefore subject to *Torah* law and regulations. As a young girl she heard the Hebrew Scriptures as a matter of course. Clearly, when confronted by the angel Gabriel, she had a heart disposed to spiritual things.

Mary was a deep thinker: twice we are told that she “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19, 51). She contemplated things, and her words (the *Magnificat*, Luke 1) show that she had deep insight into what God was doing through her.

When she met the angel Gabriel, Mary was already of marriageable age. In fact, a marriage was in the works: she and Joseph had a legal contract of marriage already. So, even though the news of a child was shocking, Mary’s faith in God was deep.

Mary knew she could trust in God, that this pregnancy was probably scandalous, but that her son would be someone special.She didn’t get a lot of details or have great clarity, but Gabriel told her, “You will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33). By this Mary knew that she had cause for praise (vv. 46-47). She knew that “the Mighty One” had done great things for her (v. 49). And so much more. In fact, today’s reading is a review of the many things Mary did know.

Mary’s words, the *Magnificat,* lead us to wonder *what we know?* Can we say that we are servants of God? Can we, like Mary, trust in God? Do we have cause to praise God? Have we experienced God’s mercy, which “is for those who fear [God] from generation to generation”? Does our soul glorify God and does our spirit rejoice in God our Savior? How might we accept God’s invitation to advance God’s promised Kingdom of peace and justice, mercy and provision for all? These are questions which, like Mary, we ought to ponder in our hearts.

Prayer: All-Knowing God, we thank You that You take the simple things of life and servants that are humble in spirit, to be lifted up and used by You to Your praise and glory. We pray that we would walk humbly before You all the days of our lives and that You would use us in whatever way You choose, to Your praise and glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Source:** Peters, M. Danielle. “Jewish identity of Mary.” https://udayton.edu. No date. Retrieved May 28, 2023.

**Mary Didn’t Know**

Sunday, December 24, 2023  [Luke 1:26-38](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1%3a26-38&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Almost 40 years ago, songwriter Mark Lowry scribbled down some lyrics for a Christmas song about Mary, the mother of Jesus. We were already canting carols set in the bleak midwinter, about herald angels singing from the realms of glory, while shepherds watched their flocks by night all seated on the ground, in praise of the sweet, little Jesus boy, born on this silent night. But few carols paid homage to the teenage girl who had a baby 2,000 years ago in a manger in the little town of Bethlehem.

Lowry’s song, *Mary Did You* Know, reached Number 6 on *CCM Magazine’s* Adult Contemporary Chart. At the time, Lowry was with the Gaither Vocal Band, and he recorded his song on their 1998 Christmas album, *Still the Greatest Story Ever Told.* Today, the song is a modern Christmas classic, recorded by hundreds of artists over the years, and periodically reaching the top 10 in the Billboard R&B and Holiday charts. Lowry’s song consists of a series of questions.

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?*

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?*

*Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?*

*This child that you’ve delivered will soon deliver you?*

The simple answer to all of Lowry’s question is “No!” Mary didn’t know any of those things. She was a young girl, probably in her mid-teens. She had a boyfriend, to whom she was engaged; but she and Joseph did not live together, and they had never been intimate (Matthew 1:18). The Bible is emphatic about this. Twice in our text, Mary is described as a virgin; she even raises this argument with Gabriel, the angelic messenger, saying his proposal is absurd: “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” (v. 34).

**Mary does not know what is happening to her**, around her, inside her, and through her. She is taken aback by Gabriel’s message. God is acting in a decidedly new way, and Mary is reeling with the news. Sometimes, we don’t know what’s going on either. Have you ever been in a huge mall or museum looking at a “You Are Here” sign, but you still don’t know where you are? Even if you do know where you are, thanks to the sign, you still might not be clear on where you’re going or how to get there. This describes Mary as