

Monday, March 12 – Read Luke 1:26-38. John 19:25-27 describes Jesus' care for his mother Mary, even as he hung on the cross. To get a fuller picture of Mary and Jesus, we start with the episode where Mary entered the Bible story. She was likely a girl in her mid-teens (the age for marriage in her culture). When God called her to a world-changing life mission, she responded with faith and trust. Gabriel laid out for Mary a reality and a task which she couldn't (and we can't) fully understand. How does her response in verse 38 speak to your heart? Are you willing to surrender your life to God's leading, even in areas that call for a trust that reaches beyond intellectual understanding? The angel said to Mary, "Greetings, you who are highly favored!" But Mary's "favored" life led to a day at the foot of a cross, watching her boy die at the hands of the Romans. Has God ever "favored" you with one or more experiences that you'd just as soon have skipped? How can God bring growth and good out of even the hard times?

Tuesday, March 13 – Read Luke 2:25-35 When Jesus was just eight days old, Simeon met Mary and Joseph at the Temple. He told them they had a unique privilege and challenge as Jesus' parents. Three times (verses 25, 26 and 27) Luke repeated the Holy Spirit led Simeon to that meeting. He clearly didn't want anyone to miss Simeon's words, or see them as the ramblings of an elderly eccentric. Mark Lowry's beloved lyrics to "Mary, Did You Know?" include: "Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new? This child that you've delivered will soon deliver you." How did Simeon's message highlight the saving, renewing aspects of Jesus' mission? In what ways has knowing Jesus made you new?

Wednesday, March 14 – Read Luke 2:41-52 Long before the cross, Mary lived through a time of deep distress. She must have feared that something bad had happened to Jesus. Luke's story shows Jesus as a dutiful, but far from ordinary, son. Already he knew that the Temple, even more than Mary and Joseph's home, was his Father's house. Verse 51 hints that Luke learned this story from Mary herself. What does Jesus' precocious fascination with the teaching in the Temple tell you about him? When he began to preach publicly, he said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6). How much of an appetite do you "usually" have for God? What steps can you take during Lent to nurture that inner hunger and thirst? Jesus' parents lost Jesus for a day—and spent three days finding him. Think of a time when you lost track of Jesus, and lived for days (perhaps weeks, months or years) with no contact with him. What helps you maintain a continual contact with Jesus—and return to him with confidence if you do lose touch?

Thursday, March 15 – Read Luke 7:11-15. A widow with no son or other male relative had few legal rights and little protection or social status in Jesus' day. Jesus noticed a woman facing that painful, frightening situation as he went through the little village of Nain. He couldn't ignore her tragedy. Luke says his heart went out to the woman, as it did to his mother when she stood at the foot of his cross. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament notes that "Philosophers often tried to console the bereaved by saying, 'Do not grieve, for it will do no good.' Jesus' approach is entirely different: he removes the cause of bereavement." How have you experienced the difference between denying or suppressing feelings of grief, and finding comfort and hope in God's promised gift of eternal life? Scholar William Barclay wrote of verse 13, "There is no stronger word in the Greek language for sympathy, and again and again in the gospels it is used of Jesus." How can this story strengthen your faith that Jesus deeply cares about you and your life?

Friday, March 16 – Read Luke 23:32-34. John's gospel said Jesus' mother was at the cross. But she was not left to face this awful moment alone. Commentator Donald English wrote, "For all the strong protestations of loyalty by the men (14:31), at the end it was the women who saw it through." As we'll see after Easter, some of these tenacious women also got to be the first witnesses of the risen Lord. First century Jewish, Roman and Greek culture all saw women as second-class citizens. Mark had no reason to include their presence in his account except that it was a fact (and perhaps also that they were the eyewitnesses who told him the story). How does his inclusion of details like this increase your faith in the gospel account's integrity? We often call the people in the Christian family who surround and support us at times of loss "stretcher-bearers" (based on Mark 2:3-5). How telling is it that even a pivotal figure like Mary was not depicted as facing her son's crucifixion in a solitary, self-sufficient way? Who are the stretcher-bearers you can count on in tough times?

Saturday, March 17. Read John 19:25-27. Comparing this passage with Mark 15:40 and Matthew 27:56 leads many scholars to believe that Jesus' mother's sister was Salome, mother of the sons of Zebedee. If so, then John the disciple was Mary's nephew. Jesus had brothers, but John 7:5 said they did not believe in him yet. So he gave his mother into John's care. As William Barclay wrote, "There is something infinitely moving in the fact that Jesus in the agony of the Cross, when the salvation of the world hung in the balance, thought of the loneliness of his mother in the days ahead." Few of us in our death-denying culture are at ease thinking about our mortality. Often we put off making a will or other provisions for the event of our death. Are you willing to deal with your discomfort for the sake of those who depend on you? If you haven't, will you make the needed plans to help your family, and your church family, when you are gone? Consider doing that as an Easter gift to God and your loved ones.