

In Mary's Voice

(Teacher Resource)

The Visit

Elizabeth was pregnant. It was her first child, and she was over thirty-five. A first child at that age could result in a difficult birth.

I wanted to go and visit her and help her as her time to deliver drew near.

I hadn't seen Elizabeth for about two years. I didn't remember her well—she was closer to my mother's age, and Elizabeth and I had little in common. With my own mother gone, I wished to take her place in being of help to our kinfolk.

It was with mixed feelings that I began my journey to Elizabeth's home. I wanted to help . . . I missed my mother so deeply. I didn't really know Elizabeth. I was pregnant myself, through this very unusual gift from God. . . . Joseph had seen my pregnancy and couldn't understand it. I didn't know what to do. God finally told Joseph about it in a dream and we were reconciled, but the confusion was still upsetting me. What did God want of me with this child? I was physically very tired. These thoughts churned in my head and my heart. I had a lot of time to think about these things on the long journey, which seemed even longer because of my confusion.

"Mary." I heard my name called at what seemed a great distance. I was absorbed in the moment, and the sound of my name was an unwanted intrusion. "Mary?" It was a question—it echoed the question in my mind: "Who am I?"

I turned and saw a woman heavy with child. She was radiant with life. Her face, ruddy with health, smiled with the tenderest of feelings. I stood up, and couldn't help smiling back. Was this lovely woman, so alive, so charming, my "old" cousin Elizabeth? She extended her hands to me, and I moved toward her. We stood there, two women, each ripe with hidden life inside of us.

Suddenly she was holding me. The small extension of my body bumped against the large protrusion of hers. We laughed. Without warning, I found myself sobbing. Tears everywhere, pouring out of me. "Mary," she said again, and the sound of Elizabeth's voice rang through my spirit and gentled it.

She eased me down, and we sat on the hill together, her arm around me, holding me firmly but gently.

"You honor me, Mary," she said. "You are blessed among all women in the world. Just now when our bodies touched, awkwardly, the child I carry knew of the mystery you hold within you. He danced, alive with joy, at the presence of the precious burden you carry."

"You and this child, Mary, are for all time—for the glory of our God and the glory of God's people."

This woman, my cousin, knew. She understood the mysterious working of God in me. As I sat there in the warmth of her strong arms, the tensions and fears drained from me. I could talk. She listened. How wonderful a gift.

"My whole being glories in the wonder of our God. I am so small . . . and God has touched me so mightily. God saw my weakness—I am but a girl—and has called me to give to the world a gift through which all peoples for all times will remember me. God is saving all people, my cousin! God is fulfilling the Covenant, and will continue to do so.

(This reading comes from a longer reading titled "The Visit," in *Mary Remembers: Cherished Memories of Jesus*, by Velma McDonough [Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1987], pages 13–15. Copyright © 1987 by Velma McDonough. Used with permission of Twenty-Third Publications.)



Letting Go

I was worried about my son. I shared this with Joseph, and he told me that my worries didn't help Jesus and only made me upset. But I still worried.

Jesus was off to Jerusalem by himself. Only seventeen years old. He wanted to learn from the rabbis. His search for knowledge about the Scriptures was insatiable. I knew this, and I knew also that he had learned all he could from the local teachers. But it was the first time he had gone off on his own.

He planned to stay with some relatives in the city. Once he was there, I knew he would have a warm place to stay and get good meals.

But I was afraid of the journey. There had been so much talk here in the village about bandits who attacked travelers. I wanted Jesus to wait until the feast days when Joseph would be going to the holy city with the other men. But that would have been two months off, and he couldn't wait.

Jesus was such a loner. Sometimes it worried me. He did things other boys his age would never think of doing. He was wonderful to Joseph and me, and he was very comfortable with friends his own age. But he was so deep, so reflective. Those days I just didn't know what he was thinking about. And he didn't share it with me.

I guess I shouldn't have been surprised. I had been that way myself. I remember my mother complaining about me in the same way after I had returned from the temple school. I would go off by myself for hours at a time. I thought deep thoughts too, and told no one. I shouldn't have complained when my son did the same.

Still, I worried about him. It would be so long until I got word that he had arrived safely. And I wouldn't know what he was doing, or how he was, except once a month when the caravan came with news.

Now he was a man. He needed to stretch his mind and put even physical distance between us. He had to become his own person, and he had to do it by himself. I had to let go.

I allowed myself a few silent tears as I experienced this separation, so painful for me as mother; so necessary for Jesus as a son. I reflected that the only pain greater than this would be the separation of death.

From now on our relationship would have to be different. How would it be? Only he could tell me. And maybe he couldn't either. That was frightening. Again, I was asked to wait. . . .

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“Behold Your Son”

I knew it firsthand.

When I was on the hill of Calvary watching my son die, he gasped for air. He, the light, the one who had brought fire from heaven, was being consumed by fever and thirst. He gasped again and again, struggling to breathe.

I don't know how I got through those hours. . . . It was awful. I kept trying to breathe for him.

It would have been so easy just not to breathe. I said to myself, “Mary, if you don't breathe you'll die too.” It was exactly what I wanted at that moment. To die with him. My son. He was my very life.

But somehow I just couldn't. He had told me to care for John and had asked John to care for me. John was the only one of Jesus' close friends to be there with us.

So I couldn't die. Jesus wanted me to live and take care of John and the others.

How hard it was for me to hear Jesus say, “Mother, behold your son.” Jesus was my only son. I wanted him and only him. I didn't want him to die and to have some other son replace him. I wanted my son to live, to grow old with me, not to die at an early age.

And what a waste! Pilate had sent the order, but the religious leaders of our people killed my son.

Yes, there was anger mixed with my tears and sadness. And perhaps it was the anger that moved me out of the despair of wanting to die. It enabled me to say, “Yes, my son. You will die. I must stand here and watch. And I will do as you ask. I will be mother to John, and to the others. It is your last request to me. And it was so hard for you to get the breath to say it.”

More new work for me to do. I felt too old to start something new again, and I didn't know what that work would be. I realized I was waiting again. I prayed, “O, my God, you would think I would have learned to wait by this time. I do it better now than years ago, but it is still so hard.”

As I was thinking this, I heard him say, “It is finished.”

(This reading comes from a longer reading titled “Behold Your Son,” in *Mary Remembers: Cherished Memories of Jesus*, by Velma McDonough [Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1987], pages 55–56. Copyright © 1987, by Velma McDonough. Used with permission of Twenty-Third Publications.)

