

*Even for Mary, It Was a Challenge*  
*Luke 1:46-50, 2:15-20*

It's Mother's Day, and let's be careful here. This is not a day of unmixed joy. After all,

a) for some, motherhood is an accident, and not always a welcome one;

(b) for some, biological motherhood isn't possible. Today you might feel as if you are on the outside looking in at a special kind of party.

(c) for some, mothers weren't all that nice.

(d) for everyone, motherhood under the very best of circumstances still has more than its share of challenges and frustrations. There's a cartoon that shows a woman visiting a counselor, who says, Let's see, you give 50% of your emotional energy to your husband, 50% to your work, and 50% to your children. So, what's your problem?

e. for some, Mother's Day is a day that brings to mind a child who is now deceased or a mother who is now deceased.

F. Some women have chosen to terminate their pregnancies.

(And these folks need to know that God loves them still, that even as the church proclaims a message to choose life, that the ideal is that abortion should only be a last resort in extreme circumstances, there is understanding and compassion even if you made choices that are not the same as others would have made.)

G. There are mothers who placed children for adoption. My sister lived for years wondering about her daughter, placed for adoption. They were eventually reunited, and it's a blessed situation, but such an outcome

is a rarity.

So, Mother's Day is not an unmixed joy. As a church, as a faith community, we must always be concerned with those who are left out, with those who are struggling. We must be careful to be a church that embraces all people, all mothers, not just mothers who fit the ideal of husband and wife living together and raising children together. We lift up this ideal, because it is good, it is Godly, but the church is a place for all folks.

We all fall short in one way or another; we all proclaim as Lord our savior Jesus Christ. To proclaim him savior is to acknowledge that we all need saving from sin. Even as we rightly honor mothers and motherhood today, we do not want to forget that greater message that everyone is welcomed in the grace and love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, what is there left to say? Well, if Mother's Day is not an unmixed joy, yet it still remains a joy, a day to celebrate, a day for us to count our blessings. To border on the ridiculous, it is fair to say that no matter how complicated our relationship with our mothers might be, without our mothers we would not be here.

So we celebrate that we have been given the gift of life itself. And today is a day to be grateful for, and acknowledge those who have been like mothers to us, whether actual moms or not. To make important those gifts traditionally associated with mothering: unconditional love, nurturing, sacrifice, compassion.

Come to think of it, such concepts are associated with Christ himself. And blessed are children who when coming to know Jesus Christ as Lord have already savored something of what Jesus' love is like because of their mothers.

There is a Spanish Proverb, which roughly translated, says, “An ounce of mother is worth a pound of pastor.”

Mothers, it is your love, your tenderness, your guidance, that starts the journey of your children to Christ.

Let’s remember, even the story of the savior begins with a mother. And so does your story and so does mine.

Now in the case of Mary, *the contemplation* of being a mother was all spiritual and wonderful and beautiful.

“My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior. Generations will call me blessed.”

Mary is like most women. Motherhood is easy and magnificent, without challenge and trial. . . until you actually have a child. Isn’t that the case with us all? It is easy to be an expert on parenting until you actually have a child. And raise a child. And then you find it’s not quite as easy as you thought to deal with a two year old; and somehow arguing with a teenager never goes as well as you thought it would.

And then when we get to the birth narrative itself. It’s only in Luke. Mark doesn’t mention the birth of Jesus at all; John’s version is more spiritual: the word become flesh and dwells among us; Matthew doesn’t really care about Mary one way or another; his concern is with how wonderful Joseph is (and that’s good for Father’s Day). But Luke. Luke lets us into Mary’s perspective.

And on that first Christmas night, even as the shepherds return rejoicing, Mary is left to ponder, to contemplate the incredible responsibility that is now hers: overwhelming, not that she is the mother of Jesus, the savior, but simply because she is the mother of a child. Moreover, an unmarried mother, far from home.

Now that the child is here, there are things to ponder. Raising a child is serious business. If you are a mother; if you are a father, there is no more important work than God can ever give you to do than to be a parent.

He might have been president of the United States, but George W. Bush needed to take the time to be the Dad at a daughter's wedding. And President Obama must understand that his responsibility is not just for national defense and appointing a Supreme Court justice; finding just the right dog for his children in its own way is equally important.

And Mary ponders because her task is overwhelming. And no where in the Bible are we ever told that she was a wonderful mom or an exceptional mom. In fact, in John, at the wedding of Cana of Galilee, she and Jesus are actually sort of fussing at each other. But we are invited to rejoice in Mary, not in her perfection, but in her role: she was mom.

The Bible doesn't talk much about Jesus and diapers. Jesus is wrapped in swaddling cloths, but were never told how soon they are soiled. Quickly, if my experience is any guide. Scripture does not record Jesus being potty-trained, Jesus crying out in the middle of the night, Jesus getting ready for school. We don't talk about meals Mary had to prepare, clothes to mend and clothes to wash. Jesus' conception was announced by an angel; his birth was marked with angel song and shepherd joy, but then Mary is left to ponder.

How to be a mother. What to do, what to say.

And so it is with every mother. And today as a church, we need to celebrate. We need to say thank you to mothers. We need to honor mothers. We need to exalt motherhood as being central to God's purposes. Now

I know the Old Testament was written by men. It concerns battles and nations and prophecy and such. But there at the end of Proverbs, a book written to dispense wisdom, to tell us how to live blessed and blessing lives, the very end says this: and you know what? When you have a great woman, who is a wonderful wife and a blessing to her children, then, you have something very special indeed.

I do not want to diminish the role of fathers, of course. When Eric was little, he and I had many Dad times. Go to the park. Watch basketball. Go to Gettysburg. Mom was invited, but not essential. But when Eric was sick, Dad wouldn't do. He needed mom.

There's no instruction book. When to insist on vegetables, when to offer dessert. How to make a home a safe house, how to offer comforting and welcoming arms, but then at the right time, set your child free to launch into the world with his own dreams.

In my own family this is the first Mother's Day in 26 years that Eric is not with his mom. It's a celebration, though it doesn't seem so. His compassion, his sense of integrity . . . his mother has played far from a small role in creating this adult. She sort of led him the wrong way in political affiliation, but in every other case, she has steered him just right. And I hope that even as she misses him, his living in the city of his dreams is due in no small measure because Susan encouraged him to dream and to believe not in her dreams for him, but to follow the ones God has given him.

There are no easy checklists to being a mom. But it's appropriate, if just for this day, to say, men, you are wonderful, non-mom women, you too are precious in God's sight and you have much to offer and much blessings to give and to receive. . . but just for today... we celebrate motherhood, and say to all the moms: you

are important to us, and your calling as mother more important than you can ever know.

After all, Jesus Christ was given to the world. But this gift of a son was entrusted first to his mother. And so it is with us all. God's first gift to us is life.

And for this reason, and for so many others, on this day, on this day, we celebrate motherhood and honor our mothers as treasured gifts from God, and ask God's blessings upon you as you fulfill this wonderful, sacred, and sometimes overwhelming call of motherhood. Amen.