

Away In A Manger Week 2: Love

Last week we looked at Jesus' birth from the perspective of the **prophet Isaiah** who lived 700 years before Jesus' miraculous birth in Bethlehem. Today, we are going to come from the perspective of the person who had the **most intimate knowledge of Jesus' birth**. That would be his loving mother, **Mary**.

If we are going to come from Mary's perspective then, love is the place to start. There's nothing like a mother's love.

What does a mother's love look like? I think pretty much the same then as it is today. When you **give birth** to another person who has been **growing inside of you**, there's a loving that gets to percolate and grow.

Listen to how Luke describes the scene **immediately after Jesus' birth** in that Bethlehem stable. The shepherds have **just come from the fields** where they had the amazing and terrifying visit from the angels telling them about the savior's birth and where to find him.

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. Luke 2:16-19

That's what mom's do. They cherish things in their hearts. **Robin knows** what time of day or night and how much they weighed, as well as length. I remember how long the fish I have caught are, but babies, I don't remember. I do remember them all being born in hospitals. **They were; weren't they, honey?**

Love had arrived and was swaddled in the manger. **Mary was in love** with her new love and likely had **counted all his fingers and toes** more than a time or two. She's decided **which family member** he looks like. **Now she's taking it all in, as new stories** from the shepherds sound like something she experienced nine months earlier. **These stories would have sounded unbelievable,** had it not happened in a similar fashion to her.

A mother's love has always been rightly elevated as a high level of love. **If you can love someone, like his or her mother, then that's pretty amazing.** For that reason, we are going to look at how Mary expressed love for Jesus. **Can we love him like Mary did?**

Mary was like any other mother... **She loved seeing people adore him.**

The video depiction of a conversation that might have happened gives you this picture.

Moms love it when people **recognize something special and good** in their child.

That has been the case with our kids. When we find out that our kids are loving and have been patient and kind, it makes our hearts soar.

I think about **how I feel when a teacher**, a coach, a youth leader, tells me about something they appreciate about or see in my child. Walking into that parent teacher conference, the coach wants to talk to you when you pick him up from practice or Matt says, "I need to talk to you" directly after State Youth Convention. It's a great feeling, relief, and joy.

And when **I've been on the other end** and been able tell a parent something really good about their child. Maybe when they haven't heard that in a while. Mom's and dad's love that.

She heard the **shepherds' stories** of God's glory and the angels. **That was all about her baby!**

She saw how the wise men or magi brought expensive gifts and worshiped him like a king.

They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2:11

A mother loves when others love her child. Mary was no different. **She knew who he was and who he was to become.** She wanted other people to know the wonder that she felt looking at him in the crib and saying, **"My little boy is the Messiah, the promised savior."**

She loved him because he came through struggle.

My job during childbirth was simple. Don't get in the way. Talk and encourage, but not too much that you become annoying. Be prepared with ice chips and water. Be attentive, but don't hover or again you will become an annoyance. Help with the breathing by modeling the proper breathing, but never correct her breathing because then you will go beyond being annoying to being an insensitive jerk. Tell her you love her, particularly after the child is born, and encourage her for all the hard work. Don't go overboard at that moment because you will no longer be of any interest to her, because now she is looking at the baby.

Under the best circumstances, childbirth is hard and can be dangerous. And Mary didn't have any other women around telling her what to do or to coach her through this. She was in a strange, very unsterile place.

Let's not forget who Mary was that contributed to her struggle.

- Teenager.
- Unwed mother which was something that would have **isolated her** from relationships, and worship. She would have been **viewed in the worst terms**. Even in danger of death.

- She was **viewed as a liar** in many people's minds. Who would believe that story?

And lets not forget the long trip on the back of a donkey while pregnant. Lot's of rest stop breaks I'm sure.

Under normal circumstances, pregnancy and childbirth are a struggle, but this was like no other. After all, she is carrying the most dreamed of anticipated figure in the history of Israel.

But when she saw her baby, it was all worth it. Not simply because he was a baby, but he was The Baby. **She was not going through this struggle just for herself so she could have a son who could care for her in her old age,** assuming Joseph would die first. **She was going through the struggle to be a part of something God was doing in the world that was unprecedented.** God was in a human body, **the invisible creator of all things** God in the packaging of a fragile human baby, her baby.

If she is like any other mom, she is pondering what needs to happen next. What does a good mom need to do for her little boy? Today, that might mean...

- Vaccinations.
- Learning how to feed him.
- Getting the right car seat to go home from the hospital.
- Getting the birth certificate.

For Mary, that meant thinking about getting home safely and out of this barn, but also what happens in 31 days. I'll explain that in a few moments.

A mother loves to **see people recognize and love** her child. Mary also loves her baby because he was the amazing **outcome of struggle and hardship**. We also know that... **She loved him by being faithful to God's purpose**. If you want to add two words to the end, you can add "for him".

Mary and Joseph accepted that he belonged to God and that they should not get in the way of what God had planned for him.

There are things she needs to do to position him to become what he is to become. These are things Jesus cannot do right now, but she and Joseph can do for him.

That's where we come to the significance of 31 days after his birth. Listen to how Luke describes what most likely happened exactly 31 days after that night in Bethlehem.

Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses (circle that) after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.²³ The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD." (Circle that)²⁴ So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." Luke 2:22-24

As a good Hebrew mom, Mary would have had this day marked on the calendar. This was what it meant to be faithful to God's purpose in the world and for Jesus.

So what's this all about? Here's what Mary was pondering.

"Everything in Israel that is specially set apart for the LORD also belongs to you. ¹⁵ "The firstborn of every mother, whether human or animal, that is offered to the LORD will be yours. But you must always redeem your firstborn sons and the firstborn of ceremonially unclean animals. ¹⁶ Redeem them when they are one month old. The redemption price is five pieces of silver (as measured by the weight of the sanctuary shekel, which equals twenty gerahs). Numbers 18:14-16

This is called Pidyon Ha'ben. It goes back to the time immediately following the Exodus when the Lord, because of His great love for his people, used Moses to lead all the ancestors of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, out of slavery and into freedom. While Luke briefly refers to this in verse 23, Exodus 13 describes more fully what happened.

Tell the story of Exodus 13:1-2, 11-15...

Then the LORD said to Moses, ² "Dedicate to me every firstborn among the Israelites. The first offspring to be born, of both humans and animals, belongs to me." V. 1

They would sacrifice first-born animals to God while redeeming first-born sons. Here's how Moses explains this strange rite of passage or act of faithfulness.

"And in the future, your children will ask you, 'What does all this mean?' Then you will tell them, 'With the power of his mighty hand, the LORD brought us out of Egypt, the place of our slavery. Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, so the Lord killed all the firstborn males throughout the land of Egypt, both people and animals. That is why I now sacrifice all the firstborn males to the LORD—except that the firstborn sons are always bought back.' Exodus 13:14-15

This ceremony of pidyon ha'ben is one month after the boy's birth. Since traditional Jews would waste no time, the ceremony usually takes place the 31st day after birth.

Here's how it would happen:

- **The father would bring his son to the temple.**
- **Find a godly priest, son of Aaron, tribe of Levi.**
- **Father presents son to priest who asks, "What is your preference—to give me your firstborn son or to redeem him for 5 shekels, as you are commanded to do in the Torah?"**
- **Father states his intention by giving his son to be a priest or redeem him.**
- **When money is paid the priest give a blessing.**

- Then the Kiddush cup (wine goblet) is blessed and usually a party follows.

Here's a modern day pidyon ha'ben. The baby is presented on a silver platter with bedazzled clothing.

Picture of baby

Next the five silver coins. **Picture of coins** These are specifically made for this purpose weighing the exact amount. You can actually buy these for 480.00.

The pidyon ha'ben for Jesus is recorded in Luke 2:25-33 goes pretty much that way without the silver plate and fancy clothes because Mary and Joseph were poor.

- **Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple.**
- This was to **ceremonially cleanse Mary** with the proper sacrifice (Lev. 12:1-8).
- They **brought 2 pigeons** as stipulated. They were poor and pigeons were the cheaper option.

Jesus was not exempt from the redeeming, he was not from the priestly tribe, but rather Judah.

There was a priest named Simeon who was devout and eagerly anticipated the coming of Messiah. It says that the Holy Spirit was upon him and **told him that he would not die before seeing God's promised Messiah.**

Prompted by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts when Joseph and Mary brought Jesus.

He took Jesus in his arms and blessed him.

"Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. ³⁰ I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for **all people. He is a light to reveal God to **the nations**, and he is the glory of your people Israel!"**
Luke 2:29-32

They would have placed Jesus in his arms and as they gave the 5 shekels, the blessing was given. Think about what they just heard. That he would be **for all nations, that means **gentiles**, not simply the people of Israel. He is everyone's savior.**

Then Simeon continued with his blessing. ³³**Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. ³⁵ As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."** Luke 2:33-35

This is not all good news being the messiah. Some will oppose you.

Why tell his whole story?

Remember what Numbers said?

- If Jesus is to be the **fulfillment of the Law**, then he has to keep it now.
- Jesus needs to be **dedicated to God** because his dedication will be tested. **Mary and Joseph are demonstrating their dedication to God's plan for Jesus.**

Mary loved Jesus by being faithful to God's purposes for Jesus. God was going to use her son in a powerful way for all people, but not everyone was going to cheer him. **Instead of trying to shield him, she has this trusting attitude toward the God who sent the angel to her to tell her that she was going to give birth to a son whose father was the Holy Spirit who was the savior of his people.**

That kind of love is hard, it's not sentimental.

She had been faithful to what would prepare Jesus for the life he was sent to live. She had done what was needed so that Jesus was **starting on the right foot.** That's a mother's love.

This is how mothers love. They want **others to love and recognize** what is good and special in their child. Mothers have a special love **because of the struggle** they go through and the blessed at the end. **And mothers demonstrate their love by doing what is faithful for their child to be used by God.**

But there's something different about this mother's love then any other mother. **She loved him but he loved her first.**

Every other baby in history was loved first before they loved anyone. **Baby's are egocentric.** Their goal is to have their needs met so they can survive. Human babies are fragile.

Jesus loved his mother first and it is that love that enabled her to do all of these loving things for him.

Love was the catalyst for the incarnation of Jesus.

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17

It starts there and then **we get to how Jesus enables us to love God and others.**

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ **God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.**

¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely

ought to love each other... ¹⁹ We love each other because he loved us first. 1 John 4:7-11 & 19

Ultimately we must receive his love for us that means Jesus. Then it is Jesus who enables us to love God. We know what a life fully devoted to him, filled by him looks like.

They redeemed their son Jesus that is love. He redeemed them and us on the cross and that is love.

Mary could love because she was loved and chosen. You can love because you were loved and chosen.

Let's circle back to the first question we asked. Can we love Jesus like Mary did?

Probably not with the same intensity, but here's how we can love like she did.

Do we want to see others adore him and have him transform their lives? Are we here just to receive eternal life and heaven from him? Do we want him to be the famous one or is that where we want to be.

Do you see your love for him growing through struggle or is that where your eye started to wander for the kind of love that was easier?

Do you love him enough to be faithful to his purpose for you and the people around you? Or do you have plans for your kingdom?

That's what it means to begin to love like *Mary*.

Is there something that *God* is speaking to you? What do you need to do to be obedient?