

## **“A SWORD SHALL PIERCE YOUR SOUL”**

(Discourse below given by Eugene Burns. Bible Students Pre-Memorial Convention, April 15, 16, 1978, Wilmington, Del.)

Luke 2:25-35: “And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Our study at this time will endeavor to look at Jesus from the experiences of others, whose lives touched Jesus’ life. Sometimes we think in terms of the Apostles and those prominently involved with Jesus in carrying on the ministry, but overlook those who do not shine forth in our Bibles. Today we will walk along with Mary.

We each see things from a certain standpoint of our own involvement or the involvement of those near to us, and it is difficult to grasp some of the realities in the lives of those distant from us. Sometimes, too, things are projected to us in glowing terms and with such positiveness and excellence as to leave us poorly prepared for the trying experiences that must come to the Lord’s people.

Our friends in the “born-again” circles portray acceptance of Christ as such a transforming and fulfilling experience, and in such glowing terms, it tends to leave these good people with the idea of a lasting euphoria throughout this life in the life to come—where only Christ is shining into their lives and God is beaming upon them—for they are his and they are saved eternally. To them the illusion is often created that upon acceptance of Christ—“He who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence; they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb is in the midst of the throne and will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Rev. 7:16, 17)

This is a beautiful thought and many would like to believe this is true from the moment they say Lord, “I believe, I am thine.” In portraying the matter in such a glowing light, it becomes easier to lead people to Christ. It’s like the sales pitch advertising which shows happy people using the product they wish to sell. It is the Madison Avenue sales pitch for Christ.

It’s kind of catchy, and sometimes we would like to indulge in it just a little. But by taking things from their context we can build illusions—a false Christian hope. While the text in Revelation applies to the Great Company, it tells us it is not until after they overcome they shall never hunger nor thirst, nor any scorching heat sear them. Then there shall be the springs of living water and God shall wipe away their tears. But this is telling us in effect that while overcoming they might indeed hunger and thirst, be cold or seared; they might have tears and heartaches of truly crushing sorrow. While this applies to the Great Company, we think the principle applies to all the firstborn, even as Jesus aptly said, “through much tribulation shall ye enter the kingdom of heaven.”

### **Mary—the Mother of Jesus**

We are introduced to Mary in Luke 1:26, “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the Virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name 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 father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ And Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I have no husband?’ And the angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you [not an angel], therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. For with God nothing will be impossible.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed.”

Mary accepted the divine messenger with humility, quiescence and faith. We notice the words exchanged were very few, and the only explanations given were vital to the appointment Mary was to have with the Holy Power of God Almighty. Gabriel brought the message, but the Holy Spirit of God Almighty Himself would over-shadow her and start the life process in Mary. She was given this announcement to which she could say yes or no. Her choice was a faithful, yes. We notice she did not interrogate the angel further and seek more assurances. Further, the angel did not volunteer anything more.

The message dwelt on the child she would bear and his importance, but the problems the angel's announcement would make in her life were not answered or even considered.

The Lord left Mary's faith sorely tested. He did not hasten to send Gabriel to Joseph to inform him for some time. He allowed Mary to be in a rather embarrassed position, with Joseph fully believing she had been unfaithful to him. Not until Joseph was going to put Mary away quietly, without causing any more pain than necessary, did the angel give Joseph a message, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." (Matt. 1:20, 21) God had allowed Joseph and Mary both to go on under a cloud. Mary made no attempt to inform Joseph of what had taken place in her life, but left the matter to God. Yet God was slow, by human standards, to clarify the matter. God's slowness brought about some heavy heartedness. Joseph must have been stunned and grieved. Mary was left to appear a faithless woman who betrayed her troth. God allowed this trial to hover over them both for a season before he moved to resolve it—and then only at the last moment. This trial did not end here, but extended to Jesus in his adult years.

We learn lessons here in God's dealings with His people. Despite the honor Mary and Joseph were to have in being parents to God's son, they were not to be spared trials, even as God's Son was not to be spared trials. God's blessings and privileges come with trials of faith—sometimes with immense heartaches and sorrow. Mary knew the truth but Joseph didn't. Sometimes trials come because the parties concerned do not know all the truth at the same time.

We all know how Jesus came to be born in Bethlehem, and how Mary had to endure the difficult journey there and then give birth to Jesus in a stable. It required a lot of faith not to murmur or repine at the hardships; especially as she knew she carried the child of the Highest—why wasn't the Lord doing better by her? If the shepherds adoration stirred Mary's heart and lifted high her spirit, eight days later she was told by Simeon, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also) that the thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." Why was God so slow in telling Joseph; and now so early (33 years before) in telling about the sword that would pierce the soul of Mary? We are told of the shepherds' words—"Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart." (Luke 2:19) Did she also take to heart what Simeon told her? Did she carry this sorrow through her life with Jesus—that "a sword would pierce her heart"?—would it be a literal sword? Would it be a piercing sword of trial?

Things were not tranquil for long. After the wise men came to worship Jesus, Joseph and Mary were told to flee into Egypt for Herod sought the life of Jesus. As fugitives they fled, but surely Mary must have heard of the bitter weeping—"Rachel weeping for her

children, for they were not.” Why didn’t God stop this? For instance in Acts 12:21-23 we read, “On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and made an oration to the people. And the people shouted, ‘The voice of a god, and not of man!’ Immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he did not give God the glory; and he was eaten by worms and died.” God did not, however, prevent the death of the poor innocent babies, nor did he prevent those poor mothers and fathers from knowing such a terrible tragedy. Mary was spared from seeing her tiny son being pierced with a sword. Her son was saved from this.

Have you ever wondered what kind of a prayer you would offer in the face of such a tragedy? Maybe the groaning of broken hearts is the only prayer needful: for God himself shared that sorrow and promised Rachel that her children “would come again from the land of the enemy.”

### **Returning From Egypt**

Mary and Joseph had to make their abode in Egypt. They left with only what they could carry and this meant hardship for them. The providences of God provided for them there. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to them saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” (Luke 2:20)

We learn something of the Lord’s way of dealing here. While Joseph was told to go back to Israel, he was not told everything. Joseph probably assumed he would go back to his home (which was thought to be Bethlehem) and his little carpenter shop. He thought this would make things normal again. But no. We read, “When he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go there; and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled... He shall be called a Nazarene.” (Matt. 2:22-23)

The Lord veiled Joseph’s and Mary’s eyes from the truth that they would not return to Judea proper, but to northern Galilee, and most of all to Nazareth. This in itself meant a certain humiliation for all the family—who would want to buy furniture made in Nazareth? If they did, it was certainly because it was cheaper in price—remember the stigma, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” The honor and blessing of being the parents of Jesus brought considerable hardship. But if there was some poverty and hardship, the child Jesus was no doubt a joy to them. He was more than just a child—he was the hope of their nation; he was the hope of their people; he was the hope of the whole world.

Mary was a most wonderful woman, and she accepted God’s providences with full faith and trust in God. She had neither murmured nor repined at what God’s providences had

permitted at any point. She had a well-used and reused memory—“Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.” Her heart and soul were full of the wonderful promises of the angels and the holy men and women who had spoken great things concerning Jesus.

### **Jesus in the Temple**

The only time Jesus made a problem for them was when they went to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. Somehow, they assumed he was in the company returning, only to realize later that he was missing. When they found Jesus in the temple Mary betrayed her own anxiety—“Son, why have you treated us so? Behold your father and I have been looking for you anxiously.” (Luke 2:48) To this, Jesus replied, “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s business?” (Here Jesus repudiated Joseph as his father.) They did not understand the words of Jesus; but dear Mary, the record says, “And his mother kept all these things in her heart.” (Luke 2:51) Yes, her heart was a reservoir of God’s promises and Jesus’ words. It doesn’t say she understood these things or the direction things would go, but she kept it in her heart.

Things were beginning to shape up. She had found Jesus in the temple and the religious leaders were very much impressed with him. Public opinion was growing daily in his favor—“Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.” (Luke 2:52) Certainly, it was apparent, Jesus would emerge as a leader and Saviour of the people. It is easy to endure hardship and privations when you see your hope growing. When the troubles make our hope more bright we can abide easily the trials and hardships.

We have little information about Jesus and his mother from this incident until Jesus becomes 30 years of age. But Mary had a longer relationship with Jesus than any of the others. She had a whole 33½ years and even longer if we add the time the angel and the Holy Spirit began to reveal to her the purpose of God. And I am sure we would gladly set aside the rest of the convention to hear Mary recount the wonderful things Jesus did and said as a boy and as a young man. But the Lord has hidden all these things, wishing us to concentrate on Jesus’s 3½ years as a New Creature. Much can be said about His life and death, but this convention is set aside mostly to commemorate His death. And this is where our lesson today takes us.

### **Jesus at Cana in Galilee**

Jesus began his ministry, collecting those who were to be his disciples. He first found Andrew and then his brother, Simon Peter. Jesus found Philip in the same city, Bethsaida. And Philip tried to interest Nathanael in Jesus, but Nathanael was hesitant, really a bit skeptical, a proper fear of being misled as he feared Philip his friend had been. He said,

“Can any good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46) But Philip’s enthusiasm was very great and he said, “Come and see.” That was a worthy challenge. Jesus greeted Nathanael in a heart-cheering way, by paying him a sincere and honest compliment —“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.” It should make us realize too we should express our confidence in the heart qualities of our brethren. Now Nathanael felt he was being paid an insincere compliment, because he said, “How do you know me?” Then it was the powers of the Master began to unfold to Nathanael. Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” (John 1:48) Nathanael had apparently hidden himself in the foliage of the fig tree to have it as a prayer closet, and he had prayed for guidance for himself and for Philip, lest indeed they be deceived in following some false teacher. Jesus’ knowledge of this secret prayer startled Nathanael into saying, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Now on the third day after this event, we think Jesus went to the marriage in Cana of Galilee. We are not entirely sure what third day it was, but we know it typically represented the third 1,000 year day, the Millennial day in which we are living, in which the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb will be consummated.

We learn from this that Jesus was not a recluse or a monk withdrawn from contact with life. The one being married was probably a close relative of Mary, otherwise she would not have shared in the confidence that the supply of wine was running low. Mary confided this information to Jesus, but not expecting a miracle, for this was the beginning of the miracles of Jesus. Mary probably sought the council of Jesus, thinking he might be able to do something to overcome the embarrassment of the family.

Jesus’ answer to Mary came as a gentle reproof—“O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” This was a strange statement to make to his mother; but as Jesus had previously renounced the fatherhood of Joseph, and acknowledged God as His Heavenly Father, so here he was telling Mary that His loyalties were not divided between her and God—a fact flagrantly overlooked by our Catholic friends. Mary was not offended for she realized she was only a servant of the Lord, and her life was honored with the privilege of serving God to fulfill his purpose among the sons of men.

Mary trusted Jesus’ wisdom and told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2:4-7) We learn a lesson from Mary. While she was favored and blessed among women, she was not placed on a pedestal of honor and glory in this present life. Jesus treated her with love and respect, but not with veneration. The veneration belonged to God and could not be accorded to Mary in the same sense. Mary’s honor would come not so much in this life, but if she humbled herself, she too would be exalted in due time. We too, must not be in a hurry to receive honor and glory and blessing. Any service we render must not be laden with expectations of present recognition and acclaim.

## **“Went Down to Capernaum”**

In Matt. 12:46 we are referred to another occasion when Mary seeks her son. This took place about one and a half years after the miracle at Cana. Jesus by this time had captured the attention of the nation. The crowds were thronging about constantly. Probably sympathetic mothers, had told Mary that they had seen Jesus, and how they had noted evidences of weariness and fatigue, and they thought his strength and vitality were being drained by the miracles he performed as well as by the ceaseless demands of the crowds. It was probably upon hearing that Jesus was very much in need of a good rest and some good food, that Mary decided in her maternal instinct to seek out her son, and persuade him to rest awhile. (Mark 3:20, “And they went into a house. And the crowd assembled again, so that they could not even eat bread.” See footnote on verse 21 in Diaglott.)

Doubtless Mary was happy to find the whole nation responding to Jesus’ ministry. All the trials and hardships she had endured were sanctified by the good and blessing resulting from the work of the Messiah. While Jesus spoke to the people, “behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside asking to speak to him.” (Matt. 12:46) The crowd seeing that Mary was Jesus’ mother, quickly showed respect for her and carried her message to Jesus. Jesus reply again seemed as a mild rebuke to Mary. Jesus said, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister and mother.” (Matt. 12:49, 50) (This is the first instance recorded where Jesus refers to his disciples as his brethren.) Jesus’ statement showed the preferred relationship with him would not be just blood ties, but with those who do the will of the Father in heaven. This did not demean Mary or imply she did not do the will of God. But Mary probably returned home realizing that her instincts to minister to the well-being of her son Jesus, must be subordinated to the will of God.

Perhaps Mary may have had moments when she felt Jesus hadn’t given her a place of recognition when he was at the height of his popularity. But she was a woman of great faith in God, and she endeavored to understand these experiences from a heart full of love and faith. Even though Mary was denied moments of acclaim and recognition during the ministry of Jesus, at the end she was not denied the heart-break of seeing Jesus’ agonizing death. Remember once when one of the women shouted, “Blessed is the womb that bare thee.” Jesus responded, “Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.” (Luke 11:27) Yes, Mary was blessed, but Jesus knew a sword “would pierce her soul.” He also knew his mother was hardly prepared for the events which were to befall him. Even his disciples were completely dismayed and devastated by it all.

Because Mary and John dearly loved Jesus, they were so vulnerable that day. When Simeon had told her “a sword would pierce her soul,” she could not have known what was fully meant. Possibly she could have thought that she herself might suffer martyrdom—she might be thrust through with a sword literally at some point. That would not have been different, for in the past many women of faith died martyr’s deaths. Mary would not have turned aside at the prospect of the certainty of death. Her life had been touched by the ministry of angels, and prophets and by the Holy Spirit of God, and for all she knew she could be the object of persecution unto death.

Our story takes up again after Gethsemane. When the crowd came to take Jesus led by the traitor Judas, Peter swung into action and cut off Malchus’ ear. Malchus was a slave of the high priest. Jesus was calm and assured. He healed Malchus’ ear—this revived the confidence of the disciples—confidence in Jesus’ power. Even when Jesus answered the quest of the crowd regarding whom they were seeking, he said, “I am he.” When he said this, the crowd drew back “and fell to the ground.” (John 18:6) This demonstration of power would lead the disciples to believe that Jesus was in full command of the situation and did not need their help. Jesus’ inquiry, “Whom do you seek?” forced the crowd to say, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus maneuvered them cleverly into taking him a prisoner, for if they were seeking him, then they were not interested in taking anyone else into custody. So Jesus provided for the escape of his disciples by saying, “If ye seek me, let these men go.” Thus Jesus gave account of his disciples, for John says, “of those whom thou gavest me I lost not one.” (John 18:9)

So while Jesus was led away, the disciples fled with the exception of John and Peter. Yet we need not to think their loyalty was ended. Actually these disciples had a community of contact with one another. They probably went back to tell other disciples that Jesus had been apprehended. At Bethany there was a large group of people sympathetic with Jesus. The disciples who witnessed the arrest of Jesus, might have reasoned that when they would break the news of Jesus’ capture, the crowds would rally to Jesus’ support. But it did not work out this way. There was a sense of fear and defeat and they could have rationalized that Jesus was well able to take care of himself. The power of Jesus in his miracles would have given good reason for their rationalization.

Peter stayed to see the trial of Jesus before Annas. John had asked for permission for Peter to come into the hearing. Hence Peter heard a good deal and probably saw Jesus struck by one of the officers. Peter seemed to be readily identified as a disciple of Jesus, and three times he was accused of being a friend of Jesus. At the last, Peter denied his Lord and went out weeping bitterly after Jesus looked at him. However he did not weep all night and apparently arrived back at the home of the disciples, perhaps at two or three in the morning. The disciples who had been sleepy in the garden, were now awake burning the midnight oil. They were huddled together wondering what was happening and what they might do. When they heard the hurried steps outside of the door, they

feared who it might be. What relief it was to find that it was Peter, and they eagerly awaited word as to how things went. He reported what happened before Annas and how they probably had gone to Caiaphas to secure Jesus' condemnation. This may have allayed the fears of the disciples somewhat, for they knew the Jews themselves could not try to put Jesus to death. Under Roman law, it was not lawful to put any man to death. (John 18:31)

The night progressed into the dawning hours. John remained to witness the trial before Pilate. Because the account is covered in detail, we have reason to believe that John stayed through the whole trial, until Jesus was turned over to be crucified. We may not be sure, but probably at this point John forsook Jesus, not in the sense of rejecting Jesus, but the proceedings were too much to bear. John probably ran to the other disciples, for we know he was a good runner, for he outran Peter later. No doubt he was careful to see that no one was following, and he then broke the horrible news to the disciples, and to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Jesus had been turned over to the Romans to be crucified on the grounds he was a king. John told the other disciples that the charges against Jesus had been changed from blasphemy to the crime of claiming to be a king. Mary, when she heard this, could not be restrained from going out to see her son. Actually there were three Marys at the cross: Mary the mother of Jesus; Mary the wife of Cleopas, who was also a sister in the flesh to Mary, the mother of Jesus; and Mary Magdalene (John 19:25). When John saw they were going to be with Jesus, he probably decided to accompany them. He probably felt a great sorrow for Mary, the mother of Jesus, and went on a double mission of mercy: both for Jesus, the one he loved, and for Mary. No doubt his heart ached for Mary.

The other disciples were fearful. Crucifixion was a horrible thing and they remained out of sight for fear of the Jews. Probably John was afraid too, but he had to go back to be with Jesus, no matter what. John's heart was no doubt strengthened when he viewed Mary's pale face and determination to be with Jesus. John was absent only a short while, because we virtually find no interruption in his description of events. John's account is written from the standpoint of an eyewitness. John does not mention Jesus falling under the weight of the cross, and Simon the Cyrene helping him; and it may be that John left while Jesus was bearing his cross. He may have run full speed back to the other disciples to tell them the turn of events, and then ran back, losing only a short time away from Jesus. We cannot be exactly sure of these matters. We do know that Jesus said, "You will all fall away [or be offended] because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'" (Matt. 26:31) But with John this was only momentary.

John was back in time to witness the crucifixion of Jesus and also of the two others as being on either side of the Master. He avoids telling the sad details of the agony and pain

involved. John seemed to be pleased that the chief priests were not allowed to change the inscription on the cross, “The King of the Jews” written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. (John 19:19-22) John also observed that the Roman soldiers stole the last possession of Jesus, his garment and seamless robe. John was plainly annoyed with them for casting lots, but recalled the Scripture, “They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” (John 19:24) John was learning as he watched!—The details of prophecy were falling into place!

For whatever reason, John omits many of the unpleasanties of that day. He avoids mentioning how Jesus was taunted when on the cross—“He saved others, let him save himself.” (Matt. 27:42) “If He is the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.” And the most cutting remark of all, he also avoids, “He trusted in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” (Matt. 27:42-44) He also cannot bring himself to record Jesus’ words, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46)

John alone tells of Jesus’ mother. “But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took Mary to his own home.”

There was Mary, the mother of Jesus, watching at a distance the excruciating suffering of her son—the kind and gentle one she loved so dearly. She saw how he was taunted, ridiculed, which implied that Jesus was cursed of God. She at last heard him cry, “It is finished.” Truly a sword pierced her heart that day—more painful than any sword of steel which would have brought death in a moment. These scenes and cries would remain in her heart, a constant and overwhelming sorrow.

Have you ever wondered what Mary prayed, what she said to God that day, or what she might have prayed at the close of that day? What kind of a prayer would you have offered? All the promises she had pondered in her heart, seemed as a treasure chest of lead that day. What do you think John prayed standing at the cross? What did the others pray? I do not really know; but I am sure they all said, “Dear God! Dear God! Dear God!” Yes, even the angels watching this event were filled with a heaviness they never felt before. They too, watched in agonizing sorrow to see the Lord of Glory reduced to such a wretched condition, and then watched and saw him die alone and forsaken. What could they pray? God was not interested in words. The will of God, they knew was being done and even the angels could not really say much more than to call upon the name of the Lord. Well did the Psalmist say, “For God alone my soul waits in silence.” (Psalm 62:1) Yes, the “just shall live by faith.” The time had come to “Have faith in God.”

Luke sums up that awesome day, saying, “Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, and said, ‘Certainly this man was innocent!’ And all the multitudes who assembled to see the sight—when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.” (Luke 23:47, 48)

Yes, there was sorrow and terror at what had happened. Even those who had not been sympathetic with the Master suddenly found swollen emotions of shame and guilt. Yes, they all left beating their breasts in silent despair. And Mary more than others returned, leaning upon John, with leaden steps and ashen face, bearing the marks of her personal tragedy.

But on the third day the dark cloud was broken when the word came, “He is risen!” All the promises Mary had treasured in her heart now began to live and bloom. John, who had run to the tomb was the first to believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

The last account we have of Mary clearly indicates she was indeed a follower of Christ. We read in Acts 1:13, 14, “And when they had entered, they went to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

Not only were the apostles there, but women of faith were there, and now at last Jesus’ brothers, those who did not previously believe in him—now they are there also continuing in prayer.

Surmounting the cross, Mary finally understood the message of the angels, “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 father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:32, 33)