

Mary.

When you think of Mary, Jesus' Mum, who do you think of? Given there are no solid records to go on we have some scope for imagination.

So Who do you instinctively think of for Mary?

How old is she? I'll suggest some ages and you put your hand up if that is how you picture her. About 40, about 30, about 25, about 20, about 15.....about anything else....?

How about how big do you think she was?

About 200 lbs, 180, 150, 120, 100, 80, 60lbs....?

And how tall? 5'10", 5'6", 5'2", 4'8", 4'4", 4'even, less???

And clothing, Raggy clothes? Farm-hand clothes? Clean but simple? Nice, well cut?

What was Mary's favourite colour? Blue? Anything but Blue?

Do you think she was quiet? Or noisey?

Was she polite and demure? Or strong willed and pushing to the front?

Do you think she could read? Could she do public speaking?

Was she headstrong? Was she mousey?

I always used to think she was like the pictures you see in paintings, the old masters works. She was a bit frumpy, princess-ish, always in a castle or a palace. She seemed to spend a huge amount of her time sitting very still gazing in to the middle distance. Then she had Jesus, and continued to be in palaces gazing in to the distance. Very well dressed in clean, un-crumpled clothes, lots of them, mostly blue with a bit of white.

One Christmas I got a Christmas card made in an Anglican Nunnery in England. It was a hand drawing of a young woman in a knee length skirt hanging out the washing in the wind. Just an ordinary young mum.

"Behold! The handmaiden of the Lord!" it said underneath.

Ever since then I have been wondering about Mary.

It matters because, out of all the women in the world, it was she who was chosen to be The Saviour's Mum. So I think it must have mattered to God what kind of a Mum his son was going to have. Mothers are a powerful force in the formation of their children. Powerful.

So would God have chosen some milk-toast girl from a posh house? Would he have chosen a feisty fire-brand girl with a sense of adventure? Would he have chosen an obedient lass? A scholar? A good cook? A pretty woman?

We have to guess.

We have a few pieces in the Bible about the early Mary, the pre-motherhood woman. And we know that in those societies in the Middle East of 2000 years ago, girls married young, in their teens, and started having children quickly.

So I begin by imagining a teenage girl-come-woman.

The first thing we know is the story of the angel.

She *questions* the angel. I would be sitting on the floor with my mouth open if I was visited by an angel. Then she asks for details about the pregnancy God is plotting for her. Then, with courage beyond belief, she says

“Alright then! I’ll go along with what you’ve said.” And promptly goes and tells her parents she’s pregnant and with no one they have met personally.

The second thing we know is about her going off to see her old cousin Elizabeth, who had, at a very advanced age, and without ever having children, got pregnant. (Her baby was going to be John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin!) Pause and consider this. A pregnant unmarried teenager from a small town undertakes a journey of two, or several days, with no word of an escort, through largely deserted areas where both roadside bandits or dangerous foreign soldiers were a clear danger. On foot or with donkeys, and *maybe* one of her Dad’s employees coming along. I used to live in Guelph and I wouldn’t have let my 16year old daughter go to Toronto and back by bus! Let alone on foot!

Then Luke gives us the first big speech Mary made. We call it the Magnificat. It is full of energy, challenge, social comment, a deep, active faith and trust in God. Listen to it again (For a reader, it is in Luke’s Gospel, Ch 1;47-55. Read it out loud like it has never been heard before. It is a shout of Victory!)

The Magnificat is no mealy-mouthed piece, and makes me think that Luke had the impression that Mary was someone to be reckoned with.

That is how I see the young Mary. It is not definitive but it matters to me. It matters because I care about **who** carried my Lord.

And that matters because I need to know if it is OK for me to carry my Lord. I don’t want to let Mary be just a painting. I need her to be a person. Each of you is a person. And when you receive communion, and then, later, as you leave this building *you* are carrying the Lord. I am too.

You see, I don’t think God wants a blank slate, a nobody sort of person. He wants a real person. He wants YOU in the fullness of what and who YOU actually are. I don’t think He wants a watered down, version. Not a YOU with aspects of your personality muzzled. He doesn’t want you edited, sanitized or reduced. He wants all of you, including the parts you think may be unacceptable. Well, if they were unacceptable God wouldn’t want you. But given that you are still here, and not destroyed by a fireball, we will have to believe Jesus, and just accept that God does indeed love us, yes, just the way we are!

As we get ready for Christmas we have to realize that the Omnipotent, Holy, Awesome, Almighty God decided to place his whole self (very God of very God) in the womb, the hands and the upbringing care of a very young, and rather bouncy woman. God does not change from then to now. What we see of God in the story of Jesus is timelessly true. So God, who has no hands on earth to reach out to touch other, but ours. Who has no mouth with which to speak words of love and healing and redemption, but ours... This God entrusts Mary, and Genepha, and Sylvia, and Craig and Winston and Debbie and Graham-about-to-become-a-priest.....and You, and even me, with carrying him. And he knows we are all a bit odd. And he is OK with that. In fact, I think he likes it.

We are the cradle in which God trustfully places himself; humble, vulnerable and believing in us, as he did with Mary and Joseph.

So be not afraid, as the angel once said, be glad, be proud and be yourself. For God has, apparently, favoured you too.