



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

Mary, Mother of Jesus

Faith, Surrender, and Trusting God Through the Unexpected

The Short Answer

Mary was an ordinary young woman entrusted with an extraordinary calling: to become the mother of Jesus, the promised Messiah. God's plan disrupted the life Mary likely expected. She did not understand everything that would happen. She faced uncertainty, possible misunderstanding, displacement, danger, unanswered questions, and eventually profound grief. Yet Mary's response provides a remarkable picture of biblical faith. She listened. She asked an honest question. She believed God's Word. She surrendered to His will. She worshiped. She treasured what she did not yet understand. And she continued following Jesus even when His path became painful and confusing. Mary's story does not teach that trusting God makes life predictable. It teaches that God can be trusted when life is not.

Luke 1:26-56 · Luke 2:1-52 · Matthew 1:18-25 · Matthew 2:13-23 · John 2:1-12 · John 19:25-27 · Acts 1:12-14

Opening Memory Anchor

Faith does not require knowing what comes next. Faith trusts the God who does.



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PART ONE

BEGINNER GUIDE

1. WHO WAS MARY?

Read Luke 1:26-38. Mary enters the biblical story quietly. She lived in Nazareth, a town in Galilee, and was pledged to be married to Joseph, a descendant of David. Scripture does not introduce Mary as wealthy, powerful, famous, or socially important.

Then everything changed. The angel Gabriel appeared to her and announced:

"You have found favor with God."

— Luke 1:30

Mary would conceive and give birth to a Son. His name would be Jesus. He would be called the Son of the Most High. He would receive David's throne. His kingdom would never end. Read Luke 1:31-33.

Mary suddenly found herself standing inside the fulfillment of promises God had been making for generations. Read 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:6-7. The Messiah Israel had been waiting for was coming. And Mary had been chosen to carry Him.

2. WHAT MADE GOD'S CALLING SO UNEXPECTED?

Mary was a virgin pledged to Joseph. The angel's announcement therefore raised an obvious question:

"How will this be...?"

— Luke 1:34

This was not a minor change in Mary's plans. Her entire future had suddenly become uncertain. Pregnancy before Mary and Joseph came together could expose her to misunderstanding, shame, and the possible loss of her marriage.

Matthew tells the story from Joseph's perspective. When Joseph learned Mary was pregnant, he initially planned to end their betrothal quietly. Read Matthew 1:18-25. God intervened by revealing to Joseph that Mary's child had been conceived through the Holy Spirit.

But Mary did not know every detail of how God would work everything out when Gabriel first spoke to her. She was asked to trust God before she could see the outcome.

Memory Anchor

God often gives enough light for the next faithful step without revealing the entire road.

3. WAS MARY WRONG TO ASK, 'HOW WILL THIS BE?'

No. Mary asked a genuine question. Compare Mary's response with Zechariah's earlier conversation with Gabriel. Read Luke 1:5-20.

Zechariah asked, "How can I be sure of this?" (Luke 1:18). Mary asked, "How will this be...?" (Luke 1:34). The questions sound similar, but Gabriel responded differently. Zechariah was corrected for unbelief. Mary received an explanation.

Scripture therefore gives good reason to understand Mary's question as seeking understanding rather than demanding proof. Faith and honest questions are not enemies. Biblical faith brings uncertainty to God.



4. HOW DID MARY RESPOND WHEN SHE STILL DID NOT KNOW EVERYTHING?

Gabriel explained that the Holy Spirit would come upon Mary and that her child would be holy - the Son of God. Then Mary responded:

"I am the Lord's servant... May your word to me be fulfilled."

— Luke 1:38

This is one of Scripture's clearest pictures of surrender. Mary did not receive a detailed timeline or an explanation of every consequence. She did not know how Joseph would respond, that Caesar's decree would take her to Bethlehem, that she would flee with Joseph and Jesus to Egypt, or that Simeon would tell her a sword would pierce her own soul. She certainly did not yet understand the cross.

Mary knew something more important than all of those details: God had spoken. So she entrusted herself to Him.

5. DOES SURRENDER MEAN PASSIVITY?

No. Biblical surrender is not giving up. It is willingly placing oneself under God's authority. Mary called herself "the Lord's servant" (Luke 1:38).

Her surrender was active. She listened. She questioned appropriately. She believed. She obeyed. She traveled. She worshiped. She cared for Jesus. She pondered what God was doing. She remained present through circumstances she could not control.

Surrender does not mean, "Nothing matters." It means, "God's will matters more than control."

6. WHAT DID MARY DO AFTER RECEIVING THE NEWS?

Mary went to visit Elizabeth. Read Luke 1:39-45. Elizabeth was also experiencing an extraordinary pregnancy. Though previously unable to have children and advanced in age, she was carrying John the Baptist.

When Mary arrived, Elizabeth called her blessed and described her as "the mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43). Elizabeth then highlighted something important:

"Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

— Luke 1:45

Mary's blessing was connected not merely to what happened to her but also to her believing response to God.

7. WHY IS MARY'S SONG SO IMPORTANT?

Read Luke 1:46-55. Mary's song is often called the Magnificat, from the Latin word associated with its opening declaration: "My soul glorifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46).

Mary praised God as her Savior, the Mighty One, holy, merciful, powerful, and faithful to His promises. Her song shows that she understood her experience as part of something much larger than herself. God was remembering His covenant promises and fulfilling what He had promised Abraham and his descendants.

Mary's story was not ultimately about Mary. It was about God's faithfulness. The natural question is, "What is happening to me?" Faith gradually learns to ask, "What might God be doing?"

Memory Anchor

Mary's circumstances were unexpected. God's plan was not.



8. DID TRUSTING GOD MAKE MARY'S LIFE EASY?

No. Soon Mary's life became even less predictable. Read Luke 2:1-20. A decree from Caesar Augustus required Joseph to travel to Bethlehem. Mary went with him while pregnant. Jesus was born there, away from their home in Nazareth.

Then shepherds arrived describing an angelic announcement about her newborn Son. Everyone who heard their report wondered. Mary responded differently:

"Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

— Luke 2:19

Mary did not necessarily understand everything immediately. She treasured. She pondered. She waited. That is another form of faith.

9. WHAT HAPPENED WHEN MARY'S FAMILY HAD TO FLEE TO EGYPT?

Read Matthew 2:13-23. Mary's unexpected journey did not end in Bethlehem. After Jesus' birth, Herod sought to kill the child. God warned Joseph in a dream:

"Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt."

— Matthew 2:13

Joseph took Mary and Jesus and left during the night. They became a family displaced by danger. Matthew then describes Herod's brutal killing of young boys in and around Bethlehem. Read Matthew 2:16-18.

Scripture does not tell us precisely what Mary knew about those events at the time or how she emotionally processed them. It is important not to invent details the Bible does not provide.

What Scripture does show is that the family's life became unsettled and dangerous. Mary had surrendered to God's calling, yet surrender did not protect her from disruption. The Messiah had come, yet evil still opposed Him.

Eventually, after Herod died, God directed the family back to Israel, and they settled in Nazareth. God's presence does not always mean the absence of danger. Sometimes faithfulness means continuing to trust God while walking through circumstances no one would have chosen.

10. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO 'TREASURE AND PONDER'?

Luke uses similar language twice. Read Luke 2:19 and Luke 2:51. Mary appears to have held events carefully in her heart and reflected upon their meaning.

Mary had received extraordinary promises about Jesus. Yet her daily experience included ordinary motherhood, uncertainty, hardship, and questions. Angels declared glory. She saw a manger. Simeon proclaimed salvation. He also predicted opposition.

Sometimes faith receives God's Word long before circumstances make complete sense. Mary shows that not every unanswered question must be resolved immediately. Some truths must be carried, remembered, prayed over, and understood gradually.



11. WHAT DID SIMEON TELL MARY?

Read Luke 2:22-35. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple, Simeon recognized Him as God's promised salvation. But Simeon's prophecy was not only joyful.

He said Jesus was "destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel" and would be "a sign that will be spoken against" (Luke 2:34). Then Simeon told Mary:

"And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

— Luke 2:35

The suffering Mary would experience was connected to the opposition Jesus Himself would face. Jesus would reveal hearts. Some would receive Him. Others would reject Him.

Mary's extraordinary privilege would therefore also involve extraordinary pain. Following God's will does not mean avoiding suffering. This does NOT mean every painful circumstance has an easily identifiable hidden purpose. Scripture does not tell hurting people to pretend suffering is painless. Mary's story demonstrates something more careful: suffering and God's faithfulness can exist at the same time.

12. WHAT HAPPENED WHEN JESUS WAS TWELVE?

Read Luke 2:41-52. Mary and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem for Passover. While returning home, they discovered Jesus was not with their traveling group. After searching for Him, they found Him in the temple.

Mary expressed the distress they had experienced. Jesus responded:

"Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

— Luke 2:49

Mary and Joseph did not fully understand what He meant (Luke 2:50). Again Luke says, "His mother treasured all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51). Mary's faith was not based on understanding everything about Jesus. Her understanding developed as she continued walking with Him.

13. WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM MARY'S RESPONSE TO THE UNEXPECTED?

GOD SPEAKS. Mary listens.

UNCERTAINTY APPEARS. Mary asks an honest question.

GOD REVEALS WHAT SHE NEEDS TO KNOW. Mary believes.

THE FUTURE REMAINS UNCLEAR. Mary surrenders.

CIRCUMSTANCES BECOME DIFFICULT. Mary continues.

SHE DOES NOT UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING. Mary treasures and ponders.

GOD'S PURPOSE IS LARGER THAN HER PERSONAL STORY. Mary worships.

This is not a formula guaranteeing that every difficult situation will turn out as hoped. It is a posture of faith.

Memory Anchor

Trust does not say: "I know exactly what God will do." Trust says: "I know enough about God to entrust myself to Him."

PART TWO

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

INTERMEDIATE



14. HOW MUCH DID MARY ACTUALLY UNDERSTAND ABOUT JESUS?

Scripture does not tell us exactly. Mary clearly understood that Jesus was extraordinary. Gabriel identified Him as the Son of the Most High. Elizabeth called Him “my Lord.” The shepherds reported the angelic announcement. Simeon identified Him with God's salvation.

Yet Luke also deliberately shows Mary encountering things she did not fully understand. Read Luke 2:50. This protects readers from imagining that Mary possessed complete theological knowledge from the beginning.

God revealed truth progressively. Mary responded faithfully to what she had been given. God's people often understand His purposes more clearly in hindsight than while living through them. Mary knew enough to trust God even when she did not know everything.

15. WHAT DOES 'FAVORED ONE' MEAN IN LUKE 1:28?

Gabriel greets Mary with language translated in several ways: “Greetings, you who are highly favored!” (Luke 1:28).

The Greek word is *kecharitomene* (keh-khah-ree-TOH-meh-nay), related to the word for grace or favor. The wording emphasizes that Mary has received God's favor.

Different Christian traditions have drawn different theological conclusions from this expression. The verse itself clearly presents Mary as the recipient of extraordinary divine favor. It does not, by itself, explain every later theological claim made about Mary. Mary is favored because God has graciously chosen her for a unique role in His redemptive plan.

16. HOW DOES MARY'S SONG CONNECT TO HANNAH'S SONG?

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and Luke 1:46-55. Mary's Magnificat strongly echoes themes found in Hannah's prayer. Both women praise God for overturning ordinary human expectations.

Hannah declares that God brings down the powerful and raises the weak. Mary says God has “brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble” (Luke 1:52). Hannah speaks of the hungry being filled. Mary says God has “filled the hungry with good things” (Luke 1:53).

Both songs celebrate the God who reverses human status and acts faithfully for His people. But Mary's song stands at a greater moment in redemptive history. Hannah rejoiced at Samuel's birth; Mary rejoiced because the promised King Himself was coming.

Mary's worship sounds like Scripture because her understanding of God had been shaped by Scripture.

17. WHAT HAPPENED AT THE WEDDING AT CANA?

Read John 2:1-12. When the wine ran out, Mary told Jesus, “They have no more wine” (John 2:3). Jesus' response indicates that the timing and nature of His mission were governed by His Father's purpose, not by human pressure.

Mary then told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). Those words capture something important about Mary's biblical role. Mary points away from herself and toward Jesus. Her story should direct attention toward Him.



18. DID MARY ALWAYS UNDERSTAND JESUS' MINISTRY?

Apparently not. Read Mark 3:20-35.

Reader Safeguard

This is one of the more difficult passages involving Mary. The central point does not depend on resolving every detail of verse 21.

Mark 3:21 says that when Jesus' family heard what was happening, they went to take charge of Him because people were saying, "He is out of his mind." The wording and subject of this verse have produced interpretive discussion.

It is not completely clear whether Mark intends Jesus' family themselves to be making that accusation or whether they are reacting to what others were saying. Later, Jesus' mother and brothers arrive and send someone inside to call Him. Read Mark 3:31-35.

Jesus responds by redefining family around obedience to God: "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35). Matthew 12:46-50 and Luke 8:19-21 preserve similar sayings without including Mark's earlier "out of his mind" wording.

Scripture does not justify portraying Mary as perfectly understanding every part of Jesus' ministry. But neither does it clearly present her as rejecting Him. The tension is worth leaving where Scripture leaves it.

19. WHY DOES MARY CALL GOD HER 'SAVIOR'?

In the Magnificat Mary says, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47). This statement keeps Mary's biblical role in proper perspective.

Mary was highly favored. Mary was uniquely chosen. Mary was blessed. But Mary still worshiped God as her Savior. The Gospel is not ultimately about Mary's greatness. It is about God's grace. Mary herself directs attention there.

20. WHY DO CHRISTIANS UNDERSTAND MARY DIFFERENTLY?

Christians across Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions honor Mary as the mother of Jesus and recognize her important place in the biblical story. However, Christian traditions differ concerning later teachings about Mary.

One important historical title is Theotokos, commonly translated "God-bearer" or "Mother of God." The title was affirmed at the Council of Ephesus in AD 431. Its central purpose was Christological: it protected the confession that the One Mary bore was Jesus Christ, truly divine and truly human. The title therefore says something first about Jesus.

Other Marian teachings developed within Christian tradition, including perpetual virginity, the Immaculate Conception, the bodily Assumption of Mary, and forms of Marian intercession or veneration.

Catholic and Orthodox traditions generally place significant weight on historic church tradition alongside Scripture, though they understand that authority differently from one another. Most Protestants hold that doctrines binding the conscience must be demonstrable from Scripture and therefore reject or remain unconvinced by several later Marian doctrines.

Bible-Study Principle

Honor what Scripture honors. Say clearly what Scripture says clearly. Identify later theological conclusions as later theological conclusions. And keep Jesus at the center.



21. WHERE WAS MARY WHEN JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED?

Read John 19:25-27. Mary stood near the cross. The child she had carried was being crucified before her. Simeon's words from decades earlier now carry painful significance: "And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:35).

The Bible does not describe Mary's emotions in detail. There is no need to embellish them. The scene itself is enough. Mary had once held the infant Jesus. Now she watched Him suffer.

From the cross, Jesus entrusted Mary to the care of the disciple He loved. Mary's calling had carried her somewhere she could never have imagined when Gabriel first entered her story. Her surrender to God did not lead to a painless life. It eventually brought her to the foot of a cross.

22. IS THAT WHERE MARY'S BIBLICAL STORY ENDS?

No. Read Acts 1:12-14. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, His followers gathered together in Jerusalem. Among them was "Mary the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14).

The woman who once received Gabriel's announcement is now found among the praying community of Jesus' disciples. She began by saying, "I am the Lord's servant" (Luke 1:38). She appears near the end of her biblical story still among those waiting upon the Lord. The unexpected calling became a lifetime of faith.

23. WHAT DOES MARY TEACH ABOUT SURRENDER?

Surrender is sometimes imagined as one dramatic moment. Mary's story suggests something deeper. Her surrender began in Luke 1. But she had to keep living it.

She surrendered when the angel spoke. She trusted while Joseph needed his own revelation. She traveled to Bethlehem. She gave birth away from home. She heard strange reports from shepherds. She fled with Joseph and Jesus to Egypt. She heard Simeon predict opposition and sorrow. She searched anxiously for twelve-year-old Jesus. She encountered parts of His mission she did not understand. She watched His public ministry unfold. She stood near His cross. She remained with His followers after His resurrection and ascension.

The first surrender was real. So were all the ones that followed.

Memory Anchor

Surrender is rarely one moment. It is often the repeated decision to trust God again.

24. WHAT IF GOD'S PLAN LOOKS DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WAS EXPECTED?

Mary's story does not promise that every unexpected event comes directly from God. Scripture contains suffering caused by sin, human choices, injustice, living in a fallen world, and circumstances whose reasons are never revealed.

Christians should therefore be careful about saying, "God caused this because He has something better." Scripture does not provide that explanation for every hardship.

What Scripture does give is something stronger: God remains faithful when life becomes unexpected. He can be trusted when answers are incomplete. He can work in circumstances people cannot control. Nothing can prevent Him from accomplishing His ultimate redemptive purposes.



25. WHAT DOES MARY'S STORY REVEAL ABOUT GOD?

Mary's story ultimately reveals more about God than about Mary. God remembers His promises. God works through people the world may overlook. God's plans are not limited by human impossibility. God welcomes humble faith. God is patient with honest questions. God can be trusted before the outcome is visible. God's purposes may unfold over years rather than moments. God does not abandon His redemptive plan when circumstances become painful.

Most importantly: God kept His promise to send the Savior.

THE GOSPEL IN MARY'S STORY

Mary's greatest significance is not simply that she provides an inspiring example of faith. Mary carried Jesus. And Jesus is the center of the story.

Gabriel announced that He would reign forever. The shepherds heard that a Savior had been born. Simeon recognized God's salvation. Jesus eventually went to the cross. He died for sinners. He rose from the dead. He ascended to the Father.

Mary needed the Savior she carried. So does every person.

Gospel Memory Anchor

Christian faith is not ultimately: "Try to surrender like Mary." It is: "Trust the Savior Mary trusted."

Mary's example matters because her faith points beyond herself to the faithfulness of God and ultimately to Jesus Christ.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. LISTEN BEFORE PANICKING. Return to what God has actually said in Scripture.
2. ASK HONEST QUESTIONS. Faith does not require pretending confusion does not exist.
3. DISTINGUISH WHAT IS KNOWN FROM WHAT IS UNKNOWN. Mary knew God had spoken even though she did not know how everything would unfold.
4. TAKE THE NEXT FAITHFUL STEP. Complete understanding is not required for obedience.
5. REMEMBER GOD'S CHARACTER. Circumstances change. God does not.
6. TREASURE AND PONDER. Not every question must be answered immediately. Some things become clearer with time.
7. KEEP JESUS AT THE CENTER. The goal is not merely surviving unexpected circumstances. The goal is continuing to follow Christ through them.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Which part of Mary's story most clearly shows that faith and uncertainty can exist at the same time?
2. What is the difference between asking God an honest question and refusing to trust Him until every question is answered?
3. Mary repeatedly "treasured" and "pondered" what she did not fully understand. What might that look like in a believer's life today?
4. How does the flight to Egypt challenge the assumption that being within God's will means life will be comfortable or predictable?
5. What does Mary's Magnificat reveal about what she believed about God before she knew how her own story would unfold?



DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION - CONTINUED

6. Why is Simeon's description of Jesus as both salvation and "a sign that will be spoken against" important for understanding Mary's later suffering?
7. Which statement is harder personally: "God is faithful" or "God will do what I expect"? Why is the distinction important?
8. What is one circumstance where the next faithful step may be clearer than the final outcome?
9. How does Mary's statement "Do whatever he tells you" help keep a study about Mary centered on Jesus?
10. What does Mary's final appearance among the praying disciples in Acts 1 add to the picture of surrender that began in Luke 1?

REVIEW AND RETENTION

1. Where was Mary living when Gabriel appeared to her? Nazareth.
2. What did Gabriel announce? Mary would conceive and give birth to Jesus, the Son of the Most High and promised King.
3. Did Mary ask a question? Yes. She asked how this would happen.
4. What was Mary's response after Gabriel explained? "I am the Lord's servant... May your word to me be fulfilled."
5. What did Elizabeth praise about Mary? She believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises.
6. What is Mary's song in Luke 1 commonly called? The Magnificat.
7. What Old Testament prayer strongly parallels themes in Mary's Magnificat? Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2.
8. Why did Mary, Joseph, and Jesus flee to Egypt? Herod was seeking to kill Jesus.
9. What did Mary repeatedly do when she encountered things she did not fully understand? She treasured and pondered them.
10. What did Simeon say about Jesus? He would cause the falling and rising of many, would be opposed, and Mary herself would experience deep sorrow.
11. Where was Mary during Jesus' crucifixion? Near the cross.
12. Where is Mary found after Jesus' ascension? Praying with the community of Jesus' disciples.

FINAL MEMORY ANCHORS

- Faith does not require knowing what comes next. Faith trusts the God who does.
- God often gives enough light for the next faithful step without revealing the entire road.
- Mary's circumstances were unexpected. God's plan was not.
- Surrender is rarely one moment. It is often the repeated decision to trust God again.
- Trust does not say, "I know exactly what God will do." Trust says, "I know enough about God to entrust myself to Him."
- The future may be unexpected. God is never unprepared.

A SCRIPTURE PATH FOR CONTINUED STUDY

Luke 1:26-38 - Gabriel announces Jesus' birth · Luke 1:39-56 - Elizabeth and Mary's Magnificat · 1 Samuel 2:1-10 - Hannah's prayer · Matthew 1:18-25 - Joseph learns the truth · Luke 2:1-20 - Jesus' birth and the shepherds · Matthew 2:13-23 - Flight to Egypt and return · Luke 2:22-35 - Simeon's prophecy · Luke 2:41-52 - Jesus at the temple · John 2:1-12 - Wedding at Cana · Mark 3:20-35; Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21 - Jesus and His family · John 19:25-27 - Mary at the cross · Acts 1:12-14 - Mary among Jesus' praying disciples.

FINAL SUMMARY

Mary's story began with an interruption. God called her into something she could not have planned, controlled, or fully understood. She asked how. God answered what she needed to know. Then Mary surrendered. But that first surrender was only the beginning. There would be Bethlehem, a manger, prophecies, danger, Egypt, Nazareth, questions, years of ordinary life, a public ministry she could not control, opposition she could not stop, a cross she could not prevent, a resurrection greater than she could have imagined, and finally a room filled with disciples waiting and praying. Mary did not know the entire story when she said, "I am the Lord's servant" (Luke 1:38). She simply knew the God who had called her. Mary's story therefore offers a deeply practical picture of faith: listen when God speaks, ask honest questions, believe what He has revealed, surrender what cannot be controlled, treasure what is not yet understood, keep following when the road becomes painful, and keep looking to Jesus. The greatest truth in Mary's story is not that Mary trusted God perfectly. It is that the God Mary trusted was faithful.

Final Memory Anchor

The future may be unexpected. God is never unprepared.