

## Mary Holy Mother of God

Cycle C Luke 2:16-21

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem would probably go via Samaria and Jerusalem and take about four days on foot. The Bible says nothing about Mary traveling on a donkey, so we can't be sure. But it's quite likely Joseph would have a donkey to carry wood and tools of the carpenter's trade. And surely, as Mary was heavily pregnant with the baby Jesus at this time, she would have ridden.

It's about 120 Km from Nazareth to Jerusalem and another 10 Km from Jerusalem to Bethlehem (**about 80 miles in all**). If Mary had not been feeling very well it could have taken nearly a week to do the journey.

In those days good Jews were supposed to offer hospitality to travelers and might have taken Mary & Joseph into their homes overnight. Or they might have camped out with a group of people from their area. They used to go every year on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with the people of Nazareth, so with a 12th of the population of the area going to Bethlehem, they surely would have traveled in a group for safety. There were lots of bandits at that time that would attack lonesome travelers, and even wild animals, so traveling on foot could be dangerous. Traveling through Samaria might have been hard too, as the Samaritans did not like the Jews very much and might have made life difficult for Jewish travelers like Mary and Joseph.

From the moment of the Annunciation Mary completely didn't completely know or understand the full significance of her Son. She pondered on who that child would be from her "Yes" at the Annunciation, when her Son, the Christ, first began to grow inside her.

At each step of the way, she had to re-assert that "yes" of the Annunciation, more deeply understanding what her response meant. She spent her life pondering the visible Word of God that was and is her Son. And we must do the same...we too are asked to incarnate Jesus in our lives, especially today in this confusing and dangerous age.

And Mary's response to God should not be thought of as simply a choice between right and wrong, good or bad, some sort of ethical or moral decision. Nor should our choices be only that. Mary gives us an example of what our choice as Christians really implies: that each genuine choice we make reveals who we are and is not simply what we do.

I hear a story of Jesus taking His morning walk through heaven. He met there some nasty people who should have been in the other place. He went to the front gates to bawl Peter out, but in his defense, the apostle said, "Lord, when the unworthy come here, I chase them away and tell them to go to hell. But then they go to the back door, knock softly, and your mother sneaks them in." Jesus smiled and apologized to Peter. He promised to go fishing with him soon. Then He whistled softly as He went off to have lunch with Mozart and Bach.

In this Year of Mercy, we should remember that Mary is a merciful mother who does not let any one of her children be lost...and we, too, are her children. [Mary made the church user-friendly.](#) [She made it into a softer place.](#) Artists of the middle ages often painted her with a large mantle. Their inference was that all of us could get under it where we could and seek sanctuary and support from her.

Mary would be our own back door into Heaven. Mary, as our mother, never gives up on anyone of us no matter how sinful we are.

The gospel today is almost an exact repeat of what was read at the Christmas Eve Liturgy. The shepherds, considered among the marginalized, the poor, the outsider, are those first informed of Christ's birth, and who first visit the infant Jesus. It is the outsider who bears the good news of what the angels have announced: that the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord, has been born. In Luke, Mary represents the ideal believer; she hears the good news and ponders it in her heart, and fully responds to it. Her heart becomes the place of discovering Jesus, and who he truly is, as our own hearts must become that place of response. Mary's entire life, and the Church's entire life, is centered on that process of pondering who that child now born to us really is. It is this aspect of Mary's motherhood that is most important for our new year, a year in which we continue our **own** journey of the heart towards God.

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