

## Mary & Our Marriage

Although Mary is perhaps known best in her role as mother and disciple of Jesus, she was also the wife of Joseph. We do not have much information about Mary in that role. In fact, Joseph makes only a few cameo appearances. Some believe that he had probably died by the time Jesus began his public ministry, thus explaining his absence at the marriage feast in Cana. Is there anything that we can learn from their marriage and from Mary in her role as a spouse?

What do we know about Mary?

She was prayerful and had a relationship with God.

She was humble.

She was calm and contemplative.

She was obedient.

She trusted God. She was brave.

She trusted her spouse and his relationship with God.

She worked as a team with Joseph to accomplish their common goal: raise Jesus.

Although we typically think of Mary as a model for wives, we believe that Mary is a model for both spouses. Perhaps the most controversial proposition advanced with respect to Mary as a model for wives is that the wife is to be obedient or subservient to her husband. That, however, is not actually how Mary is depicted in the Bible and that is not what Jesus, Himself, told us about the role of a spouse. To whom was Mary ultimately obedient? That is the real question. From her first "YES" to the Angel Gabriel, we are told that she is obedient to God. At that moment, she actually chose God over her future husband IF it came to that. She knew that being pregnant surely meant divorce from her betrothed.

Moreover, Jesus used Mary to emphasize the point that God must come before family. In Matthew Chapter 12, when the disciples told him that his Mother and brothers were outside, he took that moment to teach a lesson about family relationships:

Matthew 12: 46-50

46 While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers appeared outside, wishing to speak with him.

47 (Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak with you.")

48 But he said in reply to the one who told him, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?"

49 And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers.

50 For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother."

No one could interpret Jesus to say that a spouse must obey his or her spouse if to do so is against God's law. This is again graphically and vividly confirmed by Jesus in Matthew 10: 34-39 when Jesus says:

Matthew 10:34-38

34 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword.

35 For I have come to set a man 'against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

36 and one's enemies will be those of his household.'

37 "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;

38 and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.

Jesus is clear on this point: spirit is thicker than blood-- a family member is obedient first to God. We believe, however, that if a person is obedient to God in all things, there is also a greater chance that he or she will find peace and fulfillment in his or her marriage. If both spouses commit to this model, it could be a heavenly marriage. Some might view a spouse's deferential treatment as obedience. Others might call it mutual respect learned by acceptance of the Gospel message of unconditional love.

Mary and Joseph are not depicted as if one were the master and one a subservient being. They are depicted as a team united in a common goal: to raise the precious child Jesus. He is seen as the protector and understanding husband. She is seen fulfilling, in a brave and courageous way, her role of a wife and mother—a role that was fraught with danger. While she may have been humble, we suggest that Mary was no wimp! She endured a long trip in her last month of pregnancy either on foot or on a donkey to Bethlehem and then just a few days after childbirth hit the road again to save her child.

The depiction of the couple shows a common commitment to God as a priority in their lives and an understanding that God was a priority, even if they did not totally understand all of the circumstances pertaining to their situation. It shows the complete trust they had in each other and in God. If tomorrow morning your husband (or wife) woke up and said, "Honey, an angel appeared to me last night and said we have to leave all our belongings behind and flee to Argentina today," what would you say to him? Would you trust him enough and trust in his relationship with God to get on Travelocity and book your tickets?

Mary's response to the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation—her "Yes" to God— and her subsequent praise of God, the Magnificat, shows that she had a deep and loving relationship with Him. Joseph obviously also had a relationship with God too. God spoke to Joseph through the angels and Joseph responded by his actions. They were both used to turning to God for answers and direction in their lives. They were both used to following God's instructions.

The New Testament shows a woman who was humble. She wasn't proud. She didn't demand things her husband could not provide, like a fancy hotel for the birth of her baby. She is not depicted as complaining about her situation. She coped with each new and changing circumstance regardless of the hardships.

Mary was contemplative and calm. She pondered things and guarded them in her heart. She is not depicted as someone who shot off three or four sentences which she immediately wanted to retract. She is not the Saint of Snappy Responses. She thought about things and reflected on them before responding. How many times do we wish we had pondered a little longer before saying something to our spouse?

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Do you see other ways that Mary serves as a model for married people today?

How can being more like Mary help husbands and wives in their marriage?

Do you share your faith with your spouse? How?

Do you and your spouse make God a priority in your marriage? If so, how. If not, why not?

How has the decision to marry either within or outside of the Catholic faith affected your marriage? How has that decision affected your personal relationship with God?

Do you think that even if your spouse is not willing to change, your unilateral commitment to be more like Mary might ultimately benefit your marriage?

In what way do you wish your spouse were more like Mary (choose one characteristic)?

In what way do you think your spouse wishes you were more like Mary (choose one characteristic)?

What keeps you from being more like Mary in your marriage?

Will you commit to being more like Mary in one way for one month?

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