

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

November/December 1986

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The Mother of the Lord

We see her first, that little Mary (may I say little? I think she was a teenager), as a simple village girl in a poor home in an out-of-the-way place. She is bending over her work when suddenly the light changes. She raises her eyes. A dazzling stranger stands before her with a puzzling greeting. He calls her "most favored one" and tells her the Lord is with her. She is stunned. I don't believe her thought is of herself (Who am I? or Am I ever lucky!) Mary is troubled. She discerns at once that this has to do with things infinitely larger than herself, far beyond her understanding. What can it mean?

The angel does not weigh in immediately with the stupendous message he has been sent to deliver. He first comforts her. "Don't be afraid, Mary." *Mary*. She is not a stranger to him. He is assuring her that he has the right person. He explains what she has been chosen for—to be the mother of the Son of the Most High, a king whose reign will be forever. She has one question now—not about the Most High, not about an eternal king—those are things too high for her—but motherhood is another matter. She understands motherhood, has been looking forward to it with great happiness. Her question is about that: "How can this be? I am still a virgin." He does not really explain. He simply states a mystery: "The power of the Most High will overshadow you." He goes on to tell her of another miraculous pregnancy, that of her old cousin Elisabeth, well past child-bearing age. "God's promises can never fail," he says. They won't fail for you, Mary. Rest assured.

How will the girl respond? She is at once totally at the disposal of her Lord (she sees that the visitor is from Him). Whatever the mystery, whatever the divine reasons for choosing her, whatever the inconveniences, even disasters (broken engagement? stoning to death—the punishment of a fornicator?) which she may be required to face, her answer is unequivocal and instant: "Here I am. I am the Lord's servant; let it be as you have told me." *Anything, Lord*.

We see her next with Elisabeth, who, by the manner of Mary's greeting and by her own baby's sudden movement in her womb, knows immediately that God has chosen Mary to be the mother of the Lord. They don't sit down over coffee and natter about the gynecology or the practical logistics or what people are going to say. Mary sings her song of gladness, of thorough-going acceptance of the gift, of trust in the Mighty One.

We see her sweating in the cold of the stable, putting her own life on the line, as every mother must do, in order to give life to somebody else. We see her with the tough shepherds, breathlessly telling their story of the glory of the Lord and the singing of the angel choir. Everyone else is astonished (a word which comes from thunder-struck), but Mary does not join the excited babble. She is quiet, *treasuring* all these things, pondering them deep in her heart. We see her with the mysterious travelers from the East bringing their lavish gifts. She says nothing as they kneel before the baby she holds in her arms. We see her on the donkey again, on the

round-about journey to Egypt because her husband has been given a secret message in a dream. She does not balk, she does not argue.

We see her in the temple handing over her baby to old Simeon, to whom the Holy Spirit has revealed the child's amazing destiny: a revelation to the heathen, glory to Israel. But to Mary he gives the far deeper message of suffering, for there is no glory that is not bought by suffering: her son will suffer—he will be a sign which men reject; she, his mother, will suffer, will be pierced to the heart. No question or answer from her is recorded. Again we know only her silence.

We see nothing of her for twelve years—days and nights, weeks and months, years and years of caring for the infant, the toddler, the little boy, the adolescent. There is no mention of any of that. Mary has no witness, no limelight, no special recognition of any kind. She is not Mother of the Year. Hers is a life lived in the ordinary necessity of their poverty and their humanity, no one paying attention to her attention to him. Whatever the level of her comprehension as to the nature of this boy, she knows he was given to her. She remembers how. She treasures all this. She ponders things in the silence of her heart. Did she share any of them with Joseph? Could she? Could he receive them? We know next to nothing of the dynamics between them. She was content to be silent before God.

The apostle Paul tells us we are "hidden with Christ in God." There is mystery there, but when I think of the life of Mary, I see some facets of that mystery that I missed when I read the apostle. Hers was a hidden life, a faithful one, a holy one—holy in the context of a humble home in a small village where there was not very much diversion. She knew that the ordinary duties were ordained for her as much as the extraordinary way in which they became her assignment. She struck no poses. She was the mother of a baby, willing to be known simply as his mother for the rest of her life. He was an extraordinary baby, the Eternal Word, but his needs were very ordinary, very daily, to his mother. Did she imagine that she deserved to be the chosen mother? Did she see herself as

fully qualified? Surely not. Surely not more than any other woman who finds herself endowed with the awesome gift of a child. It is the most humbling experience of a woman's life, the most revealing of her own helplessness. Yet we know this mother, Mary, the humble virgin from Nazareth, as "Most Highly Exalted."

This Christmas I am thanking God that unto us a Child was born. I am thanking Him also that there was a pure-hearted woman prepared to receive that Child with all that motherhood would mean of daily trust, daily dependence, daily obedience. I thank Him for her silence. That spirit is not in me at all, not naturally. I want to learn what she had learned so early: the deep guarding in her heart of each event, mulling over its meaning from God, waiting in silence for His word to her.

I want to learn, too, that it is not an extraordinary spirituality that makes one refuse to do ordinary work, but a wish to prove that one is not ordinary—which is a dead giveaway of spiritual conceit. I want to respond in unhesitating obedience as she did: Anything You say, Lord.

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart,
for They Shall See God.

A Few Words from the Man behind the Scenes

Who wanted a few words from him? No one in particular. It's a bit like when I was in sales with McKesson Company in Atlanta. The home office folks popped in every now and then. We knew there was a reason for their coming and it meant something for some of us to do.

The Newsletter has been going since November, 1982 and is being mailed to 36 countries, United States, and Canada. Those of you who have been with us since the beginning may

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remember that I said a few words at the end of the first year.

Servant Publications is continuing to give their help. We are still committed to mailing the Newsletter (without cost to those who can't afford to pay). We don't send any underlined, red-lettered, starred appeals. We sure appreciate you who have been very generous in your support, helping others receive it, especially aiding overseas and Canadian friends who have a terrible exchange rate.

The "Home Office" will say that should anyone find himself wanting to place a year-end gift (for some strange reason this seems to help at tax-time), or even a mid-year gift for that matter, the office will respond with a very loud thank you.

Please, please return the card when it comes, to let us know if you want to continue on the mailing list. As some of you know, it's an automatic off-the-list if we get no response. You don't need to send money, but you do need to return the card.

You can help greatly if you think the Newsletter is worth keeping in business. Pass your copies on to friends, or ask them if they'd like to sign up. The strange fact is that as our numbers grow the unit cost decreases. Must be a tie-in somewhere there with that cookbook, *Eat More for Less*, or something.

Thanks from Lars Gren, the Man Behind the Scenes (referred to at times as the Third Mr. Elliot).

Those Christmas Cards

I learned this one from old friends of my parents, the Walter Buckinghams of Vero Beach, Florida. Save the cards (they string them up all over the house, which I prefer not to do), take one card each day and pray together for those people. You could send a regular government fourteen-cent post card each day, telling people they've been prayed for. You've no idea how this might cheer some of them, and it'll cheer you even more to do it (remember?—"more blessed to give . . .").

A Children's Christmas Pageant

My friend Virginia Larsen of Austin, Minnesota, described what happened at the last one in her Sunday School. Two little chubby angels fought over who got to hold Baby Jesus, so Mary grabbed him and passed him like a football (overhead toss) to Joseph, whereupon one angel grabbed a fistful of straw and threw it at her rival—and pandemonium ensued, for the shepherds and two more angels and one Sunday School teacher all got involved. They heard "Knock it off!", "Hey, he pinched me!", "Gimme that!", and a three-year-old shepherd got one of his colleagues by the leg with his crook and sent him flying. It would be hard to stage a pageant where everything goes wrong, but in this one everything did. I imagined the heavenly host rolling in the aisles of Paradise, holding their sides together.

The Incarnation

That the Great Angel-blinding light should
shrink
His blaze to shine in a poor Shepherd's eye;
That the unmeasur'd God so lowe should
sinke,
As Pris'ner in a few poor rags to lye,
That from his Mother's Breast he milke
should drinke,
Who feeds with Nectar Heaven's faire family,
That a vile Manger his low Bed should prove,
Who in a Throne of stars Thunders above;
That he whom the Sun serves, should faintly
peepe
Through clouds of Infant Flesh! That He, the
old
Eternall Word should be a Childe, and weep;
that He who made the fire, should fear the cold,
That heaven's high Majesty His Court should
Keepe
In a clay cottage, by each blast control'd;
That Glories self should serve our Griefs and
feares,
And free Eternity submit to years,
Let our overwhelming wonder be.
(Richard Crashaw, 1613?-1649)

Sex Is a Lot More Than Fun

A twelve-page booklet for children of about eleven to sixteen (depending on the child) about the true meaning and use of sex. I've tried to help them to see there are good reasons for waiting, and they CAN say NO.

Please order directly from us, *not from the Newsletter:*

Lars Gren

10 Strawberry Cove

Magnolia, MA 01930

Single copies: \$1.50 postpaid. Lots of ten: \$12 postpaid.

Please make checks payable to BOOKLETS Ltd.

Endorsement?

Occasionally readers have questioned whether my speaking for certain groups is tantamount to an endorsement. Most emphatically not. I will speak for anyone who will listen. Very few groups I cannot endorse would dream of asking me to speak, but some do. If such groups intend to capitalize on my presence as though it were a seal of approval, I am content to leave that with God.

Travel Schedule November/ December 1986; January 1987

November 4 Liverpool, NY; Sheraton Inn Syracuse; Natalie Ambrose, 315-685-8260 or Caryl Bangs, 637-3727.

November 7, 8 Boyne Mountain, MI; Winsome Women's Retreat; Meg Brown, 616-347-4945 (office 347-0020).

November 14 Trumbull, CT; Mrs. Kenyon, 617-927-2300 (ask for Planned Giving Dept.).

November 16 Easton, MA; Foursquare Church, 617-238-1280.

November 22 Bangor, ME; Evangelistic Assoc. of New England; Donald Gill, 617-523-3579.

November 25-30 Keystone, CO; Campus Crusade for Christ singles conference; Donna Guirard, 501-661-0366.

December 28 St. Louis, MO; Assemblies of God SALT conference; Dennis Gaylor, 417-862-2781.

December 29 Philadelphia, PA; Campus Crusade for Christ; Joan Gilliam, 617-648-0900.

January 28 McPherson KA; First Baptist Church, 316-241-6400.

January 29 Steubenville, OH; Ohio Valley Christian Assoc.; PO Box 972, Steubenville.

January 31 Edina, MN; Colonial Church, 612-925-2711.

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