

“A JOYFUL MOTHER’S DAY”
ACTS 1:12-14,
ASCENSION SUNDAY, MAY 8, 2016

You may have heard about that young mother who was expecting the birth of her second child. She was now two weeks into her second trimester---and so she found herself in her bedroom one day, sorting through her clothing, placing the clothes that she could no longer fit into—into an unused dresser drawer.

Her little five year old son was also there—observing all that was taking place carefully. And this is when that little fellow piped up and asked: “Mommy, now that you are going to have a baby does this mean that you’ll soon be wearing “ETERNITY” CLOTHES?”

You and I know that he was speaking about “MATERNITY” CLOTHES, but he thought that they were called eternity clothes. And yet perhaps for some expectant mothers living in the last two weeks of what may have been for them a rather difficult and challenging pregnancy, they may seem, at times, like “eternity” clothes.

Well, today is Mother’s Day in the United States of America; a day that—for those in the florist industry ranks right up there alongside of Valentines’ Day and Christmas!

But today is also a day in the church when we are celebrating the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ—once again to his rightful place into heaven—on that fortieth day after his glorious resurrection from the dead! For countless years in the church, the celebration of Ascension Day ranked right up there with the celebration of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost and still today in many places throughout Europe, and in other places in the world, everyone is given a day off work—because of this longstanding tradition! Brothers and sisters the ASCENSION OF OUR LORD is extremely important for at least three highly significant reasons.

(1) BECAUSE OF ASCENSION DAY WE KNOW NOW WHERE THE RISEN CHRIST HAS GONE. And this extremely important to us! What if Jesus who had been making so many of those post-resurrection appearances to his disciples, following his death and resurrection, would simply have “vanished into thin air” one day, but no one was there to witness it? What if Jesus had for all practical purposes, if you will allow me to use yet another old cliché, had “dropped off the face of the earth?”

Think of all the unanswered questions that his faithful disciples would have had. No Jesus purposefully wanted his disciples to witness this highly significant event!

(2) SECONDLY, JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES THAT IT WAS TO THEIR BENEFIT (AND TO OUR BENEFIT TOO) THAT HE WAS NOW ASCENDING ONCE MORE TO THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD THE FATHER. For it was only in that way that he would then be able to pour out upon them that life-giving gift of the **Holy Spirit!**

(3) THIRDLY JESUS KNEW THAT THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT UPON HIS DISCIPLES IN CREATING THE CHURCH—WOULD NOW MEAN THAT HE COULD BE PRESENT IN MANY DIFFERENT PLACES ALL AT ONE TIME, WHOSE FULLNESS, PAUL REMINDS THE EPHESIANS IN OUR SECOND LESSON TODAY—NOW FILLS ALL THINGS IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH—AND NOT ONLY ACCORDING TO HIS DIVINE NATURE BUT ACCORDING TO HIS HUMAN NATURE TOO. For once the divine nature and the human nature of the only-begotten Son of God had been joined together at the moment of our Savior’s conception they could never be separated every again!

As I was preparing for this message today—remembering that today is both Mother’s Day and Ascension Sunday—the Holy Spirit called to mind for me that great revelation that St. Luke shares with us in those verses immediately following our first lesson today, Acts 1:11-14. There it becomes apparent to

many of us that **Mary must have been present with her Son on the Mount of Olives on his glorious Ascension Day, and what a JOYFUL MOTHER'S DAY** that must have been for her, though it took place actually on a **Thursday** and not on a Sunday!

And since she is the best-known and perhaps the most-loved Mother of all time I was hoping we could spend a few moments speaking about the great challenges that were laid upon her as the Mother of the only-begotten Son of God!

(A) ONE THING WE COULD REMEMBER IS THE WAY THAT SHE RESPONDED SO FAITHFULLY TO THE CALL OF GOD UPON HER LIFE—EVEN WHEN THAT CALL OF GOD CAME AS A COMPLETE SURPRISE TO HER.

Mary was living a rather secluded life as a poor peasant girl in that rather small, one-horse town of Nazareth, when she was basically shoved from the shadows into the spotlight when the Angel Gabriel appeared to her suddenly and said: *“Don’t be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name ‘Jesus’”* (Luke 1:30-32)! Mary must have been dumbfounded. Nevertheless she managed to say: *“How will this be since I am a virgin?”* (Luke 1:34) The angel said to her, *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God”* (Luke 1:35)!

Can you and I really even imagine her surprise and her shock? And let’s not forget that Mary was only about 15 years old at the time. If some people believe that children grow up quickly today, lets me that in that first century Hebrew culture that many girls were often married and the mother of one or two children by the time that they were sixteen or seventeen years old!

Don’t you think that Mary must have been suddenly, and totally, overwhelmed?

Someone has pointed out, ladies, that there are two little words that can drastically change your whole life: “You’re pregnant!” And the same thing can be true of a man when a woman tells the father of her baby: “I’m pregnant!”

ONCE YOU HEAR THOSE WORDS, OR PERHAPS TODAY, ONCE YOU SEE THAT PLUS SIGN ON THE INDICATOR OF ONE OF THOSE HOME PREGNANCY TESTS, YOU LIFE WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN!

But when Mary found out about her unplanned pregnancy, she didn’t see it as an inconvenience. She didn’t look for a way out. She saw her pregnancy for what it was—a gift of God! For Mary the Mother of Jesus to learn that she would give birth to the Son of the Most High God, no doubt came as a complete surprise to her, but she responded with an unwavering love and devotion to God and to her unborn Son who would grow up to be the Promised Savior of the world!

(B) A SECOND THING WE COULD REMEMBER ABOUT MARY IS THE WAY SHE RESPONDED SO FAITHFULLY TO THE CALL OF GOD UPON HER LIFE—EVEN WHEN ANSWERING THAT CALL MEANT THAT SHE WOULD BE SERIOUSLY JEOPARDIZING HER RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PEOPLE IN THIS WORLD; ESPECIALLY THOSE PEOPLE WHOM SHE KNEW AND GREATLY LOVED.

Yes, when she received the message from Gabriel—it soon hit her that she was not even married yet!

How as she going to explain this to her parents? To Joseph? Can you imagine the pain in his eyes, when she finally got up enough courage to tell him the story? Who would have believed it? Joseph certainly didn’t, not initially, and he loved Mary the most. He didn’t believe it until God spoke to Joseph one night in a dreaming divinely confirming for him that everything Mary told him was true

Nevertheless she responded very favorably to the call of God upon her life! Once the angel had answered the question, she said: *“Behold I am a servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word!”* And then we read that the angel departed from her (Luke 1:37-39)!

(C) A THIRD THING WE COULD REMEMBER ABOUT MARY IS THE WAY SHE RESPONDED SO FAITHFULLY TO THE CALL OF GOD UPON HER LIFE—EVEN WHEN THAT CALL UPON HER LIFE WOULD REQUIRE A GREAT SACRIFICE FROM HER ON HER PART TOO!

Forty days after her Son was born, Mary and Joseph did travel to Jerusalem with the Baby Jesus for Mary’s rite of purification. And as they were walking into the temple that day—an elderly gentleman, named Simeon, whom they had never met before, came up to Mary and said to her specifically, Luke says: *“Behold this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed and a sword will pierce through your own soul also, so that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed!”* (Luke 1:34-35)

Of course, Simeon was prophesying that day when Mary would kneel at the foot of the cross as she watched her Son being crucified for the sins of the world! What a heartbreaking ordeal that was for her!

I am grateful that St. John tells us that when the dying “Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciples whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” and to the disciples, “Here is your mother.” And that from that time on, this disciple took her into her home” (John 19:26-27).

To me, this is also one of the best reasons I can come up for Christians at least to acknowledge Mother’s Day in our church services on the second Sunday in May, though some have protested against it. **IF JESUS, WHO WAS DYING ON THE CROSS, COULD TAKE TIME TO HONOR HIS MOTHER, HOW MUCH MORE SHOULD WE HONOR OUR MOTHER’S TOO!**

I am glad she who had witnessed the great horror of her Son’s brutal crucifixion, was also able to see him alive, fully alive again, later on the third day on that first Easter Sunday! I am so glad that she was there for some of those post-resurrection experiences. But I am also glad she was there on the Mount of Olives that day to witness her Son’s glorious ascension into heaven.

As I have always read these words from Acts 1, I have taken them to mean to me that she was there, though there are some who question this too. They think Mary and Jesus’ brothers hung back there in Jerusalem during the actual event of Jesus’ ascension, and hooked up with the eleven remaining disciples after that event—but that doesn’t sound like the Mary I have come to know.

I’ve had people asked me, “Why are their women pictured in that beautiful stained-glass window all about Ascension Day, when Jesus rose back into heaven from the Mount of Olives, there weren’t any women there?” And I answer them by saying that the Bible doesn’t say there weren’t any women there. And on those rare days, I have sometimes read these words of our text to them...these words that simply have always led me to believe that Mary and Jesus’ biological brothers—were there—with many of the disciples, even as they went back to Jerusalem, into that Upper Room, once more, *where they were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers”* (Acts 1:14).

It wasn’t a sad day; Luke says that they all returned to Jerusalem with great joy!

What a joyful Mother’s Day this must have been for the Mother of our Lord!

But what a joyful day it can be for all mothers here today and for their children too, because even though some of the mothers here were less than perfect mothers, all of their sins have been washed away in the blood of the Lamb. And even though some of the children here today were less than perfect children, all of their sins have also been washed away in the blood of the Lamb.

It was the last glimpse that Mary the Mother of Jesus would have of her Son on that day when he was ascending into heaven, while she continued to live out her life on earth! But it was certainly not be the final glimpse of her Son—for she would meet up again with him one day in his glorious palace – called heaven.

Just as Jesus promises mothers who are grieving the death of their sons and daughters in this life, and sons and daughters who are grieving the death of their mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers—will one day meet up again with him in heaven too.

In the meantime let's celebrate the forgiveness of sins that God brings to all of us as we are gathered at the urging of his Holy Spirit around the Table of Jesus Christ this morning!

So in closing I want to tell you one more story about a young mother who was putting her four year old daughter to bed one night—her daughter named Anna—and as her mother was tugging her in and was about ready to say her prayers with Anna—she said, “Anna this is going to be the last day ever that you will be four years old—for tomorrow you have a birthday!”

That's when both Anna and her mother held up those four fingers on their right hand just as they had always done in a ritualistic fashion when any one would ask: “How old are you Anna?” And Anna holding those four fingers would say: “Four years old!”

Then he mom asked her one final question: “How old then Anna will you be tomorrow? And opening up her hand as wide as she could, she answered, ‘Tomorrow, Mom I'm going to be a real handful!’”

Well for those who as children are willing to admit that they may have been a real handful, or for those mothers who have ever tried to raise children who were a real handful, are we glad today that through our Savior Jesus Christ that God blessed many of your efforts and that God forgives you and me and all those around us our many, many sins! Amen