



Grace Tidings



A Newsletter of Avalon Grace Church

December 2023

What Mary Could Not Know

The popular song “Mary, Did You Know?” raises very interesting questions about what Mary knew about God manifest in the flesh. What did Mary know? What could she know? Probably a lot more than people give her credit for. After all, the angel Gabriel did say:

“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”
– Luke 1:32-33

The prophets declared that his name would be “God with us”:

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” - Matthew 1:23

Then, just in case they were thick as bricks, contemporary prophets gave them more prophecies about Jesus:

“But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” - Luke 2:19

“And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;” - Luke 2:34

Nevertheless, of all the things that Mary could and probably did know, there is one thing that she most definitely did not know.

“Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.”
- Colossians 1:26

Mary did not know the mystery of Christ that was first revealed later to Saul of Tarsus. *(continued on page 2)*



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All Are Welcome!

Sunday Worship 10:30 AM

(Sunday Messages available on website)

Children’s Sunday School 10:45 AM

**“And to make all men see
what is the fellowship of the mystery,
which from the beginning of the world
hath been hid in God, who created
all things by Jesus Christ: . . .”**

- Ephesians 3:9



This means Mary was not aware of how Jesus would be crucified to save all men freely by his blood. Jesus' own disciples were ignorant of his death when the Lord talked about his death:

"And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.— Luke 18:33-34

It was Mary who appealed to Jesus to perform his first recorded miracle:

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, they have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."— John 2:1-5

Yet, Mary did not know that her son, the Lord Jesus Christ would resurrect three days after his crucifixion, death, and burial. Mary was a law-abiding Jew making purity sacrifices:

"And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. - Luke 2:24

She would have been baptized by water for the remission of her sins as she trusted her son to be the Messiah, God with us.

She lived her entire life under the Law of Moses and did not know how Gentiles could receive righteousness without the law, covenants, and blessings through Israel:

"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law..." - Galatians 4:4

There is every indication that Mary knew that her baby would one day rule the nations. However, what was kept secret from Mary, the angels, and the prophets were the things more excellent about the great mystery of God's will and of Christ:

"Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:" - Ephesians 1:9-10

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began..." - Romans 16:25

But the Scripture is clear; Jesus's mother Mary did not know the gospel that saves in this current dispensation.

Still, we celebrate the birth of Christ, not because Mary believed and trusted the angel Gabriel that announced she would bear the Son of God; but because we remember our Savior's birth, and His death, burial, and resurrection, not just on Christmas Day, but every day!

Blessed Christmas to everyone!
Pastor Phil



O Holy Night


*O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born;
O night divine, O night, O night Divine.*

Please plan to join us on
Sunday, December 10, 2023
at 10:30 AM

For our Annual Christmas Program

When we set aside a brief time
to read the Scriptures that chronicle
Our Lord's incarnation

It will be a time of reflection,
praise, song and remembering
the birth of our Savior,
The Lord Jesus Christ

A silhouette illustration of a nativity scene set against a dark blue night sky with a bright star. A beam of light from the star illuminates a manger where a baby lies. Several figures, including shepherds and camels, are gathered around the manger. Palm trees are visible in the background.

*"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and shall call his name Immanuel." ~ Isaiah 7:14*

The Night Before Christmas

'Twas the night before Christmas
And all through the world
A message was preached,
a challenge was hurled.

Believe on the Son
and thou shall be saved:
The road to heaven
with His blood was paved.

Out of the darkness
of sin and despair
God's salvation —
the fairest of fair.



Was born in a manger;
no room in the inn.
God in the flesh,
He died for our sin.

The angel spoke;
the shepherds rejoiced
Messiah has come!
The message was voiced.

By joyous believers
both far and near
Christmas has come!
Immanuel is here!



Christ Is the Light of Christmas

By M.S. Lowndes

Christmas joy and lights aglow;
Christmas songs to warm and cheer
Excitement is on the children's faces
As anticipation fills the air —

But for some, it can be lonely
When loved ones have passed away,
Memories are all that linger
As the years begin to fade

But Christ's light should never dim;
It should ever shine out bright
Our ray of hope in this troubled world
Is our joy of eternal light

Christmas, when spent with Jesus,
Can warm our hurting hearts,
For as His light shines within us,
Its glow warms our deepest parts.



*"And the Word was made flesh, and
dwelt among us, (and we beheld his
glory, the glory as of the only
begotten of the Father)
full of grace and truth."
~ John 1:14*



2ND Annual Thanksgiving Day Dinner with our Avalon Grace Church Family



This year's Thanksgiving celebration was a wonderful time of fellowship, seeing loved ones we haven't seen in a while, meeting new folks, and all of us together enjoying the bounty of God's goodness and grace, and His love for us. This year, 4 turkeys were cooked accompanied by all the traditional holiday fixings and sumptuous deserts including pumpkin pie (rightly divided) :)

Pastor Phil reminded us all of our Savior's great love for us by His coming to earth, dying on the cross for our sins, and rising again to give us eternal life freely! Then Pastor Phil led us in prayer seeking God's blessings with hearts of overflowing thankfulness to God for His provisions for us every day! Then we all dug in and enjoyed a delicious Thanksgiving dinner! Here are just a few pictures capturing all the joy!





Each year, Avalon Grace Church supports and participates in Samaritan's Purse worldwide ministry, "Operation Christmas Child." It is wonderful to know that our small fellowship in Naples, FL is part of a greater worldwide ministry caring for children in bringing the gospel message of Jesus Christ to children at Christmas and, hopefully, all year long.

Most of these children have never experienced the surprise and joy of receiving a gift freely given. In short, that is the gospel message . . . Eternal life, a gift freely given by our Savior Jesus Christ.



Thank you all for participating in this Christ saving ministry with your monetary gifts and little toys and story books, stuffed animals, coloring books, toothbrushes, and even T-shirts for kids across the globe. Avalon Grace Church had a total of 12 shoeboxes filled to the brim with toys and Christmas gifts to delight little children with the gospel message of Jesus's love for them in addition to another 9 more shoe boxes purchased on-line due to your generous monetary gifts supporting this wonderful ministry! We will be able to track our boxes to see where they are delivered. Thank you all so much! Here is a picture of the 12 shoe boxes that are on their way to little children. Thank you so much for your participation and generosity!



Avalon Grace Church also will be sending \$300.00 to Brazil's Project ABBA this Christmas! ABBA is a ministry of "Things to Come Mission" that reaches children with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Brazil. Michell and Joe Campos have been missionaries with "Things to Come Missions" in Brazil since 2002. Each year, Avalon Grace Church participates in providing poor and underprivileged children an opportunity to hear the Gospel and receive

a few small Christmas gifts. Your generosity makes that happen! Thank you so much for your generous gifts and prayers for the success of the outreach in reaching more souls for Christ and your support of this life-saving ministry.

Quotes for the Wise & Young at Heart:



"Christmas waves a magic wand over this world, and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful."

~ Norman Vincent Peale

"You do know what would have happened if it had been three wise women instead of men, don't you? They would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, clean the stable, made a casserole, and brought disposable diapers as gifts!" ~ Unknown



"Faith is salted and peppered through everything at Christmas. And I love at least one night by the Christmas tree to sing and feel the quiet holiness of that time that's set apart to celebrate love, friendship, and God's gift of the Christ child. " ~ Amy Grant



Keeping Christ in Christmas

by Kathleen Smith



We keep several large plastic 30-gallon containers in our garage, neatly stacked on shelves reserved only for Christmas decorations until mid-November or early December. That's when the ladder goes up to fetch them, and they are lifted carefully down from the shelves and carried into the house. Some of the containers are filled to the brim and are quite heavy. This is a yearly assignment reserved just for my husband, Richard, who is my hero and much taller and better equipped to handle this yearly task of carrying all this heavy stuff into the house than me.

One by one, the containers are placed in the house and opened to reveal favorite Christmas trinkets, pine berry wreathes and garland, ceramic knick-knacks, memories from Christmas's past, and all kinds of holiday collectibles, pictures, tree ornaments, and lights. Then, after carefully removing the bubble wrap protecting the nativity set, each figurine - the angel, the shepherds, the wise men, a camel, donkey, cow, and little lambs, Mary, Joseph, and of course . . . Baby Jesus in his crib - is once again displayed in a very special place in our living room. Each figurine portrays the simplicity and silent wonder of that first Christmas night so long ago, when Our Savior was born, filling our hearts and home with Christmas joy and peace. But, can you imagine displaying a nativity set without baby Jesus? Can you imagine Christmas without Christ?

Sometimes while driving on I75 or Rte. 41, we see "Keep Christ in Christmas" magnets on people's car trunks. Doesn't that just warm your heart? But how, exactly, do we keep Christ in Christmas? It can be a real challenge at this busy time of year especially if you're already knee-deep in endless shopping, wrapping gifts, baking cookies, checking lists, planning Christmas dinner, or struggling to put up the Christmas tree and lights! Here are a few ideas to remind ourselves, our family, and friends of the real reason for this joyous of all seasons:

- ◆ Give God one very special gift just from you to

Him. Let this gift be something personal that no one needs to know about. Maybe your gift to God will be one of patience for that difficult neighbor or rude cashier at the check-out counter, or perhaps your gift will be to forgive someone you've needed to forgive for a long time or make a phone call you've been putting off, or just offering a helping hand. You may even discover that you have been given a gift yourself!

- ◆ Set aside a special time as a family and read the Christmas story as recorded in Luke 1: 5-56 through Luke 2: 1-20.
- ◆ Decorate a birthday cake with birthday candles and sing, "Happy Birthday, Jesus" as a special surprise after Christmas dinner and have the children blow out the candles for Jesus on His birthday! What a precious memory!
- ◆ Make a record of family prayer requests. This one is really cool! Ask each family member to jot down personal prayer requests and place the prayers inside individual envelopes (with their name on the front with your prayer tucked inside). After your Christmas celebration is over, store the envelopes containing prayer requests with your decorations. Then next year, before you put up your tree or assemble your nativity display, open the envelopes and praise God for answered prayer, or pray for needs that have not yet been met. How great is that?

These are just a few ideas to help us focus on Jesus this Christmas and creating lasting memories for years to come! Merry Christmas!

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:2 KJV

P.S. The Joy that was set before HIM, is us!!





"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." - Isaiah 9:6 (KJV)

