

THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Whenever I think of Mary, I can't help but wonder what it was like for her to be the mother of the Messiah. Was it any different from being the mother of some other, so-called "ordinary" child?

Did Mary go through the same kinds of concerns that most mothers do?
Jesus has a fever. I hope it breaks soon.

Did she have the same kind of frustrations that most mothers have?
Hey, buster! No running in the house! And it's almost dinnertime. Go get ready and wash your hands, Jesus. This is the second time I've had to tell you.

Did Mary feel the same kind of pride and joy about Jesus' accomplishments that most mothers feel about their children?

Jesus does such beautiful work in his father's carpenter shop. He's an artist when it comes to working with wood and stone. And a lot of people are interested in buying them.

Surely Mary was no different from any other mother in any other day and age, doing her best to raise Jesus well, teach him right from wrong, steep him in the religious faith of their Jewish ancestors, keep him healthy and safe, and prepare him to become a righteous, productive man when he entered adulthood and went out into the world to be on his own.

I remember many years ago, wandering around some store, looking at posters. I was a big poster guy when I was younger. I liked to hang them on the walls of my room. Elton John. Farrah Fawcett. I had all kinds of them.

Anyway, I was looking at some posters one time, and I saw one that caught my eye. It showed Jesus, walking on water. He had an annoyed expression on his face. Because standing next to him, also walking on the water, was his mother, Mary. She, in turn, had this motherly, "what do you think you're doing" kind of look on her face. . . .

. . . as she held out a pair of waterproof boots for Jesus to wear.

Yes, I do believe that moms will be moms. Even if she's the mother of the Messiah.

Today, in honor of Mother's Day, I want to reflect on the wedding at Cana through the eyes of the second most important character in the story: Jesus'

mother, Mary.

I really love the story of the wedding at Cana. First of all, it blows my mind that Jesus' very first miracle was turning water into wine. And not just any wine, mind you. We're talking top of the line, award winning, \$100 a bottle wine!

And the second reason I love the wedding at Cana story is that it shows a side of Jesus that people rarely see or talk about—that Jesus wasn't some somber, "you're-never-gonna-get-me-to-smile" Messiah. No, it seems that Jesus enjoyed going to parties. And maybe one of the reasons Jesus was resisting his mother's appeals, when she went to him because the wine was running out, was because he was having such a good time and wanted to continue socializing and having fun.

"Mom, what are you coming to me for? It's not my time—besides, Peter's in the middle of telling a great fish story and you're interrupting."

We don't know exactly why Mary was so concerned that the wedding she and Jesus were attending was about to run out of wine. But you have to admit, it was a very motherly thing to do. Mothers always want to be gracious hosts, and make sure every guest at her table has enough to eat and drink. As my mother-in-law has said at probably every single Thanksgiving feast she ever hosted, "If anyone leaves this table hungry, it's their own fault."

Some Bible scholars have suggested that the wedding at Cana was actually the marriage of one of Mary and Joseph's daughters. In other words, it was the wedding of one of Jesus' sisters. In which case, I would wonder why Jesus wasn't a bit more compassionate about the wine shortage his mother brought to his attention.

Other Bible experts believe it was more likely the wedding of one of Mary's relatives, or perhaps a close friend. And one Bible scholar I read even argued that it could actually have been Jesus who was getting married at Cana, which would have made his family very responsible for providing the wine. Of course, that would make Jesus' words, "Woman, why do you involve me?" pretty irresponsible.

I myself don't believe the wedding at Cana was a celebration of Jesus' marriage. But his mother Mary clearly believed that running out of wine at it was a serious issue. It's obvious that she was somehow personally invested in this celebration. And she knew there was only one person who could possibly fix this problem. Only Mary's son, Jesus, would be able to come to the rescue here. Jesus may have been an all grown up, adult, thirtyish-year old man, but he was still her boy." And so, like a lot of mothers, she turned to her son for help.

But actually, Mary didn't merely ask Jesus to help out. She pretty much

told him to. Not a direct order, mind you. Mary was too subtle for that. No, Mary used a trick many mothers use effectively. She appealed to Jesus' conscience, and maybe even laid a little bit of guilt on him. As John's Gospel records, "when the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to [Jesus], 'they have no more wine.'" You can almost see Mary's puppy dog eyes. In other words, "Come on, son. The host of this shindig is in a bind, and you and I know you're the only one who can do something about it. Please."

You can almost hear Jesus respond to her, "Aw, Mom!" Jesus seemed more than a little annoyed with his mother. I have to admit, his words sound almost harsh. "Woman, what does that have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

There are two things I want to point out here.

First of all, the Greek word *yuvai*, translated in this passage from John's Gospel as "woman," isn't an expression of disrespect to his mother. In fact, a more accurate translation of that word would be "dear woman." The second thing I would point out is that Jesus isn't actually resisting his mother's request out of stubbornness or obstinacy. Rather, he's simply telling his mother, "This isn't how things are supposed to unfold—at a wedding, making more wine so people can continue partying without interruption. Besides, it's not yet time for me to reveal myself as the Messiah."

"Woman, what does that have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." Jesus' words sort of remind me of all the millions and millions of sons throughout history who have snapped back at the beloved person who gave birth to them, "I'll take out the trash later, Mom."

By the way, I personally love the paraphrase of Jesus' words from a version of the Bible called *The Message*, and how it translates Jesus' response. "Don't push me." Because that's what his mother was doing. She was pushing Jesus. But it's not unusual for a mother to do that to her child—even her beloved child. Give them a little push to motivate them to do the right thing. Sort of like, "Thank Aunt Ester for the lovely sweater (that's an ugly green color and two sizes too big), Billy."

Mary was clearly a nice woman, as reflected in her concern that the host of the wedding not experience the embarrassment and shame of running out of wine at the wedding they were putting on. And she was most likely a great mom. After all, Mary was divinely chosen for the role of mother to Jesus the Messiah because she was a woman of deep and abiding faith. And presumably, God knew that she would do a wonderful job raising Jesus.

But Mary was the same as most other moms. She was probably even a lot like our own mothers—a bit on the assertive side, and willing to use her

identity and role as a mother to motivate her child to do something that needed to be done. You could call it a mother's prerogative. And even though Jesus was all grown up, Mary was still his mother; and Jesus was still her baby, her son, her little boy. And he always would be, even when his death on a cross cruelly took him away from her.

Yes, Mary was Jesus' mother; and she always would be. That was her greatest honor and most important role in life. Which is true for all mothers, of course. It's certainly the greatest possible privilege that God has bestowed on the female creatures God made: giving birth to another human being. Motherhood is the most honorable and important role there is in the world. Along with being one of the most difficult roles in the world, as well.

Because of Mary's place of importance in Jesus' life, I guess you could say that she had a right to be a little assertive with Jesus and expect him to respond favorably to her request at the wedding in Cana. Because, you see, even though Jesus was the Word made flesh, the Son of God, the Messiah and Lord of all, Jesus was still obliged to obey the same Fifth Commandment that we're all expected to obey: *Honor your father and your mother.*

One final observation about this story of the wedding at Cana, and Mary and Jesus' role in it as mother and son. Jesus may have been required by one of Moses' laws to honor his mother, even if he disagreed with her purpose and timing. But that didn't mean Jesus couldn't have a little fun with it. As in, "Mom wants a miracle? I'll give her a miracle. She wants wine? I'll give her wine. I'll give this wedding celebration so much wine they won't know what to do with it all!"

And he did. Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine, inspired by his mother's request, resulted in more wine than the guests at that wedding party could ever possibly drink: about 180 gallons worth. And as I alluded to earlier, Jesus didn't give his mom just any old wine. He gave her the best wine. So good, in fact, that the steward in charge of the festivities scolded the groom and said, "Everyone brings out the best wine first, and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink and can't tell the difference. But you have saved the best wine for now."

How come, Jesus?

Because his mom wanted a miracle, and he gave her a miracle.

Because mom wanted more wine, and he gave her more wine. Wine in abundance. Jesus gave his mother the very best wine! Because nothing was too good for his mother.

I wish everyone a very happy and blessed Mother's Day. If you are a mother, may God bless you, because you have one of the most important and

fulfilling roles anyone—man or woman—can ever have: to give birth to and raise a precious human life, your own flesh and blood.

If your mom is still here, alive and well, may you have a close, loving relationship with her, give thanks to the Lord, celebrate her, and rejoice in her love for you and for all the things she has done and is doing for you.

If your mother is still among the living but you have a strained or broken relationship with her, I pray that one day, by the grace of God, there might be forgiveness, healing and reconciliation between the two of you.

And if your mom has passed away, may you give thanks to the Lord for the time you had with her on this earth; may you take time to rejoice for the special moments you had together; if it's necessary, may you forgive her and for her mistakes and let go of the hurt and anger you might be carrying; and may her memory and her love for you always live in your hearts.

Because, after all, she is your mother. She birthed you into the world. She raised you and cared for you. And nothing is too good for mom, even if it's only to honor and respect her, as the Fifth Commandment directs us to do, for the important and irreplaceable role she played in your life.

Happy Mother's Day! Amen.