

Stewardship Series: Not a Silent Night

Sermon #2: “Not a Mary Christmas” or “The Piercing of Mary’s Soul”

Scripture: Luke 2:14, 34-35, Romans 5:1, 6-8 (to be read during the sermon)

Source: Rev. Adam Hamilton at the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, MO

<http://www.cor.org/worship/sermon-archives/show/sermons/At-the-Cross-and-the-Tomb/>

Opening Video Clip

PP#1: Not a Silent Night

“Not a Mary Christmas”

“Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘...A sword will pierce your innermost being, too.’” - Luke 2:34-35

Not a Silent Night. Christmas through the eyes of Mary. Not a Mary Christmas. Luke 2 “Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘...A sword will pierce your innermost being, too.’”

PP#2: *Mary looking miserable and pregnant riding on a donkey.*

Christmas, for Mary, was not an easy night. She was 9 months pregnant, and had been riding on a mule for days to a town she had never been to, all because of some dumb law, declared 1,500 miles away. Talk about rotten timing! And then, when they get there, there’s no place for them to stay. They couldn’t make reservations, and they didn’t have enough money to buy any influence. Imagine how miserable that trip must have been for her! And, remember, she is somewhere around 14.

They end up in a barn...not that they were too proud...they were used to being poor. But that was not a silent night. Her labor was painful, and I’m sure she screamed at her contractions. I’m sure Joseph was running around, frantic and talking loudly. Then there was the baby’s cry as He took His first breath. Then, right when things finally settled down and they tried to doze off, in come the shepherds, causing all kinds of commotion again. It was not a silent night, especially for Mary.

And I don’t think that Christmas was ever easy for Mary thereafter, either. Each year, as they celebrated Jesus’ birthday, Mary’s mind was flooded with all the memories, and haunted by all the prophecies around her son. I’m sure Christmas was never a totally happy celebration for her.

That’s what we’re doing this Christmas season. We’re trying to look at Christmas through Mary’s eyes. And I think, when we do, we’ll get a much different view of what Christmas is all about. Christmas is about Jesus, of course, but no one had a better view of Christmas than Mary. She was the one who actually experienced it! And she understood more about Christmas than anyone. And what she came to understand Christmas to mean to her, can really help us see what Christmas means for us today.

For these first couple of weeks in December, we’re looking at how Mary celebrated Christmas years later. Last week we saw what Christmas meant to Mary as she neared the end of her life. It meant for her the hope of resurrection. Christmas and Easter are one package, two sides of the same coin. Christmas means so much because of Easter, and Easter only makes sense because of Christmas. Jesus declared, “I am the resurrection and the life.” We open the gift of the hope of new life at Christmas.

PP#3: *A scene of the Last Supper, with people (women?) in the background.*

This week, we go back 15 years before Mary died. It's AD 33 and Mary is 49. It's not Christmas. It's the feast of Passover. It's not Jesus' birthday. But on that day, Mary is thinking about Christmas, as tears stream down her face.

Jesus and the disciples sit down to a big feast. Mary is probably there, too, although it doesn't actually say it. Jesus tells them this will be His last meal with them. Everyone is shocked, except Mary. There's that feeling of dread again. After the meal they go out to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prays late into the night. Judas leads the guards to Jesus, and Jesus is arrested and taken to the High Priest's house.

PP#4: *Crowd of people (including women?) outside of the High Priest's house before sunrise.*

We can imagine that Mary followed along behind, and Mary undoubtedly stood outside the home of high priest as her son was on trial. She walked with the crowd when they led Jesus to the palace of Pontious Pilate. You see, the Jewish leaders found Him guilty of claiming to be God. They wanted Him put to death, but only the Romans could do that. So they took Him to Pilate, the Roman prelate, to get him to put Jesus to death.

PP#5: *Crowd of people (including women?) in front of Pilate, with Jesus standing in front.*

She was in the crowd when Pilate came out and said he found Jesus innocent. Her heart got excited! But then he asked what they wanted him to do with Jesus, and she heard the crowd yell "Crucify Him!" I bet she began to quake. Pilate then asked, "Why?" But the crowd kept shouting.

At 7 a.m. Pilate sent Jesus to be flogged. It was a gruesome ordeal. Then they put a crown of thorns on His head, mocked Him as a king, and struck Him. Mary sees Him when He is brought out again. He looks like a mess, but perhaps it is now over. Pilate said that he had Jesus punished, so he was going to let Him go. Again, Mary's heart begins to be hopeful. But the crowd all around her screams again, "Crucify Him!"

At 8 a.m., Pilate finally gives in and gives the order to crucify Him. Jesus is innocent, but Pilate wants to please the crowd. Mary's heart breaks. There's nothing she can do. All she can do is again follow the crowd as her Jesus struggles to carry the cross.

PP#6: *Mary and others near Jesus on the cross.*

9 a.m. Mary watched them crucify Him. They offered Him some wine mixed with myrrh in an attempt to help numb the pain. And as they put nails through His hands and feet, she felt a piercing through her heart. For six hours He hung there. And Mary was probably closer to Him than you are to me. As she watched Him suffer, she suffered, too. Probably more than anyone else. What overwhelming grief. What a day of horror!

What was Mary thinking about during those 6 hours, as she stood there helplessly standing by? I think she was thinking about Christmas. Only Christmas would have helped her have any sense about what she was seeing. Only Christmas gave her any meaning for what was happening. Only Christmas gave her any hope.

PP#7: Luke 1:31-35

"Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and He will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne

of David His father. He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom....The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son."

She remembered what the angel had said to her. "You will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. The one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son."

PP#8: Matthew 1:20-22

"The child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins....And they will call Him, Emmanuel. (Emmanuel means 'God with us.')

She remembered what Joseph had said that the angel had told him. "He will save His people from their sins...And they will call Him... 'God with us.'" Save people from their sins...how she had pondered these words over the years. How? But on that day, as she thought about them again, she wondered, *like this?*

PP#9: Luke 2:10-14, 19

The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors." ...
Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully.

She remembered how the shepherds came, telling about how the angels had proclaimed to them, "Good news ... for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord." ... "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors."

That first Christmas, Mary pondered on these words, and wondered at their meaning. Now, at the cross, she wondered again, "Is this what they meant?"

PP#10: Luke 2: 34-35

Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being, too."

She remembered what Simeon, the aged prophet, said when she presented Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem, eight days later. Simeon had taken her baby and said to her, "This boy will cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and be a sign that generates opposition so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed."

Boy, that sure came true! Such terrible opposition! And then his haunting prophesy, "And a sword will pierce your innermost being, too."

She felt it, that day, as she watched her son hang on the cross, dying. As she thought about Christmas, she began to understand.

PP#11: Mark 15:22-25

They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means Skull Place. They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh, but He didn't take it. They crucified Him. They divided up His clothes, drawing lots for them to determine who would take what. It was nine in the morning when they crucified Him.

The wine they had offered Him had myrrh in it. It sent her mind drifting back to the gifts the magi had brought. Strange gifts, including myrrh. Myrrh was used to anoint holy things, like in the temple. It also was a mild anesthetic. But it was most commonly used to embalm the dead. Now she knew what that myrrh meant.

PP#12: *A combined image of the manger and a cross.*

Christmas and Calvary go hand in hand. They are inseparable. Christmas is celebrating salvation. Christmas is about the coming of the Savior. It is the most amazing gift of Christmas. But we don't see this until Calvary. Like Mary, we can only see the true meaning of Christmas at the cross.

PP#13: *Ornament on a Christmas tree: a long nail on a red string, or cross made of nails.*

[Hold up ornament.] Here is one of my favorite Christmas tree ornaments. It's a square nail on a red string. It reminds me of the spikes that were used to nail Jesus to the cross. The red is a Christmas color. Do you know where it comes from? It is the blood of Jesus. That's why red is a Christmas color. Jesus' death gives us eternal life; red for blood, green for eternal life.

We know that Mary thought a lot about all these things, because she told them to the disciples, who then, wrote them down. That's how they got recorded in the Bible. She had remembered them, thought about them, pondered them, and shared them.

PP#14:

“From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and legal experts, and that He had to be killed and raised on the third day.” -Matthew 16:21

“As the time approached when Jesus was to be taken up into heaven, He determined to go to Jerusalem.” -Luke 9:51

Jesus didn't die accidentally. It was not a surprise. He chose to go to Jerusalem. The Bible said that He *determined* to go to Jerusalem...one version says, “set His face,” a gritting determination. He knew what would happen there, and He went there because of it. Jesus tried to explain this again with the Lord's Supper, which we just received. As they ate, He charged them always to remember that He gave His body and shed His blood as a sacrifice.

PP#15: *Image of a Roman sacrifice during the time of Jesus.*

Now, this is harder for us to understand today than it was for people in Jesus' day. Back then, sacrifices were common. Everybody offered all kinds of sacrifices to all kinds of gods to try to appease them, to make them happy with you, so they would give you good things. They were kind of like bribes, encouraging the gods to grant your request.

But here is Jesus saying that God doesn't need to be bribed. No, God loved us first. In fact, it was God who was trying to win us! And so, Jesus is the sacrifice offered by God to put us right. Even for Jews sacrifices were to pay the price for sin. When people sinned, they had to take an animal, ritually put the blame for the sin on the animal, and then kill it to pay for the sin. A life for every sin.

PP#16: Isaiah 53

“... It was certainly our sickness that he carried, and our sufferings that he bore, but we thought him afflicted, struck down by God and tormented. He was pierced because of our rebellions and crushed because of our crimes. He bore the punishment that made us whole; by his wounds we are healed. Like sheep we had all wandered away, each going its own way, but the Lord let fall on him all our crimes. ... his life is offered as restitution ... he carried the sin of many ...”

Isaiah talked about how the Savior would be the sacrifice for all human sin. He would bear our sufferings, our sin. He would be crushed for our crimes. He would take our punishment. “By His wounds we are healed.” The Lord let Him take on all of our crimes and serve as our restitution.

The cross is a reminder of the cost of sin. Sometimes we don't think we are in need of a savior. But when we are honest with ourselves, when we look at ourselves when we are not at our best, how even we use our words to cut down those we love the most, we see we need a savior.

God knows all this about us—everything, even our deepest, darkest secrets—and He still came to save us...because we can't save ourselves, and because He believes we're worth it.

PP#17: *Image of Jesus on the cross with two thieves, and people gathered around.*

Mary heard Jesus speak while on the cross. When they crucified Him, she heard Him say, “Father forgive them.” Something about forgiveness was going on. Then, to the thief next to Him, He promised, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” Jesus was doing what He had promised. It was happening.

PP#18: Romans 5:1-8

Therefore, since we have been made righteous through His faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ... While we were still weak, at the right moment, Christ died for ungodly people. ... But God shows His love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

Paul says in Romans 5, “Therefore, since we have been made righteous through His faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ... While we were still weak, at the right moment, Christ died for ungodly people. ... But God shows His love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

The cross points to our brokenness. The Cross points to God's love. The cross shows us the path to peace: “peace on earth among those whom He favors.”

This salvation is costly. It is the best gift of Christmas. Don't leave it unwrapped.

PP#19: *Michelangelo's Pieta in the Vatican*

In 1499 Michelangelo carved an unforgettable scene of Mary holding the body of her dead son. It's named *Pieta*, the Italian word for pity. It tries to capture the sorrow that pierced Mary's heart. But the power of this sculpture is that in Mary's face, we catch a glimpse of God the Father's grief, too. Only Mary could come close to understanding that sorrow.

This is the gift of Christmas. Jesus gave it all. We tend to forget, or take it for granted. But seeing Mary's grief helps us remember the cost for the greatest Christmas present of all.

I want to invite you here, today, to not leave *that* present unopened. In fact, if you are ready, you can open it right now. God has already given it to you. All you need to do is to open it. All you need to do is to ask Jesus to come into your heart, to be for you: the reason for the season.

We're going to pray. And if you want, in your own heart, pray along with me, inviting Jesus into your heart. Let's open that Christmas present!

[Prayer....]