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AUTHOR'S NOTE

*But Mary treasured all these words
and pondered them in her heart.*

(Luke 2:19)

How we need to ponder the miracle of Christ's birth!

We've heard about the famed *Three Wise Men*, but what about the *Three Wise Women*? At the center of the First Christmas events were three very wise women: Mary (Jesus' mother), Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist), and Anna the Prophetess (who served in the temple most of her adult life, waiting, expecting, to see the Messiah). My hope is that you'll identify with these women, pondering the Scriptures, then imaging what Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna may have been going through around the time our Savior was born.

We don't get many detailed thoughts from the three wise women as the world around them changed forever, but we do read their amazing, true stories in the Scriptures. The Bible's account is what you can depend on and understand as absolute truth, so I have included many of the passages and references for ease and study.

My imagined thoughts in these pages are based on what the Scriptures reveal about Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna. I've tried *never* to let their imagined voices stray from what

we *are* given in the Bible. Before each day's devotional, I've included the scriptural accounts and relevant verses, which we can trust and consider. I've studied the culture for context and prayerfully attempted to get inside the heads of these wonderful women in an effort to deeply connect with them and their society. I invite you to do the same.

Study the Scriptures for yourself this Advent season and see what the Bible reveals to us about Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna. Imagine their joys and struggles from different perspectives. Keep in mind: They were women. They were believers in an Almighty God. And they were flesh-and-blood real.

As Christmas approaches, I invite you to meditate on the contributions of these women. In the midst of what can turn into Christmas craziness, find a quiet spot where you can listen to the voices of Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna. As you read about them, walk in their sandals, see their Middle Eastern landscapes, and hear their hopes and dreams as they wait for the coming Messiah. Let yourself be drawn deeper into the heart of God this season as you identify with the Wise Women and share with them the miracle of Christmas.

*How amazing are the deeds of the LORD!
All who delight in him should ponder them.*

(Psalm 111:2, NLT)



THE FIRST WISE WOMAN

MARY

of Nazareth

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel
was sent by God to a town in Galilee called
Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose
name was Joseph, of the house of David.
The virgin's name was Mary.*

(Luke 1:26–27)

God could have sent his Son fully grown, the way he created the first man, Adam. Yet God chose to enter our world as a baby, nestled inside Mary's womb for nine months.

The greatest news in all the world might have been delivered first to kings and nobles with trumpets blaring. But the announcement came to Mary, a young girl, common and unmarried, a virgin.

The birth of the Savior could have occurred in Herod's grand palace of gold and marble, or in the temple of Jerusalem, the aroma of incense blessing the air. But it was Mary who carried God's Son in the dark silence of her

womb, and Mary who gave birth to the hope of the world. As she wrapped her baby in strips of cloth, the smell of hay, donkey sweat, and dung wafted over the manger.

Religious leaders, trained to understand revelations, might have explained and interpreted the birth of the Messiah with words clear and filled with learning. But Mary listened to the shepherds, whose words tumbled from them like sheep trampling over one another.

What might Mary have been thinking throughout the greatest event of all time?



MARY

DECEMBER 1

Hope

And so, Lord, where do I put my hope?

My only hope is in you.

(Psalm 39:7, NLT)

•

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without
wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.

(Hebrews 10:23)

•

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you
disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again
praise him, my help and my God.

(Psalm 42:11)

•

For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust,

O LORD, from my youth.

(Psalm 71:5)

•

But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end.
(Lamentations 3:21-22)



Hope

Such a God we have! I climbed the hill behind our house this morning until I could see the Plains of Megiddo below Nazareth. Fields of barley and wheat begin to sprout beyond the valley, filling the air with earthly scents. I love all of Galilee. It's true that I have not traveled far from my little village. For a half-century, we and all of Palestine have been ruled by Rome.

But I hope for nothing more than to live here, among heavy-laden olive trees, tall sycamores, and ancient pines, perhaps with a good man like Joseph. I am eligible for betrothal, having passed the age of twelve years and a day.

On my return home, I walked by the workplace of Joseph's father. His mother spoke kindly to me, offering the blessing of the day. I heard chisels and hammers from within the shop. Because of the brightness of the sun, I could only make out two shadowy figures at work—Joseph and his father, no doubt.

I hope Joseph might speak to his father, and then to mine. But perhaps it is only my own longing that makes me imagine Joseph looks on me with favor.

My hope, O Lord, is in You.

PONDERING . . .

1. What did you hope for years ago? Where do you think your hope(s) originated? Did your hopes come true?
2. Think about one of your hopes that was never fulfilled. How do you think your life might have turned out differently if that hope had been granted? No one knows, except God. In retrospect, can you see a hint of God's thoughts, which are higher than ours?
3. Name three things you're hoping for this Christmas. How disappointed will you be if you don't receive any of them?
4. What do you think it means to "hope in the Lord"? Is there anything you can do this Advent to strengthen your hope in the Lord?

*Dear God,
My hope is in you alone.*



MARY

DECEMBER 2

Waiting

I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.

(Psalm 130:5, NIV)

•

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.

Wait for the LORD; be strong,
and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!

(Psalm 27:13-14)

•

And it will be said on that day,
“Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited
that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom
we have waited;

Let’s rejoice and be glad in His salvation.”

(Isaiah 25:9, NASB)

•

Waiting

I have passed another day fulfilling my daily duties, sweeping, squeezing the oils and making butter, helping prepare meals, and fetching water. At the well, it is tempting to listen to idle talk. For most young girls in this village, their talk always seems to return to betrothal and wedding ceremonies, though we have very little say in the matter. As for me, my thoughts, not my speech, fly to Joseph. I have heard nothing from Joseph, or from my father.

Now, as a breeze stirs the leaves around me, I must gather the few acacia sticks that remain behind our house. I turn my thoughts to God, and my Creator fills me with his presence. I gaze in wonder at his handiwork—a twisted tree trunk, the sun sinking through pink and purple clouds that swirl against the blue sky above Nazareth.

Once, my parents took me to the hill country of Judea, where our relatives, Elizabeth and Zechariah the Priest, live. We had been walking for days when I stumbled on the rocky ground of what I imagined a never-ending desert.

Then suddenly, as if in a vision, I looked up from the rocks and dust, and there she was—Jerusalem, the city of our forefathers. We did not enter, but watched as travelers poured through the city gate.

I would not want to live in Jerusalem, though I would enjoy visiting there.

Perhaps if the Lord blesses, Joseph and I will take our firstborn son to the Jerusalem temple for dedication.

“Mary? Mary!” Mother calls me from my daydreams. “The wood will not collect itself, and the night falls fast.”

“I’m sorry, Mother,” I say, gathering the sticks at my feet.

She is right, of course.

I wait, and I pray to Adonai, the One who rules in mighty power, that his will be done. My future is in his hands alone.

PONDERING . . .

1. Where does your mind go when you daydream?
What does that tell you about yourself?
2. Is there a longtime prayer you're still waiting to be answered yes? Why do you think you've had to wait?
3. What do you do when you're waiting for the answer to an urgent prayer? What do you do when you're waiting for weeks, or months, or years?
4. How do you know when God has answered, but the answer is "No"? Can you recall several examples and how you knew? Did this change your view of God or of yourself?

*Dear God,
I will wait upon you.*