

Women Rise Up! Advent Study

December 5, 2021 ~ 4 p.m.

Mary – Chapter 7 - *RISK*

Welcome

Second Session of our Advent Study sponsored by West Ohio United Methodist Women and the Academy for Spiritual and Social Practice at St. Paul UMC, in Dayton. We have folks from around Ohio, and the country with us and we welcome you all with open arms!

Explanation of Format and Facilitators:

- Linda Bales-Todd, Beth Vanoli, Becky Ruple and Paula Nourse are facilitators
- Based on the book, *Women Rise Up!* By Katey Zeh
- You will receive an outline of both session 1 and session 2, later today or early tomorrow, so you can use in your local church/UMW; it is our hope that you able to replicate this study.

Tips on Technology – (Beth) Muting, remember your small group number for reporting back; Beth's phone number if needed. Or if you cut or are left out, just close the browser and find the link and start again.

Covenant: Our Common Covenant as a Community

- Listen First
- Step up/Step back – pay attention to who's speaking and who's not...make space
- Confidentiality
- Respect for All – we may have different perspectives, different beliefs....

I am going to ask us all to think differently today – there may be some thoughts presented that are very difficult for all of us – can we give ourselves and each other GRACE today?

Centering Prayer - In Centering Prayer we challenge ourselves to understand and be comfortable in silence – not just with our minds, but with our whole being. Use the phrase “my spirit rejoices in God” (from our scripture today) to bring your thoughts back to center. “Sit in stillness and listen to what your heart prays.”

End with one line prayer to close.

Reading of the Biblical Texts ~ Re-cap pages 127-129 Luke 1:13-56; Understand that the Magnificat was the first and longest recorded prophecy by a woman, it is also similar to Hannah's song that read about last week. Latin for “My soul Magnifies the Lord”

Lectio Divina (modified) – Magnificat (“Mary praises God”) Luke 1:46-55

First reading (listen with your EYES): Voices of Women from the United Kingdom, Christian Aid organization. <https://youtu.be/VvrJsy7xaXY>

Second reading (listen with your ears, find one word or phrase that speaks to you, be prepared to write it down. (I read from CEB Version p.1288)

Background/opening discussion on Chapter 7 – On pages 135-137 our author, Katey Zeh, writes about how we have, over the years, lost “touch with the reality that Jesus was born like we all are: through the bloody, sweaty and tearful efforts of the women who give us life.”

Reality – it started me thinking - What risks did Mary take by answering the call of Gabriel? What were the implications of her being an unwed mother in her times? First, let's read a passage from Deuteronomy 22:20-21.

“However, if the claim is true and proof of the young woman’s virginity can’t be produced, then the city’s elders will bring the young woman to the door of her father’s house. The citizens of that city must stone her until she dies because she acted so sinfully in Israel by having extramarital sex while still in her father’s house. Remove such evil from your community!”

We cannot underestimate the gravity of Mary’s situation that first Christmas. According to the law of her land, her circumstance brought with it the possibility of execution. Notice there is no exception made if the young woman is pregnant, which would mean her unborn child would share in her same fate.

In such a patriarchal society, who on earth would believe the strange story of a teenage peasant girl?

Can you imagine the fear of entering a priest’s home (Zechariah) who was mandated by the government to carry out God’s law? Even though Elizabeth was her cousin and had her own miraculous encounter with an angel, with her own pregnancy to follow, she was married. Would she and her priest husband accept this unwed mother?

The holy family was found as “illegal” many times along their journey just because of who they were and what was happening to them. It was a complex, scary, and controversial situation. However, at every turn, the love and mercy of God prevailed through the kindness of friends, family, and especially strangers.

The same dynamic can still occur among God’s people today. We can become so preoccupied with the law that we lose sight of the individuals those laws directly impact. So often, the conversation surrounding abortion neglects the circumstances of the lived experiences of women, leaving us completely unaware of why abortion might be considered in the first place. This dynamic leaves us unable or unwilling to show mercy.

It is public knowledge that understanding and addressing the needs of the lived experience of individual women dramatically reduce abortions more than making it illegal ever would. When states work to meet the economic, healthcare, and educational needs of their people, abortion rates drop.

Imagine if God’s people today pursued dismantling systems of poverty, barriers to healthcare, demanded livable wages, paid family leave, affordable childcare and ruthlessly advocated for women’s rights with the same passion so many of us pursue making abortion illegal. We might just make abortion unnecessary.

Moreover, it would be doing exactly what Joseph, Zechariah, and Elizabeth did for Mary. They heard her story, believed her story, and saw her beyond the category of “illegal,” to the categories of compassion, love, and mercy. The Christmas story is the story of perfect love driving out fear. God’s law is love and his gospel is peace.

Life is not always clean and simple. Neither is our walk with God. May we remember the faithful example set by the holy family and their relatives that first Christmas. May we be those who would have received them with compassion and mercy rather than send them away or respond with legalism. May the story of Christmas inform how we see our world today.¹

Break Out Session #1 - 15 minutes – Introduce yourselves to each other and respond to these questions: *Describe a time when you needed to take a risk for another person; a child, family member, spouse, friend. How did that make you feel? How did you make your way through what might happen to you personally because of taking this risk?*

Reporting Out – Individuals may share responses

Thoughts leading to break out session #2 discussion – Let’s now look at what Katie writes on page 142, the first full paragraph, “If abundant life through Christ is meant for us now, I believe that as his (Jesus) followers we are called to the struggle for justice, so that every single one of us has access to the conditions and resources that allow us to thrive – to enjoy lives of abundance.” (John 10:10) Jesus intends for us to experience abundance here in this present moment. What do you think Jesus (we) would want the world to look like NOW for mothers and babies? REVIEW statistics highlighted on the bottom of page 142 and segue into MARY’S SITUATION (Page 143, bottom)

Break Out Session #2 – (15-20 minutes) Remember your group # for sharing and report back after session

Questions for discussion: (page 146 in text, first paragraph)

“Mary’s survival is something we ought to talk about more. If we stop to consider the risk to her life, could we imagine how this loss might shape Jesus’ ministry? What would the like of Jesus look like without the love, care, and guidance of his mother?” (What would this look like for ANY child born today at risk of losing its mother?)

Reporting Out – (call on by group numbers, if time)

Closing Thoughts – The vulnerability of the infant Jesus’s complete dependence on his young mother makes us squirm. Can we accept God as fragile, delicate and needy?

(p.146, para. 3) - Mary’s parenting does not end when Jesus is grown. We see this most clearly in the scene at the wedding in Cana described in John 2:1-11; Mary recognizes something in this moment that even Jesus does not yet see. Jesus will be set apart for the highest of callings. She creates room for opportunity and possibility and then gives him the space to make his own decision about how he will respond. There is nothing passive about Mary’s role at all, raising a child is unpredictable and ever-changing, parenting is a constant state of action. Mary is the bearer of holy miracles in more ways than one. Mary says yes to the “Slow work of God”, the challenging years of preparing Jesus for the moment when he is ready to live into his divine purpose fully. We give thanks for Mary’s strong and faithful nurturing of the one who gives us hope and healing today.

Christmas Giving Suggestion:

Week 2: Mary

National Mission Institution Wesley Center in Dayton, OH, **Baby Ready/Infant Mortality** (BRIM) Program exists to surround expecting parents and their children with everything they need to lead stable and secure lives by connecting them to resources such as parenting classes, housing assistance, visiting nurse service, and secure employment. Checks can be sent to Wesley Community Center, 3730 Delphos Avenue, Dayton, OH 45417; designate *Baby Ready* in the memo line. (Info will be in the follow-up email sent today or tomorrow)

Closing Prayer/Poem:

“The Work of Christmas” composed by Howard Thurman, an African-American theologian, educator, and civil rights leader.

“When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.”

Closing video – “Be Born in Me”

<https://youtu.be/LADMdb4vzrc>

References and resources:

¹ Cremer, Ben; <https://www.facebook.com/ben.cremer>; **How can the Christmas narrative help us to talk about abortion with more discernment?** Posted December 2, 2021, at 9:41am

Voices of Women from the United Kingdom reading the Magnificat, Christian Aid

<https://youtu.be/VvrJsy7xaXY>

Background research of Mary from *The University of Dayton*, founded by the [Society of Mary](#) in 1850. The brothers and priests of the Society of Mary are part of a worldwide Marianist family of Catholic brothers, priests, sisters and committed lay people. <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/index.php>

“The Work of Christmas” by Rev. Howard Thurman, from his book, *The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations*; published in 1973

“Be Born in Me” Christmas music video created and produced by Madison Killen featuring clips and scenes from the movie "The Nativity Story" and the song "Be Born in Me" by Francesca Battistelli from the Album "Music Inspired by The Story"

<https://youtu.be/LADMdb4vzrc>

Lyrics

Everything inside me cries for order
Everything inside me wants to hide
Is this shadow, an angel or a warrior?
If God is pleased with me, why am I so terrified?

Someone tell me I am only dreaming
Somehow help me see with Heaven's eyes
And before my head agrees, my heart is on it's knees
Holy is He, blessed am I
Be born in me, be born in me
Trembling heart, somehow I believe
That You chose me
I'll hold you in the beginning
You will hold me in the end
Every moment in the middle
Make my heart your Bethlehem
Be born in me
All this time we've waited for the promise
All this time You've waited for my arms
Did You wrap yourself inside the unexpected
So we might know that love would go that far?
Be born in me, be born in me
Trembling heart, somehow I believe
That You chose me
I'll hold you in the beginning
You will hold me in the end
Every moment in the middle
Make my heart your Bethlehem
Be born in me
I am not brave
I'll never be
The only thing my heart can offer is a vacancy
I'm just a girl
Nothing more
I am willing, I am Yours
Be born in me, be born in me
I'll hold you in the beginning
You will hold me in the end
Every moment in the middle
Make my heart your Bethlehem
Be born in me

Source: [Musixmatch](#)