

Bible Meditations on Mary by Rev. Bertrand Buby, S.M.

The following meditations by Fr. Bertrand Buby, S.M. present Mary as seen by [Paul](#), [Mark](#), [Matthew](#), [Luke](#), and [John](#). They read beyond mere interpretation of scripture patterns. We are dealing here with meditations of the second degree, meaning reflective of the holy writer's reflections about their own writings and feelings on Mary. These stories beyond the story are imaginary, the fruit of scripture and thorough study and contemplation of Mary in scripture. My Marian reflection consists in placing myself in the shoes of Paul and the evangelists. I then speak for them in simple words in order to share their perceptions and images of Mary. My "point of view" springs from my faith and my devotion to the Mother of God. I was only able to do this after many years of studying the theology of Mary primarily from the Scriptures.

Paul and Mary:

Paul Reminisces

In preparation for this meditation read: Galatians 4:4-5 and Romans 1:1-4

I never met Jesus personally nor his mother. In fact I learned her name only through Jesus' apostles. But, in thinking about her, I realize how she as a Jewish mother, taught him to live out the mitzvot of the Torah and to fulfill all of the rituals of my own Pharisaic dispensation. Surely, she had an important role in God's plan for the history of salvation. She modeled the "Valiant Woman" of our Book of Proverbs (c.31) She took him to the Temple in Jerusalem several times before he reached the age of twelve. You would now call this his bar mitzvah (son of the commandment). I understand that an incident happened then as he remained in the temple precincts without her knowing it. This is so typical even today of our children and teenagers. They can and do get lost while we are shopping. What else can I say about someone I never met. I think she taught Jesus how to say "yes." I reason about this because her own song is very similar to the earliest hymn I learned about Jesus (Phil.2:5-II). In this hymn Jesus says "yes" to his Heavenly Father and also submits even to the status of a servant and becomes obedient even to his death on a cross. How else could he have learned such lessons except from a devoted, loving mother who was so faithful to her Jewish religion and who loved God so profoundly that God chose her to be the Mother of our Messiah, the Lord, Jesus Christ!

Mark and Mary:

Mark Reminisces

In preparation for this meditation read: Mark 3:31-35; 6:1-6a)

I am a very nervous, anxious and hasty writer. I know how to make the story of Jesus interesting because of the high conflicts that I learned about his short life. I know that to understand Jesus as a disciple I must follow him to Jerusalem and experience my own shortcomings, crosses and difficulties as bound up with his suffering, death, and, thanks be to God, his resurrection and appearance in the land of Galilee which I treasure and remember when I think and write about Jesus.

Sure! I wrote the first "Good News" (Gospel) about Jesus, but I did depend on some reminiscences of Peter, the apostle; there were also a few "memoirs" about Jesus that I collected here and there to fill in the gaps. I am sorry I used the conjunction "and" so often and then the word "immediately." But Greek is a second language for me; however, it is much better than my Latin.

You ask about his mother. Well, I remember her as Mary. In fact, I was the first Jewish-Christian writer to put her name on a manuscript! I do not know all the details about how she came to be pregnant with Jesus. Perhaps other Christian or Jewish preachers and writers will find out more about the manner and time of Jesus' birth. Don't ask me. I was not around when Jesus preached, nor did I ever meet his mother. Why, then, do I mention his brothers and sisters? It all happened such a long time ago that I'm not sure whether they were Mary's children or whether they are part of the clan of her relatives, or the extended family. As you know, we are wont to call them brothers and sisters, too. Did you notice in speaking about her and Jesus I did not use so many "ands" and "Immediately's"? I am older now and have been corrected by other writers, or shall we say, they stole my material and improved on it, making a good name for themselves. As long as this helped make good disciples of Jesus and followers of the cross, I do not mind.

Back to Mary. In my two paragraphs about her, I meant to present her as the definite person linked to Jesus' history. She had the name "Mary" and she was a strong Jewish mother who protected her family reputation and wanted to call Jesus back to his senses, probably taking up the trade of his father, whom I never named, but now known as Joseph.

Because of the mysteriousness of his early years, I prefer to speak of Jesus having only one Father--and that is Abba, God. I made that point clear in all of my sixteen chapters about the Good News of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. Don't ask me about Mary's virginity, I am learning more about this mystery only now. I just wanted to share with you her silhouette. She is a strong, protective, solicitous and energetic woman. Perhaps she understood Jesus' words better than I when he said, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." I'll let it go at that.

Matthew and Mary:

Matthew Recalls

In preparation for this meditation read: Matthew 1:18-25; and 1:1, 16-17, Matt.2)

Yes, I am Matthew and I know a good amount about Judaism and explored Jesus' birth in and through that religion which I had embraced up to the time of my conversion. In fact, for the community and church within which I am a leader, this knowledge of Judaism as well as my knowledge of the Good News about Jesus helps me to keep Jew and Gentile together. You ask me about Mary just as you asked Paul and Mark. I read both of them very thoroughly. In fact, I used their own sparse information about her to fill in what I learned and reflected upon about her and her husband Joseph. I may be bold here in mentioning Joseph. I feel he would have been lost to our memories had I not recorded what I learned about him. He and Mary are inseparable in my story about when and how Jesus was born.

I always believe in learning a great deal from the way an author begins his story--all the more so, when it is about the greatest story ever told. That is why I carefully constructed my first leading line which sets up the narrative about the origins of Jesus and his blood-line. You know this is important to us Jewish-Christians. "Toledoth" or genealogies are important to us, though I know you modern readers get bored unless you are recounting your own family tree--then I get bored! My first line shouts out: "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." David is the greatest symbol for all Messianic claims; Abraham is the father of all nations and all believers. You know this well from Muslims, Christians, and Jews. I won't go through the genealogy, for its purpose is to show Davidic lineage. The fourteen generations and three sets mean symbolically the number for David's name and the three epochs of salvation history up to the center of salvation history. the birth of Jesus, the Messiah.

Pay attention to line 16. It reads, "...and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah." This forms an inclusion with line one and shows you that I understand that Mary was the real physical mother of Jesus, but Joseph was not his real father, rather, he was his legal father. And according to my religion as a Jew, this was the equivalent of real paternity once the father accepted and named the child. Notice how I relate that it was Joseph who gave Jesus his name, not Mary. She knew him to be a son from God in a special way. Joseph wrestled with this mystery and an angel or messenger from God unraveled it for him and he, then, affirmed his marriage with Mary and accepted her son even though he was not his physically.

I know I have created problems for modern students of the Scriptures, but I chose to cite Isaiah 7:14 from the Greek text which you call the Septuagint rather than from the Hebrew. In the Greek text the actual word for a VIRGIN is used: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, God is with us." I like to cite texts from the Jewish Scriptures to emphasize or illustrate what I am saying. I am getting long-winded. Let me summarize what I wished to record about Mary in a few words. I emphasize her as virgin in my first chapter and I show her to be the spouse of the Davidic Joseph. In the second chapter I emphasize the early events and struggles of the holy family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Notice I also give them a home in Bethlehem; perhaps I wanted you to see that Jesus is a builder of homes and a strong protector of family values. Oh, yes, one of your modern commentators on Matthew says this about my Marian presentation and line eleven of chapter two: "On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage."

Luke and Mary:

Luke's Recollection

In preparation for this meditation read: Luke 1 and 2; 8:19-21; 11:27-28 and Acts 1:14)

Coming from the Hellenistic culture and knowing how to write well, I decided to present a fuller coverage of Mary of Nazareth. the Mother of Jesus. You are led into my narrative concerns in my introduction (Luke:1:1-4). Matthew has already pointed out to you how important that is when reading a Gospel. Yes, I am the portrait painter of Mary. I capture her person and describe her as a rounded character in everything I saw about her in my Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. It is I who go beyond the shadow of Mary in Paul, the silhouette in Mark and the Matthew sketch of her. I allow her to speak for herself throughout my Gospel. Even though I am not very early in writing about her, I do go back to the earliest moment in her life as presented in the entire array of Marian texts. I carefully constructed the Annunciation account as both a revelation of who she is and also as a story of her calling or vocation. I like the

following poem written by a religious Sister who "pondered over" my own Annunciation:

THE ANNUNCIATION

The moonglow in a manshape
 after a light rain
 crooks and staffs
 or the limbs of trees
 tricking their shadows into angel wings,
 the bleat of sheep on a far-off hill
 and the whistle of a stiff night wind-
 perhaps it was nothing
 but that on my pallet I had drowsed into a dream.
 Yet the next morning I would have sworn
 that there had been a man
 or the ghost of a man
 who announced himself as Gabriel
 and hailed me "full of grace."
 Yes, hailed, as I were a princess,
 a queen, a Roman empress, I

Perhaps it was nothing
 but that on my pallet I had drowsed into a dream,
 yet he foretold that I would bear a son,
 a son whose name would be Emmanuel,
 and I, a simple Hebrew girl, believed
 but wondered how,
 for there had never been a man
 Perhaps it was nothing
 but that on my pallet I had drowsed into a dream
 and had awakened only now,
 thinking that in my sleep
 no man but a ghost called Gabriel

The moonglow in a manshape
 after a light rain,
 crooks or staffs
 or the limbs of trees
 tricking their shadows into angel wings,
 and a ghost called Gabriel prophesying
 "And the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,
 and he shall be king over the house of Jacob forever"--
 perhaps it was nothing
 but the bleat of sheep on a far-off hill
 and the whistle of a stiff night wind.

I deliberately describe Mary as a faithful and first disciple of the Lord Jesus. All of my lines about her point this out. Notice, too, how in the visitation to her cousin Elizabeth she brings the good news to others and thus is the star of evangelization in my Gospel. She is a most joyous and blessed person. She is the personification of what it means to be a beatitude. In a sense, I gave her the titles Blessed Virgin, Blessed Mother.

You will notice that all of the joyful mysteries of the rosary are found in my infancy narrative. I'm glad that the church chose them from my Gospel. Just as Mark gave us a good portrait of Jesus, I give you the best portrait of her that has ever been painted. She is a feeling person--didn't Simon promise her that a sword of sorrow would pierce her heart. She prays alone, then in the company of the believers in the upper room; she prays in the Temple and fulfills all the rituals of purification. She exults in God and is confident in God's unconditional love for her people.

Her "Magnificat" is one of the most liberating prayers that has been offered. Her hospitality and attentiveness to the Lord blend in her smiling face. She truly is the Mother of the Lord, who first conceived Jesus through her faith. Her "yes" is a constant Amen to God's will.

The Holy Spirit is one of my favorite Persons in my Gospel. This Holy Spirit is present at the Annunciation and also in the final appearance of Mary in my second work, the Acts of the Apostles. There she is in the midst of the community of apostles, disciples, relatives and friends of Jesus. She alone among the women is named and once again the Holy Spirit descends and a new creation, the Church, is born. Is it any wonder then that Paul VI calls her mother of the Church? As you see, I could go on and on about this wonderful mother of ours, but I do want to leave some time for John who wrote the Fourth Gospel.

John and Mary:

John Contemplates

In preparation for this meditation read: John 1:13-14: 2:1-12: 19:25-28a)

I, John, have meditated on and contemplated the life of Jesus at great length, making it the focus and center of my life. It was so remarkable an experience to know and love Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life. It is I who call him the Word who lived eternally in the loving bosom of the Father and, yet, as Word he became flesh being born of Mary who conceived him through her courageous faith and love. In my prologue I state, "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us... of his fullness we have all received." There is a direct role of Mary in this mystery of love which mirrors God's Covenant with Israel, God's people.

Because I have had more time to reflect upon this mystery than the other three evangelists, I carefully involved Mary and her beautiful acts of fidelity in two scenes in my Gospel. I try to emphasize in the first half of my work (chapters 1-12) the great gift of our faith. I want each person to come to know Jesus Christ personally as Mary did. I want people to make a positive decision for the absolute trust and belief in Mary's son. My Gospel is one of decision for Jesus as the source of Revelation--God's revelation to us. Mary, but I always refer to her as the "Mother of Jesus," is highlighted in two scenes in my proclamation of Good News. These scenes complement each other and are essential to both messages of my Gospel: faith in the first part; love, in the second part.

At Cana Mary was present as the Woman of faith who acted as the awakening of Jesus to perform a marvelous sign of generosity and hospitality at a wedding; but went beyond the marvel to the meaning of the sign. It is the first of Jesus' seven signs in my Gospel and it happens on the seventh day of what I intend to be a new creation. Jesus' hour of glorification is pre-figured. The word "hour" means his Passion. Death, and Resurrection. He is symbolized in my Gospel as the Paschal lamb of God. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was always there where Jesus was. Her words, "They have no wine," initiated the first of Jesus' signs. His disciples were led to believe in him because of this. Later, the Church would see her intercessory power. It would also show that the eucharist and baptism are signified. And we must not forget that marriage, too, is a great part of this event. Look to the mother of Jesus when you have need of something. She will tell you TO DO WHATEVER Jesus tells us. Isn't that a wonderful example of how our devotion to Jesus should be enhanced?

The final event of Mary's presence in the fourth Gospel is the scene at the foot of the Cross which I have made central to seven happenings at the Crucifixion narrative. I realize that Jesus' death on the cross is the supreme sign of God's unconditional love for us. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and the beloved disciple who represents not only me, but all believers now receive the spirit of Jesus and become the Church. Jesus is enthroned upon the cross. His death is victory over death, sin, and evil. This giving of Jesus never ceases and he gave Mary to me as mother and I, together with all of you, become sons and daughters of Mary. The Church is born at the foot of the cross for Jesus' hour has now come in its fullness... "And of his fullness, we have all received."

I would like to share with you, the words of the first commentator of my Gospel--Origen, a priest of the third century. He truly captured what I wanted to say when Jesus gave Mary to me and to you in that most solemn moment.

We might dare say, then, that the Gospels are the first fruits of all Scriptures, but that the first-fruits of the Gospels is that according to John, whose meaning no one can understand who has not leaned on Jesus' breast nor received Mary from Jesus to be his mother also. But he who would be another John must also, such as John, be shown to be Jesus, so to speak. For if Mary had no son except Jesus, in accordance with those who hold a sound opinion of her, and Jesus says to his mother, "Behold your son" and not, "Behold, this man also is your son," he has said equally, "Behold, this is Jesus whom you bore." For indeed everyone who has been perfected "no longer lives, but Christ lives in him," and since "Christ lives" in him, it is said of him to Mary, "Behold your son," the Christ.

John and Mary:

John of Patmos Envisions

In preparation for this meditation read: Rev. 12:1-6; 12:13-17).

I am John of Patmos. My claim to fame is the tantalizing Book of Revelation which consists of my letters to the seven Churches I ministered to in Asia Minor. You need recall only that of Ephesus which has such a rich Christian tradition and now is the only Christian location in Turkey. I'll come back to Ephesus, for it does involve Mary, the Mother of Jesus, about whom you have asked. You have already seen that the last evangelist, John, refers to Mary as the WOMAN and as the MOTHER OF JESUS, both at Cana and Calvary. I, too, liken her to the woman clothed with the sun and also to a bride descending from heaven. You realize that I am speaking about the Church and about Jesus in symbolic not literal language. A seer, a mystic looks beyond the ordinary words and deeds of life to those that have a perennial and profound meaning.

Only symbolic language and images can convey to you what I experienced on a Sunday while contemplating the death of Jesus as the slain Paschal Lamb. I, John your brother, had these mystical experiences and visions on the Island of Patmos where I heard the voices of angels and of Jesus speaking to me about the churches and about what was soon to happen. But, you know that part of the story, and want to know about the woman clothed with the sun. I deliberately recall that this apparition happened in the middle of my ecstatic experiences. That is why I place the woman at the center of my scroll, emphasizing her appearance as the apex of what I have written. Allow me to describe her again:

"Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman robed with the sun, standing on the moon, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant, and in labour, crying aloud in the pangs of childbirth. ... Then the dragon stood before the woman ... so that he might devour her son as soon as he was born. And she gave birth to a son, a male child who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and his throne; and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days." (Rev. 12:1-6)

"You well know that I am speaking of the birth of the Messiah and of his now being at the throne of God. Did I also mean his mother Mary in the symbolism of the woman? Remember it was a series of visions that I had. Certainly the woman represents the Church, but I see Mary, too, as the one who gave birth to Jesus. Mary and the Church are inseparable. Think of the Cross and how she as the woman represented the Church. Here, in my vision, the Church is prefigured in Mary as its prominent member. She is with us in the pain and struggle and in the persecution we feel from Satan, the flaming red dragon. "But the woman (Church/Mary) was given the two wings of a mighty eagle, so that she could fly to her place in the wilderness where she was to be looked after for three and a half years, out of the reach of the serpent. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman: it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured forth from his mouth. Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and maintain their witness to Jesus." (Rev. 12:13-17).

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