



INTRODUCTION

The study of particular characters in the Bible is always profitable. There may be little actually said by the person, but much can be learned through the careful study of their attitudes and actions. Application to our own lives should always follow, where suitable, in order that lasting benefit might result from time spent with the Word of God.

The three women we will be considering in this study are: Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary of Bethany; and Mary Magdalene. All were close to the Lord - their relationships being: family; friend; and follower respectively. By looking at their attitudes and abilities we shall see how the grace of God can enable us to use our potential for His glory and honour.

LESSONS YOU WILL STUDY

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS

1. The Angel sent from God
 - a. Gabriel
 - b. The Home in Nazareth
 - c. The Angel's message
 - d. The Response of Mary
 - e. The Hill Country of Judah

2. Rejoicing and Reflection
 - a. Mary's Hymn of Praise
 - b. The Birth of Christ
 - c. The Shepherds
 - d. The Visit to the Temple
 - e. The Visit of the Wise Men

3. The Young Child
 - a. The Flight into Egypt
 - b. "That it might be fulfilled by the prophets"
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4. The Loosening of Family Ties
 - a. The Wedding at Cana - the Need
 - b. The Wedding at Cana - the Provision
 - c. The Wedding at Cana - the Need for Obedience
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5. Final Days
 - a. The Sword
 - b. A New Son
 - c. A New Life

MARY OF BETHANY

6. Mary and Martha
 - a. An Open Home
 - b. An Open Heart
 - c. A Closed Mind
 - d. Restoration
7. The Death of Lazarus
 - a. The Discipline of Waiting
 - b. The Return of Jesus - Martha
 - c. The Return of Jesus - Mary
 - d. The Resurrection
8. The Supper at Bethany
 - a. Martha and Lazarus
 - b. Mary's Offering (i)
 - c. Mary's Offering (ii)

MARY MAGDALENE

9. The Servant of the Lord
 - a. "A New Creation"
 - b. The Cross and the Tomb
 - c. Fellow Workers
10. The Resurrection
 - a. Early in the morning
 - b. The Call and the Response
 - c. Mary's Special Commission

When you have read through each lesson carefully, write down your answers to the questions then return to the website menu using the back arrow ↩ and click on '**EXAM FORM A**'.

Complete this Form, including your answers and click '**SUBMIT**'.
Do this for each lesson. Your exams will be marked and returned to you.

Lesson 1 - MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS - The Angel sent from God

GABRIEL Luke 1:5-29

Someone once said that isolated events were 'like angel's visits, few and far between.' But in the months preceding the birth of the Lord, and for a time after, there were plenty of angelic comings and goings. The most important messages were entrusted to the angel Gabriel. His name means 'the strong one of God' and we read of him first in the book of Daniel. Daniel 8:15-16; 9:21-22.

The next time Gabriel appears in the temple at Jerusalem to tell Zacharias, a priest, that his wife would be having a child, John. When Zacharias protests that he and his wife were too old to have children, the angel said: "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God and was sent to speak to you." The dignity and authority of the angel underline the importance of the message and the seriousness of Zacharias' questioning and unbelief. The child would be born, but the father would be silent until the birth.

About six months after Gabriel's visit to the temple he was sent by God to Nazareth - the time had come; God was about to send His Son, the Saviour of the World Gal. 4:4. His mission was to a young virgin, Mary, betrothed to a carpenter called Joseph.

The angel's greeting troubled her: "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women." How is it, thought Mary, that I should be singled out for blessing? She was not conscious of anything special about herself - like Moses, when he came away from talking to the Lord, 'he did not know that the skin of his face shone,' Exodus. 34:29. Her occupation with the Lord shielded her from the sins of pride and self-importance and gave Mary a humility of spirit which must have been a delight to her God and those around her. 'A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor.' Proverbs 29:23.

THE HOME IN NAZARETH Luke 1:26-30.

There could have been no greater contrast in the places that Gabriel was sent - the temple in Jerusalem, and a humble home in Nazareth. The former we would have expected, but hardly the latter. And yet, how significant - the greatest message ever sent to mankind came to a young woman, in the peace and quiet of her home.

We are, quite rightly, often occupied with the angel's message. But consider the fact of where the news of the Messiah's coming was given. If Mary had been in the synagogue or the temple there may well have been other people around, causing distractions; but in the quietness of the home Gabriel was able to calm her mind and tell her clearly what the Lord had in mind for her.

Mary was to be the recipient of God's mercy and loving kindness. Like David (another who found favour with God - Acts 7:46) this was the One she had always looked to for help and guidance, "My eyes are ever toward the Lord," Psalm 25:15. In her own home and humble circumstances Mary had cultivated the presence of the Lord and there Gabriel, who had come from the presence of God, v19, was free to speak.

We are all responsible, to a greater or lesser measure, for the spiritual atmosphere in our home; may we be like Mary and cultivate God's presence through prayer and Bible study. Then we will be able to experience the truth of David's words: "You will show me the path of life: in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures for evermore," Psalm 16:11.

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE Luke 1:31-37.

Having assured Mary that she had nothing to fear Gabriel tells her, very simply, that she was to have a Son, who was to be called Jesus (which means, Jehovah-Saviour). Mothers are always interested in the characters of their children and Mary's Son was to bear the Saviour character of her God both in His Name and Person, Luke 1:47. He would be the Son of the Highest and be given the throne of His father, David... and of His kingdom there shall be no end. The child would be unique, the Son of God, the promised Messiah of Israel.

cp. Isaiah 9:6-7.

In answer to Mary's question: "How can this be?" the angel replies that the "power of the Highest will overshadow you." This Child would have a unique conception, for there was nothing of man in His formation, "that HOLY One who is to be born, will be called the Son of God." The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the Lord Jesus as "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners," Hebrews 7:26 and so He was, and is, and ever will be. Hebrews 13:8.

The angel's message began with a word of encouragement, v28 and it ended in the same way, "For with God nothing will be impossible," v.37. The word had been brought: God was about to appear in the flesh, bringing salvation, and yet God is mindful of the need of Mary. 'Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame,' Psalm 103:13-14.

THE RESPONSE OF MARY Luke 1:38.

The announcement of the birth of the Messiah would not come as a complete surprise to someone like Mary. There were many in Israel who were looking for the Messiah, e.g. Simeon and Anna Luke 2:25-38. However, it is important that we do not minimise Mary's responsibility or the shame and misunderstanding that would be hers. She would be the target for scandal-mongers in the district and for a time at least the man who was to be her husband would be deeply distressed. Matthew 1:19. There is no doubt that she was well aware of the consequences of her submission to the Lord, and yet she did not hesitate: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word".

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| "Maidservant" | - | slave girl, expressing her obedience to the Word of God. |
| "Let it be to me." | - | expressing her submission to the Will of God. |

In this simple response we see the perfect balance of a spiritually minded woman. Mary may have been young in years and experience and yet her desire was to please God and walk in His ways. Her prospects were limited - a carpenter's wife in a small town in Israel - but because of her deep appreciation of the character and ways of God and her willingness to trust Him, her desires were to be granted 'exceeding abundantly, above all that she asked or thought, according to the power that works in her'. Eph. 3:20.

Much of Mary's spiritual knowledge had been gained in the home; now God was proving her, finding out what was in her heart, in the same sphere, the home, the family experience.

When the children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land, God through His servant Moses, had said to them, “And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not,” Deut. 8:2. God’s way has always been to prove His people in their daily lives.

THE HILL COUNTRY OF JUDAH Luke 1:39-45.

Gabriel’s final words to Mary had been about her cousin Elizabeth: “Now indeed Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age,” Luke 1:36. This news was meant not only as a sign and encouragement - it also served as a directive. Mary had received a wonderful revelation from the Lord; she had taken the step of faith and committed herself to Him; now she needed something to do, somewhere to go - and - above all, someone to talk to. Who better than Elizabeth - an older woman, a godly woman, herself the recipient of God’s grace and power? Luke 1:6,25.

Mary hurried away from Nazareth to the hill country of Judah, thinking perhaps of what Elizabeth would say to her. Would she understand? Mary need have had no fears. Her cousin had a divine revelation and as soon as Mary greeted her, Elizabeth knew the mother of the promised Messiah stood before her. Even her own unborn baby was even aware of the event and his mother, filled with the Holy Spirit, dispelled any fears in Mary’s mind by echoing the words of Gabriel: “Blessed are you among women”. Luke 1:28

Elizabeth’s acknowledgement of Mary’s blessing from the Lord reveals there was no jealousy in her heart. She was thrilled to receive Mary into her home and no doubt their three months together was a time of real help and benefit for them both.

“Lovely to have a friend like Elizabeth,” we might say. May the Lord enable us to be a friend like Elizabeth! Elizabeth showed the strength of such a relationship as she listened to Mary and supported her at this special time, with no hint of envy or resentment. “A friend loves at all times,” Proverbs 17:17 and there in the hill country of Judah, Mary was given the companionship she needed, although Elizabeth would have said that the blessing was all hers. Luke 1:43.

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS - THE ANGEL SENT FROM GOD

EXAM 1

(Use EXAM FORM A to send in your answers)

Choose the letter of the correct answer.

1. Zacharias was silent until his son’s birth because
 - a. He was struck dumb by fear
 - b. The message left him speechless
 - c. He doubted the truth of God’s Word
 - d. The angel commanded him to be silent

2. Gabriel’s name means
 - a. A messenger of God
 - b. ‘I stand in the presence of God’
 - c. God is my King
 - d. The Strong One of God

3. Mary received the news of the coming of Jesus
 - a. At the synagogue
 - b. In her own home
 - c. By the Sea of Galilee
 - d. In the temple

4. The conception of Jesus was
 - a. Absolutely unique
 - b. Through the power of the Holy Spirit
 - c. The fulfilment of prophecy
 - d. All of the above

5. The name Jesus tells us of His
 - a. Healing character
 - b. Teaching character
 - c. Saviour character
 - d. Preaching character

6. How did the angel end God's message to Mary?
 - a. With a word of encouragement
 - b. With a miraculous sign
 - c. With a hymn of praise
 - d. With a command

7. Simeon and Anna
 - a. Brought gifts to the Lord Jesus
 - b. Looked for the coming of the Messiah
 - c. Prayed for the overthrow of Rome
 - d. Were Gentiles, not Jews

8. Mary's obedient response was because of
 - a. Pressure from her friends
 - b. Concern to please her family
 - c. Her submission to the Will of God
 - d. Joseph's influence

9. Elizabeth echoed Gabriel's words when she said
 - a. "Blessed is the fruit of your womb"
 - b. "Blessed is she that believed"
 - c. "There shall be a performance of those things"
 - d. "Blessed are you among women"

10. A true friend loves
 - a. When times are good
 - b. At all times
 - c. During times of special need
 - d. After many years of friendship

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

How important do you feel it is to have a true CHRISTIAN friend? What qualities would YOU look for?

Lesson 2 - MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS - Rejoicing and Reflection

MARY'S HYMN OF PRAISE Luke 1:45-55.

Elizabeth had ended her inspired greeting to Mary with the assurance that there would be a fulfilment of all that the Lord had told her . This assurance must have been the high point of Mary's involvement so far - now she felt able to praise God and show her appreciation of His grace and mercy towards her.

'And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour"'. This hymn of praise was an expression of Mary's personal joy; she was wholly involved, soul and spirit, in the worship of God. What she said demonstrated not only her feelings towards God - 'my soul', but also her knowledge of God - 'my spirit'.

This knowledge came from Mary's reading of the Scriptures and her observation of God's dealings with His people. We can see from the very language she uses in the hymn, that she knew the words and expressions of those who wrote the Psalms:- 'Let such as love your salvation say continually: "The Lord be magnified"' Psalm 40:16. Mary had meditated on the song of Hannah:- "Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread and the hungry have ceased to hunger," 1 Samuel 2:5. And she knew the history of the Exodus: "The Lord is my strength and song and He is become my salvation". Exodus 15:2.

Mary's hymn was a lovely echo of the praises of God's people through the ages. She spoke of God's character as saviour; she spoke of His holiness, His power, His mercy and love towards the poor and needy and of His eternal promises to Israel. All these truths she had discovered in His Word and now Mary was experiencing the same divine characteristics and power in her own life. No wonder she could say, "My soul magnifies the Lord." But what about us? Can we magnify His Name? Too often we are eager to experience the power of the Lord but not so keen to apply ourselves to the Word of the Lord. Mary was able to praise Him and be used by Him because she had given time to Him. This is God's way and this is the way of blessing, for ourselves and for others. cp. 2 Tim. 2:15.

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST Luke 1:56; 2:1-7.

Mary stayed with her cousin Elizabeth for three months and then returned to Nazareth. Joseph was given a special command from God that he should proceed with his plans to marry Mary. This was a unique situation and a fulfilment of the prophecy, "Behold the virgin shall be with child and bear a Son and they shall call his name Immanuel," Matt. 1:18-25; Isa. 7:14.

So the time for the birth drew near and the journey was made south to Bethlehem for the Roman census. There Mary's Son was born and she laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the inn. The Son of God, the Messiah, and His first resting place was in a stable? And yet Mary knew that God always identified Himself with the poor and needy and that His desire for His people was that they should walk humbly with their God. cp Psalm 40:17 & Micah 6:8. So, without questioning the circumstances, she wrapped the Child in His swaddling clothes and laid Him in the manger.

Mary's attitude and behaviour reflected that which would mark the Lord Jesus Christ throughout His life (and death). From His birth He took His place with lowliest, cp. 1 Cor. 1:26,29, and during the three years of His public ministry He was always found amongst those

who needed healing and teaching and restoring - at the Pool of Bethesda, in the streets of Jericho and by the Sea of Galilee.

Proverbs 16:19 “Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly
 than to divide the spoil with the proud.”

Psalm 41:1 “Blessed is he that considers the poor, the Lord will
 deliver him in time of trouble.”

THE SHEPHERDS Luke 2:8-20.

The first to hear of the birth of the Messiah were men who belonged to one of a despised class of workers - shepherds. They were despised by the religious because the nature of their work made it difficult for them to keep religious ordinances. However these particular shepherds were keeping watch over temple flocks and it may well be that they were amongst a number of devout people in the land who were ‘waiting for the consolation of Israel,’ Luke 2:25. The appearance of the angel may have terrified them, but his message filled them with great joy.

The sign by which the shepherds would recognise the Baby was ‘a manger.’ This expresses the humble circumstances which would mark the Saviour throughout the whole of His earthly life. At the beginning of that life, His mother laid Him in a borrowed manger and at His death, His followers laid Him in a borrowed tomb. Matt. 27:59-60.

The news, which the excited shepherds brought to Mary and Joseph, was added confirmation concerning the Baby. That such a tiny baby should be ‘the Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord!’ No wonder Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought long and deeply about them.

From this thoughtful approach to these wonderful events we can see that Mary was an intelligent participator - she was the type of person who sought to understand the words and actions of God.

Paul said to the young man Timothy, “Consider (exercise your mind about) what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things,” 2 Tim. 2:7. The Christian life requires the application of our minds as well as our hearts and hands.

THE VISIT TO THE TEMPLE Luke 2:21-35.

The requirements of the law and of the angel were met when the Baby was circumcised on the 8th day and given the name of Jesus.

About a month later, Mary and Joseph went to the temple in Jerusalem in order to present the Child to the Lord and offer a sacrifice for Mary’s purification. The parents’ obedience to the law led to an occasion of further revelation for them and a blessing for a man named Simeon. This man (known to be a good man and holy, one who was waiting for the coming of the Messiah) had been given a special assurance from the Lord that he would not die until he had seen God’s Anointed One, the Christ. So it was, that when Joseph and Mary and the Child were in the temple, Simeon was there too and the Holy Spirit revealed to him that the Child was the Christ.

The fulfilment of God's promise brought peace to Simeon. He saw and identified himself with God's salvation - 'he took Him up in his arms' - and spoke of the fact that the Lord would lighten the paths of the Gentiles as well as being the glory of Israel. Perhaps Simeon had been meditating on the prophet Isaiah. How thrilling it must have been for him to experience the realisation of such a prophecy and hold the incarnate Word in his own arms, Isaiah 42:1-7.

Mary's unique relationship with the Lord, as His mother, was to mean great personal sorrow, "a sword will pierce through your own soul." The shadows of Christ's sacrificial life and death were already gathering.

THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN Matt. 2:1-11.

In the months before the birth of Christ, men from the east had seen a sign in the heavens. They were wise men and understood that the appearance of such a star meant that the Messiah-King of the Jews was to be born. They were not only wise men who had spent time studying the heavens, they were determined men too, who were willing to make an arduous journey through the desert in order to pay homage to the new King.

They needed to ask directions when they reached Israel and naturally went to the palace in Jerusalem. But their enquiry only caused consternation in the heart of King Herod - he was the king of the Jews! The chief priests and wise men of Israel were consulted and they produced the prophecy from the book of Micah, "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah: for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd my people Israel," Micah 5:2. Herod then spoke to the wise men privately, cunningly - for he had it in mind to see that this usurper was destroyed.

The travellers continued their journey and to their joy the star reappeared and directed them to the Child. The family were living in a house now and there, at the end of an arduous and demanding journey, the wise men fulfilled their mission. 'They saw the young Child... and worshipped Him: and ... opened their treasures... gold, frankincense and myrrh' - gold, to acknowledge His royalty and deity; frankincense, to celebrate the fragrance of His life and work; myrrh, to foreshadow His sorrows and death. Their desire to worship the Messiah had been the driving force behind the arrival of these men in Bethlehem and Mary was left in no doubt as to the value of the Child in their eyes.

True worship is always marked by the gifts of appreciation of the Lord. It is only when we gather up what we know of Christ (our treasures) concerning His Deity - the gold; His life and work - the frankincense; and His sacrificial death - the myrrh and present it to Him, that we can truly say "We worship You."

Worship is much more than rejoicing in our salvation; it is occupation with our Saviour. "When they saw the young Child... they worshipped Him... and presented unto Him gifts."

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS - Rejoicing and Reflection

EXAM 2

(Use EXAM FORM A to send in your answers)

Choose the letter of the correct answer.

1. Mary's knowledge of God came from
 - a. Her reading of the Scriptures
 - b. Her study of nature
 - c. Her imagination
 - d. Observing how God dealt with His people

2. Mary was able to praise God because
 - a. She knew many psalms
 - b. She was an emotional person
 - c. She had spent time getting to know Him
 - d. She went to the synagogue regularly

3. Which prophecy was Joseph given by the angel?
 - a. Micah 5:2
 - b. Isaiah 7:14
 - c. Jeremiah 31:15
 - d. Isaiah 9:6

4. Amongst whom did the Lord Jesus take His place?
 - a. With the rulers and kings
 - b. With the rabbis and teachers
 - c. With the poor and needy
 - d. With the priests

5. What sign were the shepherds given?
 - a. The star
 - b. A manger
 - c. The stable
 - d. A lamb

6. How did Mary react to the visit of the shepherds?
 - a. With excitement and joy
 - b. With fear and wonder
 - c. With pleasure and satisfaction
 - d. With quiet thought and consideration

7. What did Simeon see in the baby Jesus?
 - a. God's salvation
 - b. A Light for the Gentiles
 - c. The glory of Israel
 - d. All of the above

8. What would Mary's relationship to the Lord bring to her?
 - a. Worry and concern
 - b. Great personal sorrow
 - c. Special honour in Nazareth
 - d. Many helpers and friends

9. Herod wanted to
 - a. Worship the new King
 - b. Meet Mary and Joseph
 - c. Destroy the Child Jesus
 - d. Bring the Child to Jerusalem

10. The gift of frankincense speaks of
 - a. The Lord's life and work
 - b. The Lord's royalty and deity
 - c. His sorrows and death
 - d. His resurrection

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

In what way can we show our appreciation of the Lord?

Lesson 3 - MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS - The Young Child

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT Matt. 2:12 - 14.

Herod had asked the wise men to report back to him when they had found the Child. But they were warned by God not to return to Herod and they went home another way. The danger remained however, for Herod would stop at nothing to destroy any threat against his throne. He was a man to be feared and as soon as the wise men had left, Joseph was told by an angel to take the Child and His mother down to safety in Egypt.

It must have been a traumatic time for Mary. So many things had happened since the visit of Gabriel. She had experienced emotional, physical and spiritual upheavals and now a long journey into Egypt in order to escape the murderous intents of a wicked king. But God has His man ready for this time of crisis. Joseph had shown by his obedience to the angel's message back in Nazareth that he believed God's Word and would act upon it. Matt. 1:24-25.

He lost no time now in responding to the instruction, "Flee into Egypt." It is interesting to see that nothing of what Joseph said is ever recorded, but from a careful study of his actions and thoughts we can see that he was a consistent, reliable man. He was just the person to cope with emergencies; he was just the person to protect the Child Jesus and His mother.

Nevertheless it must have been hard for someone like Joseph to take on these responsibilities. He may have been reliable, thoughtful and caring, but he was just an ordinary, working-class man; why should the Lord choose him? His characteristics would never make the news. Joseph's initial response could have been like Moses' who was full of excuses, Exodus 3 & 4. But, perhaps to our surprise, Joseph is marked by a willingness to do whatever God asks him to do, even when, as in the case of marrying Mary, he would have had to face unkind words and misunderstanding.

Underneath that quiet facade Joseph had a resoluteness which backed up his initial obedience to the Lord.

“THAT IT MIGHT BE FULFILLED BY THE PROPHETS” Matt. 2:15-23.

Herod's subsequent action was true to character when he murdered all the children up to two years old who lived in Bethlehem. He died soon after but it was still not safe for Joseph and the family to return to Judea. Joseph had been given an express command to stay in Egypt until he had a word from the Lord to return. Matt. 2:13.

When that word came he brought the Child and Mary back to Israel, intending no doubt to settle in Jerusalem or its neighbourhoods but Joseph was dismayed to find that an equally murderous tyrant was reigning in Jerusalem. What should he do? Again, through a dream, the Lord directed him to Nazareth and it was there that the family settled. It had been necessary for Joseph and Mary to travel the length of Israel, and down into Egypt, during this first year of Jesus' life. At times they must have wondered at the journeys - taken at most inconvenient times. Surely there could have been easier ways of protecting the Child?

But we know that all these journeys were taken in order that the Word of God and the purposes of God might be fulfilled. There had been many prophecies about the coming of the Messiah and all had come to pass: He was to be born in Bethlehem - Micah 5.2; He was to go down to Egypt - Hosea 11:1. "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this," John 13:7 Joseph and Mary were aware of the circumstances behind their travels, but they may not have realised that these very happenings were bringing about the fulfilment of God's Word.

Sometimes it is hard for us to understand just what the Lord is doing in our lives. We need to remember His words, "What I am doing you do not understand now" and in faith trust that the omniscient God is working His purposes out, for His glory and our good.

THE EARLY YEARS Luke 2:39-40.

Journey's end - Nazareth! What a relief for Joseph and Mary when at last they settled down, back in their own city.

They had travelled many miles since first leaving Nazareth for the census and they had travelled a long way in experiences too. Now the excitement and drama of those days must be set aside and the business of family life established. For the all-important task of bringing up the Son of God the Lord had brought the family back home.

Jesus was a special Child, and yet those few words, 'And the Child grew, and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom' speak to us of a healthy, balanced childhood. His natural development was watched over by Mary and Joseph. They fed Him, encouraged Him and taught Him. No doubt His response must have been a delight to experience, for 'the grace of God was upon Him.' Here is the uniqueness of Christ, even when a small child.

We know that the family was not rich in this world's goods (the offering at the temple was that of poor people - Luke 2:24) but they were, I am sure, a contented family. The development of Jesus speaks of a spiritual and ordered environment, where children would feel happy and secure.

Mary was responsible for Jesus' spiritual training in His early years. His education from the history of Israel, the psalms and the prophets would constantly direct Him to the God of Israel and the blessings of obedience. cp. Deut. 11:19, Prov. 22:6. Such early learning in the home is of lasting benefit.

Another mother and grandmother are spoken of in the New Testament - Eunice and Lois. They had taught their boy Timothy diligently 2 Tim: 1:5; 3:15 and his early training had laid a good foundation for missionary service with the apostle Paul.

“Let the little children come to me,” said the Lord - and where better for them to learn than at home with their mother? Mark 10:14.

THE PASSEOVER VISIT TO JERUSALEM Luke 2:41-52.

It was the custom for Jews to attend at least one of the great festivals in Jerusalem every year. For most it was the Passover and for Mary and Joseph this celebration was an annual event.

This visit to Jerusalem may have been the first which Jesus had made since His birth. He was twelve years old now. The following year He would take His place as a full member of the synagogue. He was reaching the age of responsibility and understanding. After attending the feast days at the temple, the family started on the return journey,

but the parents were unaware that Jesus had stayed behind. Eventually they realised that Jesus was not with them and they returned to the city to look for Him.

It was common for the learned doctors to set up informal teaching sessions on Sabbaths and feast days in the temple and this is where Jesus had been spending His time, 'both listening to them and asking them questions.' What a thirst for knowledge Jesus must have had and how eager He was to take full advantage of the opportunity of hearing the great teachers of His day. Do we follow His example or do we ignore opportunities to learn from others?

It appears that Jesus was now beginning to realise Who He was and what His life and work was to be. “I must be about MY Father's business.” Mary was grieved at Jesus' seeming lack of concern; Jesus was surprised at her lack of understanding. She should have known where He would be, but it seems that Mary's realisation of what the Messiah-ship would mean to Jesus and the family was to be revealed gradually. For the time, even the truth of Jesus' words was hidden from them, but Mary, characteristically, stored the words away in her heart, and the young Boy went home and was subject to His parents.

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS - The Young Child

EXAM 3

(Use EXAM FORM A to send in your answers)

Choose the letter of the correct answer.

1. Why did the wise men not return to Herod?
 - a. They ran out of time
 - b. They were warned by God
 - c. They were afraid of Herod
 - d. Joseph advised against it

2. Where was Joseph told to take Jesus and His mother?
 - a. To Syria
 - b. To Nazareth
 - c. To Damascus
 - d. To Egypt

3. Why was Joseph chosen to care for Jesus and Mary?
 - a. He was kind and thoughtful
 - b. He was obedient to God's Word
 - c. He was strong physically
 - d. He had lived in Egypt

4. How would Joseph and Mary know when to return to Israel?
 - a. When news came of Herod's death
 - b. When the Child Jesus was five years old
 - c. When God gave them the word to return
 - d. When there was another census

5. Why was it necessary for Joseph, Mary and the Child Jesus to travel around so much?
 - a. They were not sure where God wanted them to be
 - b. So that prophecies could be fulfilled
 - c. To escape from Herod's spies
 - d. To find employment for Joseph

6. Where did Joseph and Mary eventually settle?
 - a. Samaria
 - b. Jerusalem
 - c. Nazareth
 - d. Bethlehem

7. Who was responsible for Jesus' spiritual training during His early years?
 - a. A rabbi
 - b. His mother
 - c. Zacharias
 - d. His father

8. Who did Eunice and Lois teach, in N.T. times?
 - a. Titus
 - b. Philip
 - c. Mark
 - d. Timothy

9. How old was Jesus when He went to the Passover at Jerusalem?
 - a. Five
 - b. Twelve
 - c. Fourteen
 - d. Ten

10. What was Jesus doing in the temple amongst the teachers?
 - a. Teaching them
 - b. Discussing difficult passages
 - c. Listening and asking questions
 - d. Reading the scrolls

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Do you consider the home the best place for spiritual training today - or school? Why?

Lesson 4 - MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS - The Loosening of Family Ties

THE WEDDING AT CANA - THE NEED John 2:1-3.

Nearly twenty years had passed since Jesus returned to Nazareth with His parents - He was now ready to enter into His time of public service and teaching. His cousin John (son of Elizabeth and Zacharias) had baptised Him in the river Jordan, Matt. 3:13-17, and Jesus had begun to gather around Him the men who were to be His disciples, John 1:35-51. He had left His home in Nazareth to begin a travelling ministry throughout the country, but before the family links were finally severed, a conversation is recorded for us. It gives a glimpse of a unique and touching relationship between a mother and her Son.

The occasion was a wedding at Cana, to which Jesus and His disciples had been invited. During the festivities the wine had run out - which was a social disaster - and something needed to be done quickly before anyone found out. Perhaps Mary was one of the helpers for she knew about the calamity and brought the news to Jesus, "they have no wine."

Now why should Mary have told the Lord? Jesus had worked no miracles up to this time (this was to be the first - verse 11) so she would not have expected one. But having lived so closely to the Lord for 30 years, Mary knew that He would want to know about the need, because of His concern for people. And if anyone would know what to do, it would be Jesus. No situation was beneath His notice; no situation was beyond His power, and that still applies today! Hebrews 13:8.

"They have no wine." The simplicity of the statement is surprising and salutary. The reason why was not given and Mary made no suggestion as to what should be done. But from her simple remark we learn:-

1. That Mary was aware of the need and in touch with the situation.
2. That she was concerned about the family involved.
3. That she believed that Jesus could meet the need.

Through the years Mary had experienced at first hand the concern and care shown by the Lord for others. And because of this her own involvement with people had developed and deepened - the result being a mature and caring approach to the need of the moment.

THE WEDDING AT CANA - THE PROVISION John 2:4-11.

We have seen that Mary's concern for others was coupled with confidence in her Son, so she went to Jesus and told Him of the need. This was the natural and spontaneous action of a mother to a Son, but from Jesus' reply we see Him gently telling her that He was subject to a higher authority - His Father in Heaven. Eighteen years before, He had said to His parents: "Did you not know, that I must be about my Father's business." His actions could only be in relationship to the Father and His will. John 10:37-38.

"The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do," John 5:19. And what did the Father do, in relation to His people, the nation of Israel? From the Old Testament we learn that He blessed His people, showed mercy and loving-kindness and provided a fruitful land for them to live in. 'He will bless the fruit of the land... the new (best) wine,' Deut. 7:13. But these blessings were conditional upon the obedience of Israel and Mary impressed upon the servants the need to do exactly what Jesus told them. Their implicit obedience, 'and they filled the waterpots to the brim,' brought joy and blessing back to the wedding.

The signs (miracles) in the gospel of John were specially chosen in order that people might believe that Jesus is the Son of God. John 20:30-31. In this 'beginning' of miracles we see the Lord's motive (mercy) and action (provision of the best) perfectly reflecting that of the God of Israel, proving that He was truly the Son of God. John 5:36; 14:11. "Believe me for the sake of the works themselves," and the disciples did just that.

THE WEDDING AT CANA - THE NEED FOR OBEDIENCE John 2:5.

Mary's approach to the Lord may have been with a mistaken view of their relationship as mother and son, but it is obvious that she trusted Him and recognised His authority. "Whatever He says to you, do it." These are the last recorded words of Mary. She may not always have

understood what was going on in her life, or in that of the Lord, but nevertheless she was always obedient. More than that even - she understood the value of obedience and the need for obedience. The Lord was to say of Himself, "I always do those things that please the Father." Obedience has the highest priority. John 8:29.

In the Old Testament, Samuel had to tell King Saul, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams," 1 Sam. 15:22. Saul had disobeyed God by keeping back part of the spoils of victory which should have been destroyed. It cost Saul the kingdom of Israel.

Obedience at the wedding brought back the joy and blessing, but Mary was about to enter a time of her life when she would be suffering because of her obedience to the Word of God. Her place in the life of Jesus was to change; family relationships had to be severed, as He went out to seek and save those who were lost. The Lord Himself 'though He was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered,' Heb. 5:8. He learned through suffering what obedience to the will of God really meant and this was to be Mary's experience too.

“WHO IS MY MOTHER?” Matt. 12:46-50.

The public ministry of Christ was gaining momentum. Great crowds came from all over the country to see Him because of His healing miracles and Jesus had recently chosen twelve disciples, ‘and they came to Him’ prior to His sending them out to preach Mark 3:7-12, 13-19. This is always the right order - spending time with Christ before going out in service for Him.

It was at this point that His mother and other members of the family came to see Him. It may have been that they were anxious about His safety or concerned at what was being said about Him, Matt.12:14,24. Jewish family ties are strong and influential and this was behind their coming to see Him. “Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with you.”

But Jesus knew that however good and reasonable the family’s motives might be, they represented a hindrance to His mission; natural relationships must yield before the work of the Father. His responsibility now was for the family of God - His disciples - those who were under the authority of His Father in heaven vs 50. So when faced with the

claims of His mother and family and the claims of His Father, He put God first. It is interesting to see that Mary herself had done just that, thirty years before; now she experienced the principle from another angle.

It seems that Mary and the family did not press their claims. A new phase had commenced in Mary’s life. Not an easy one, as we shall see, but one which had to be met in the same spirit as at the beginning - submission to the will of God. Real obedience is long term. Luke 1:38.

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS - The Loosening of Family Ties

EXAM 4

(Use EXAM FORM A to send in your answers)

Choose the letter of the correct answer.

1. What message did Mary bring to Jesus at the wedding?
 - a. “They want some wine”
 - b. “There is a need for wine”
 - c. “They have no wine”
 - d. “They need wine”

2. From Mary’s remark, what do we learn about her?
 - a. She cared about people
 - b. She liked to know what was happening
 - c. She was always ready to help
 - d. She hoped that Jesus would work a miracle

3. Whose authority was Jesus under?
 - a. Mary and Joseph
 - b. The Scribes and the Pharisees
 - c. His Father in Heaven
 - d. The Roman Governor

4. What did God do for His people Israel?
 - a. He blessed them
 - b. Showed mercy and loving kindness
 - c. Provided a fruitful land
 - d. All of the above

5. Why were certain miracles chosen by John in his gospel?
 - a. To illustrate Jesus' love for all men
 - b. To prove that Jesus was the Son of God
 - c. To demonstrate Jesus' power in healing
 - d. To show Jesus' authority over nature

6. What are the last recorded words of Mary?
 - a. "Behold the maidservant of the Lord"
 - b. "My soul magnifies the Lord"
 - c. "They have no wine"
 - d. "Whatever He says to you, do it"

7. Mary was always
 - a. Joyful
 - b. Obedient
 - c. Patient
 - d. Kind

8. What had the highest priority in Jesus' life?
 - a. Healing the sick
 - b. Teaching the disciples
 - c. Obeying the Father
 - d. Preaching the gospel

9. Why did Mary and her family come to see Jesus?
 - a. They were concerned at what was being said
 - b. They wanted to become disciples
 - c. They needed Him back in Nazareth
 - d. They were anxious about His safety

10. What should come first in our lives?
 - a. The claims of our family
 - b. The claims of God
 - c. The claims of our work
 - d. The claims of our particular interests

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Mary understood the value of, and the need for, obedience. What are some of the ways in which we can seek to know His will for us so that we can be obedient?

Lesson 5 - MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS - Final Days

THE SWORD John 19:25.

‘Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother..’ It is touching to see that Mary was there with the Lord during His darkest hour.

Previously we read of her wanting to speak with Jesus at the start of His public ministry. She and the family had thought that things had got out of hand, Mark 3:21 and did not understand that it was part of the Lord’s work as the promised Messiah of Israel, to teach and preach and heal, Luke 4:16-21. But now things had changed and Mary was in the company of those who loved and served the Lord. She had taken her place in His spiritual family; the relationship transformed through her faith in Him as the Messiah.

The place of the true disciple is ‘by the cross’ and Mary did not flinch from standing where she could see, in all its awful detail, the agonising death of the Lord. No doubt she remembered the words of Simeon in the temple, “A sword shall pierce through your own soul also.” Now at last she understood the full meaning of those words as she looked at the unrecognizable face of her son Jesus. Isa. 52:14.

Her place as the mother of the Lord had brought her high privilege and honour amongst women, but it brought too a deep sorrow which only God could give her the grace to bear. And not only was she conscious of her own grief. There by the cross and its awful suffering, Mary was made aware of Another’s sorrow, far deeper than even her own. “Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, Which the Lord has inflicted on me in the day of His fierce anger,” Lam. 1:12.

A NEW SON John 19:25-27.

There was another standing by the cross - the disciple whom Jesus loved, John. He had stayed close to the Lord during the final hours; now he was given the privilege and responsibility of caring for the

mother of Jesus. It is interesting to see that the Word of God makes the point again that Mary was the mother of Jesus. This is her honour on the earth and as such can never be taken away from her. She had cared for the Lord during most of His life and now He sees that she will be cared for after His death and subsequent resurrection.

Human relationships are important to the Lord and He shows His concern by giving Mary a new son - His beloved disciple, John. In the midst of terrible sufferings He remembered the needs of others. And it was important to the Lord that this new relationship should be carefully nurtured. ““Woman, behold your son.” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother.”” Both responsible for each other; bonded by filial love and concern; the secret of a stable family life.

There were others at the cross - a mother, a sister, a wife and a single woman. How best can we bring honour to the Lord in our various relationships? How best can we work towards the ideal in our family lives and friendships? Only by keeping close to the cross and its supreme example of self-sacrifice.

A NEW LIFE Acts 1:12-14.

After the ascension the eleven disciples returned from the Mount of Olives to an upper room Acts 1:1-13. There, with some of the women and 'Mary, the mother of Jesus' they spent their time in prayer.

What a wonderful time that must have been! After the sorrows and disappointments of the cross, the spirit was one of joy and anticipation. The Lord had commanded that they should not leave Jerusalem, but "wait for the promise of the Father" Acts 1:4. And as they waited, they prayed. The Lord had once asked three of the disciples to watch and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, Matt. 26:41. They had failed on that occasion but now, as they waited in the upper room not far from that garden, they watched and prayed and waited.

Mary is the only person mentioned by name, apart from the remaining eleven disciples. When we met her first we believe she was alone in her home in Nazareth, Luke 1:26-28. There, waiting for the promise of the Messiah, she received a message from Gabriel that she was to be the mother of that very Person - Jesus. Our last meeting with Mary is again in the house; not alone now, but with other believers, and waiting again - waiting for the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, John 14:26.

It is refreshing to see the pattern of faith in God's Word repeated in Mary's life, at the beginning and at the end of her appearances in the Gospels. Mary had travelled far, spiritually, since the early days in Nazareth when she was just a young woman stepping out in faith on the promises and Word of God. Luke 1:38. By God's grace she completed the work He had given her to do and then went on, by God's grace again, to become a disciple. Eph, 2:8-9.

Mary's attitude toward God never changed throughout her life. She had a unique relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, but at the end she was just one amongst over a hundred followers of the Lord; secure, however, in the knowledge that this was the right place to be for a true servant of the Lord. Luke 1:38, Acts 1:4.

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS - Final Days

EXAM 5

(Use EXAM FORM A to send in your answers)

Choose the letter of the correct answer.

1. Where does Mary finally take her place?
 - a. Back with the family
 - b. With the disciples
 - c. With Elizabeth and Zacharias
 - d. With her friends in Cana
- .
2. Mary is near Jesus during the last week
 - a. In the garden of Gethsemane
 - b. At His trial
 - c. At the Cross
 - d. In the Upper Room

3. What words would Mary remember when Jesus died?
 - a. "Blessed are you among women"
 - b. "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business."
 - c. "Unto you is born a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord"
 - d. "A sword shall pierce through your own soul also"

4. "Behold and see if there be any sorrow like my sorrow". Which book quotes these words?
 - a. Isaiah
 - b. Lamentations
 - c. Hosea
 - d. Daniel

5. What responsibility did Jesus give to John?
 - a. To write a story of his life
 - b. To become the chief apostle
 - c. To care for Mary, His mother
 - d. To oversee the new church in Jerusalem

6. The apostle John and Mary were to
 - a. Care for each other
 - b. Be responsible for each other
 - c. Value their new relationship
 - d. All of the above

7. How best can we honour the Lord in our relationships?
 - a. By trying to like people
 - b. By only having Christians as our friends
 - c. By putting the interests of others before our own
 - d. By making a fuss of people

8. What did the disciples do after the ascension?
 - a. Spent their time in prayer
 - b. Studied the prophetic books
 - c. Started writing the gospels
 - d. Mourned the loss of the Lord's presence

9. What were the disciples waiting for?
 - a. The return of the Lord, as King
 - b. A command to go and preach
 - c. The promise of the Father - the Holy Spirit
 - d. More disciples to join them

10. What pattern is repeated in Mary's life?
 - a. Love of God's people
 - b. Faith in God's Word
 - c. Willingness to suffer
 - d. Readiness to serve

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What is the most important factor in creating a stable family life?

Lesson 6 - MARY OF BETHANY - Mary and Martha

AN OPEN HOME Luke 10:38.

It seems that Martha was the elder sister and the house at Bethany belonged to her, for it was Martha who received the Lord into her house.

We are not aware of her motives on this occasion, but an indication could be taken from the story of the Good Samaritan, which precedes this incident in the chapter. The Lord had been asked: "Who is my neighbour?" to which He replied with the parable, and yet another question, "Which ... was neighbour to him that fell among thieves?" The reply was given, "He who showed mercy on him." Luke 10:29-37.

Martha had probably never met Jesus before, although she would have heard about Him from His disciples as they travelled through the village. But nevertheless she was ready to show kindness and open her home to Him. The mercy of the Good Samaritan was the sort that resulted in positive action and Martha reflects this in her thoughtfulness towards the Lord. 'She welcomed Him into her house.' He was made to feel at home. Here is genuine hospitality - active, sacrificial and involving a real commitment to the guest's welfare. Martha showed herself to be a true neighbour. cp. 37.

AN OPEN HEART Luke 10:39.

Martha's warm-hearted hospitality gave the Lord an opportunity to teach and Mary an opportunity to learn: she sat at the feet of Jesus.

'Sitting at the feet' of a person is an expression of discipleship and three times we find Mary at the feet of the Lord. Luke 10:39, John 11:32; John 12:3. There, in her own home, she was able to sit near the Lord and hear His Word. This was seldom possible outside the home, for from early days in the Lord's ministry, great crowds gathered around to hear His teaching Mark 2:13, so Mary took advantage of this special privilege.

The apostles had many occasions to be physically near the Lord. John writes about the One 'which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon,' 1 John 1:1. He implies that they looked closely at the Lord, using their minds as well as their eyes, in order to have a deeper understanding of this Man; the Son of God; the Messiah of Israel. Mary realised too, that the Lord was Someone special, and here was a unique opportunity to really see Him.

But sitting at the feet of the Lord meant that Mary 'heard His Word' She was able to listen to His teaching and as she did this, Mary was obeying the voice of God, "This is my beloved Son, hear Him" and reflecting the character of Christ Himself, Who loved God's Word, Luke 9:35, Ps. 119:111.

And all this took place in the home! Mary sat at the feet of the Lord and heard His Word. And the place where she chose to sit, governed what she saw and heard, and what she saw and heard would influence her life and discipleship for good.

A CLOSED MIND Luke 10:38-42.

The picture of Mary was one of rest and contemplation; 'a heart at leisure from itself' but occupied with the Lord and His teaching.

The very opposite was true of her sister, Martha. “But Martha was distracted with much serving.” No doubt she wanted her guest to be entertained in a fitting manner, and perhaps there were other disciples and friends in the home as well. Whatever the reason, Martha had a lot to do.

But she was not only rushing around physically ; her mind was in a turmoil too. Her view of others, even the Lord, was clouded by resentment, because Mary had left her ‘to serve alone.’ Martha’s preoccupation was with her service and not with the Lord. She was taken up with what she was doing for the Lord and cross because He seemed to be ignoring her need for help, while her own sister sat idly at His feet.

Soon, the resentment was translated into words; the Lord did not care; her sister had deserted her and she was struggling by herself to prepare a meal. Her mind was closed to everything but herself, even the joy of having the Lord in her home had deserted her. After expressing her views, Martha demanded that He intervene and sort out the situation,

at the same time telling Him what to do: “Therefore tell her to help me.” The fog of resentment had clouded her better feelings and judgement.

RESTORATION Luke 10:41-42.

‘A soft answer turns away wrath’ Proverbs 15:1. It was evident that the Lord was fully aware of the circumstances and the people involved. He knew that Martha loved to be busy and helpful, but her priorities were wrong.

The Lord put the matter into perspective. First of all He told Martha that He knew just how she was feeling - anxious, troubled about the meal and all its details. The varied needs of her household and guests had diverted her attention from the fact that there was only one need at that particular moment - and that was to enjoy the presence of the Lord and the refreshment of His teaching. (There was Martha, concerned with the provision of food, and in her home was One who had the power to feed 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fishes!).

Having shown His understanding of the situation the Lord then commends Mary for her insight and understanding. She had chosen to share in something eternal - good, spiritual food from the Lord; the Bread of Life Himself. John 6:47-51.

MARY OF BETHANY - Mary and Martha

EXAM 6

(Use EXAM FORM A to send in your answers)

Choose the letter of the correct answer.

1. Martha was willing to
 - a. Hear Jesus preach
 - b. Provide food for the disciples
 - c. Open her home to the Lord
 - d. Take a sick friend to be healed

2. In the parable Jesus told, who avoided the wounded man?
 - a. The Levite
 - b. The Samaritan
 - c. The Innkeeper
 - d. The priest

3. "Sitting at the feet of the Lord" implies
 - a. Discipleship
 - b. Worship
 - c. Faithfulness
 - d. Friendship

4. Because Mary sat at the feet of Jesus she
 - a. Was granted forgiveness
 - b. Received power
 - c. Heard His Word
 - d. Was given a special revelation

5. Mary is a picture of
 - a. Studiousness
 - b. Rest and contemplation
 - c. Peace
 - d. Joy and happiness

6. Martha was distracted by
 - a. Having the Lord as her guest
 - b. Her brother's absence
 - c. The crowds outside
 - d. The amount of work

7. Martha's view of other people was clouded by
 - a. Illness
 - b. Resentment
 - c. Sorrow
 - d. Family problems

8. Martha was preoccupied with
 - a. Her appearance
 - b. Her home
 - c. Her service
 - d. Her sister

9. What did the Lord do?
 - a. Organised the disciples to help
 - b. Told a parable
 - c. Worked a miracle
 - d. Put the matter into perspective

10. What was Mary commended for?
- Her involvement as a disciple
 - Her understanding of the situation
 - Her faithfulness as a disciple
 - Her self control in the face of provocation

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Can you personally relate better to Martha? or to Mary? What do you feel the Lord is telling you about your attitude?

Lesson 7 - MARY OF BETHANY - The Death of Lazarus

THE DISCIPLINE OF WAITING John 11:1-6.

It appears that the Lord was a regular visitor to the home at Bethany and the family became very close to Him. They were His friends and they knew that Jesus loved them. When the crisis that every family must face came to Bethany, the sisters sent a simple message to the Lord, "Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick." A request for the Lord to heal Lazarus was not made, but the expectation that the Lord would heal Lazarus is there, in the message. "Lord, see, the one who is your dear friend is ill." Martha and Mary must have felt quite sure that the Lord, who had healed many many people who were strangers to Him, would respond immediately to the need of His friend.

The writer of the gospel is careful to make the point that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus, before he relates that Jesus stayed where He was for two days after He had received the message. The Lord was aware that through the death of Lazarus and his subsequent resurrection, God and the Son of God would be glorified and the family, with His disciples, would receive a wonderful revelation about Himself.

But first there had to be the discipline of waiting and the trauma of death, before the Lord could demonstrate fully His power and display His glory in raising Lazarus. The Lord knew that 'weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning,' Psalm 30:5.

Nevertheless, it must have been hard for Him to wait, knowing that Lazarus had died and that the sisters were grieving. He too knew the discipline of obedience to the will of God, for the glory of God.
Hebrews 5:8.

THE RETURN OF JESUS - MARTHA John 11:17-28.

We have seen that although the Lord was wholly in sympathy with the sorrow of Mary and Martha, His view of the situation was from the divine angle - from a greater height and with perfect knowledge.

However, His involvement on the human side, with the family, shows a deep and personal sympathy and an understanding of the needs of the bereaved.

As soon as Martha heard that the Lord was nearing Bethany she left Mary in the house with the mourners and went to meet Him “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died...” Martha was bewildered; she may even have been angry; but the Lord allowed her to express her emotions and regret, which is all part of the grieving process. He listened without condemning, spoke only when necessary and focused all His attention on Martha. The Lord knew she needed to talk (Martha says almost twice as much as the Lord - vs 21-27) and He accepted her outgoing, questioning nature, leading her gently to a simple statement of belief in the resurrection: not the one at the last day but in Himself, Who is the Resurrection and the Life.

Having talked the crisis through with Martha, the Lord gives her something to do. Martha had been greatly helped by talking to the Lord, away from the mourners, away even from Mary; now the healing process was further aided by activity. The Lord knew that such a positive person needed something to do; someone to organise; so He asks her to take a message to Mary.

THE RETURN OF JESUS - MARY John 11:28-33

Martha had left Mary in the house, with the mourners, when she went to see the Lord, ‘Mary was sitting in the house.’ Previously we read of her seated at the feet of Jesus; now we see her resting again, but the picture is more of desolation than contemplation. Still, she waited - waited for the Lord and His Word.

When Martha returned she approached her sister secretly and gave her the Lord’s message . Jesus knew all about Mary’s grief and her need to be drawn out of herself. Once again He focused directly on the person involved in the tragedy; He talked with Martha; He sent specifically for Mary.

Her response to the call was one of swift obedience. It could have been otherwise. Only a few days before, the sisters had sent to the Lord for help but He had not come in time and their brother died. Mary, however, had learned to trust the Lord and say, like Job: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him,” Job 13:15.

When she saw Jesus, Mary said, like her sister: “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died,” then she fell at His feet and wept. Unlike Martha, Mary had nothing more to say; her tears said it all for her. Silently the Lord allowed Mary to express her feelings and shed her tears, for this is a vital part of the grieving process and in the presence of such desolation there was nothing the Lord could say. He knew by Mary’s attitude (at His feet) that she still trusted Him completely and although He was silent we know that within His own spirit He too was deeply moved, both by the grief which He experienced around Him and by the great enemy, death. ‘Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows,’ Isaiah 53:4.

THE RESURRECTION John 11:34-45.

Up to this point the Lord had been involved with the living; now He moves towards the threshold of death. ‘Jesus said, “Where have you laid him?” They said unto Him, “Lord, come and see.”’ It was when the Jews directed Him to the tomb that Jesus actually wept. Here was the cold evidence of death - the wages of sin. Here was the return to the dust, because of sin and disobedience, the consequences of Adam’s fall, Romans 5:12.

The tension must have been felt by everyone present. All, including Jesus, were deeply affected by Lazarus' death and the Jews wondered openly why it was that the Lord had not returned to heal His friend. Only the Lord knew that without the death of Lazarus neither God, nor the Son of God, could be glorified. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had told His disciples that "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God: and those that hear will live," John 5:25-26. That hour had arrived and Jesus told Martha to roll away the stone.

It was always the aim of the Lord, through His miracles, to lead men to believe that He was the Son of God and through that belief to receive eternal life John 20:30-31. After gently rebuking Martha for her hesitancy and encouraging her to act upon her belief in Him, Jesus gave thanks to God for the fact that He had heard His request to raise Lazarus. This prayer was spoken publicly in order that the Jews present might believe that Jesus was truly the One whom God had sent. John 17:1-3.

Psalm 29:4 tells us that 'The voice of the Lord is powerful (lit. in power). The voice of the Lord is full of majesty.' The dynamic power and

supreme authority of the Lord was demonstrated fully when 'He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." His command went right into the realm of death and brought out its captive, Lazarus, alive but still bound. Now the trembling faith which had rolled away the stone was commanded to complete its work by loosening the graveclothes and freeing Lazarus.

'Stand perfect and complete in all the will of God,' Col. 4:12.

MARY OF BETHANY - The Death of Lazarus

EXAM 7

(Use EXAM FORM A to send in your answers)

Choose the letter of the correct answer.

1. What message did the sisters send to Jesus?
 - a. "Lord.. please come and heal Lazarus"
 - b. "Lord.. he whom You love is sick"
 - c. "Lord.. we need Your help"
 - d. "Lord.. Your friend is dying"

2. What did Jesus do when He received the message?
 - a. He stayed where He was for 4 days
 - b. He came to Bethany straight away
 - c. He stayed where He was for 2 days
 - d. He sent His disciples to Bethany

3. What had there to be before the Lord could fully demonstrate His power?
 - a. The discipline of pain
 - b. The discipline of disappointment
 - c. The discipline of separation
 - d. The discipline of waiting

4. The Lord allowed Martha to
 - a. Question Him
 - b. Express her emotions
 - c. Talk
 - d. All the above

5. The Lord focused His attention on
 - a. Lazarus
 - b. The mourners
 - c. Martha
 - d. Mary

6. What did Jesus say of Himself in this passage?
 - a. I am the Light of the World
 - b. I am the Resurrection and the Life
 - c. I am the Bread of Life
 - d. I am the Good Shepherd

7. How did Mary obey the call of Jesus?
 - a. Slowly
 - b. Resentfully
 - c. Swiftly
 - d. Angrily

8. Mary showed that she still trusted the Lord by
 - a. Saying little
 - b. Kneeling at His feet
 - c. Coming to Him
 - d. Going to the tomb

9. When did Jesus weep?
 - a. When He was questioned by Martha
 - b. When He saw Mary weeping
 - c. When He was directed to the tomb
 - d. When He saw the mourners

10. How did Jesus begin His prayer?
 - a. "Father, I thank You..."
 - b. "Father, I beseech You..."
 - c. "Father, I give You..."
 - d. "Father, I say to You..."

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What should be our attitude towards those who mourn?

Lesson 8 - MARY OF BETHANY - The Supper at Bethany

MARTHA AND LAZARUS John 12:1-2.

After the resurrection of Lazarus many of the Jews who had come to mourn with Mary became believers, John 11:45. However, some were informers and when the Pharisees heard of yet another miracle they met with the chief priests and 'plotted to put Him to death,' John 11:46-53.

The final days of the Lord were mainly spent privately with His disciples and friends. It was at this time, six days before the Passover, that Jesus came again to Bethany for a time of fellowship with the family. It was a time of tension and events were moving towards their climax but in that well-loved home a supper had been prepared for the Lord.

'And Martha served.' Her physical energy was undiminished and her home was still open to the Lord and His people but she bore no resentment now as she ministered to her guests. Martha had accepted the Lord's rebuke and learned from it, knowing that His words had been in love and for her own good. Heb. 12:5-11

'Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.' Restored to life, Lazarus fully identified himself with the Lord. The extent of his devotion can be measured by the fact that his life was in danger too vs 10-11. But for Lazarus there was only one place he could be - 'at the table, with Him,' enjoying spiritual refreshment and fellowship.

MARY'S OFFERING (i) John 12:3.

While Martha served the Lord and Lazarus shared His fellowship at the table (verse 2), Mary took a pound of spikenard - very costly - and brought it to the Lord (verse 3). She had sat at His feet and learned from His teaching; she had wept at His feet and experienced His understanding; all this marked Mary as a disciple, devoted to the Master. She had given Him her time and her trust; finally she gave her most treasured possession - the spikenard.

Mary had obviously appreciated the understanding and sympathy of the Lord, when she was scolded by Martha, Luke 10:40-42 and grieved by the death of Lazarus John 11:33-35. Now she had an opportunity to show her understanding and sympathy for Him. She was in touch with events and could discern the way things were going. - 'She has kept this for the day of my burial,' v 7. But Mary was moved to bring her offering before that day; she wanted the Lord to know, while He was still with them, how much she loved and appreciated Him.

True worship is always costly and not something which should be entered upon lightly. Mary was able to worship the Lord in a way which He commended because she valued His Word, Luke 10:39; she knew Him as the Son of Man, in touch with our sorrows and feelings John 11:33-35; and she had experienced His power as the Son of the Living God, John 11:41-44. Her personal knowledge of the Lord and discernment of His approaching death moved her to worship and give of her best.

MARY'S OFFERING (ii) John 12:3-9.

The supper was a time of fellowship, rejoicing even, for Lazarus was with them again and the Lord Himself was the honoured guest. There were others there besides the family so Mary's action was a public witness.

'Still waters run deep' and certainly Mary's chief characteristic was her quiet spirit, given to meditation rather than conversation. Like the mother of Jesus, Mary kept all that she knew of the Lord and the events concerning Him and pondered them in her heart cp, Luke 2:19, 2 Tim.2:7. She thought things through and God gave her a special reward - the ability to understand the progress of events and to act on what she knew, in a fitting manner. 'The secret (inward counsel) of the Lord is with those who fear Him,' Psalm 25:14.

Mary's act of sacrifice and devotion affected not only the Lord but 'the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.' Everyone benefited from the anointing and Mary herself would have been reminded of the occasion for days after, by the fragrance of her own hair. Mary was able to use what God had given her, as a woman, 1 Cor. 11:15, to honour His Son, and this was very precious to the Lord.

We only see Mary outside the house once and that was at the tomb of Lazarus. Much of her spiritual life was nurtured in the home. There

she heard the Word of God Luke 10:39; there she waited for the Lord and obeyed His command, John 11:20; 28-29; and there she was able to serve Him in a reflective and sacrificial way. 'And the house was filled...' not only by the spikenard but with the fragrance of Mary's life and witness. Song of Solomon. 1:12.

MARY OF BETHANY - The Supper at Bethany

EXAM 8

(Use EXAM FORM A to send in your answers)

Choose the letter of the correct answer.

1. After Lazarus' resurrection many of the mourners became
 - a. Informers
 - b. Disciples
 - c. Apostles
 - d. Believers

2. The last days of the Lord were spent
 - a. Teaching in the temple
 - b. Privately with His disciples and friends
 - c. Praying on the Mount of Olives
 - d. With His family in Nazareth

3. At the final supper in Bethany, Martha
 - a. Sat at Jesus' feet
 - b. Asked to be forgiven
 - c. Complained
 - d. Served

4. At the final supper in Bethany, Lazarus was
 - a. In the temple
 - b. At the tomb
 - c. Away with his friends
 - d. At the supper

5. What did Mary give to the Lord?
 - a. Frankincense
 - b. Spikenard
 - c. Myrrh
 - d. Camphire

6. Mary had kept the ointment for the Lord's
 - a. Pleasure
 - b. Appreciation
 - c. Burial
 - d. Service

7. Mary was able to worship the Lord because
 - a. She valued His Word
 - b. She knew Him as the Son of God
 - c. She knew Him as the Son of Man
 - d. All of the above

8. What was Mary's chief characteristic?
 - a. Her quiet spirit
 - b. Her generosity
 - c. Her kindness
 - d. Her faithfulness

9. Mary's special ability was to
 - a. Sort out people's problems and help them
 - b. Understand God's Word and teach it
 - c. Have sympathy with people and pray for them
 - d. Understand the course of events and act upon them.

10. Much of Mary's spiritual development was
 - a. In the temple
 - b. Out in the countryside
 - c. At the synagogue
 - d. In the home.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

In what way can the home be used for Jesus?

Lesson 9 - MARY MAGDALENE - The Servant of the Lord

A NEW CREATION Luke 8:1-3

Mary Magdalene was a devoted follower of the Lord Jesus; her whole life was an expression of deep gratitude to the One Who had delivered her from seven demons.

We know nothing of the actual miracle of cleansing, but we are told of its extent and its result. From being completely dominated by evil spirits, Mary became, through the power of the Son of God, a changed person. Cleansed and forgiven, she received new life, new priorities, new goals. But Mary was not content to receive only - she proved the reality of the inward change by her service for the Lord.

Although we know that Mary's actions were prompted by her devotion to the Saviour it was very necessary for her to keep close to the Lord and His people. There would have been many calls to return to her past life and experiences; Mary made sure that she did not linger in the old haunts or with her former friends.

In the first place she kept near to the Lord and His disciples. In His company she would have heard and seen those things which were helpful and stimulating for her new spiritual life, Luke 8. Secondly, Mary had like-minded friends amongst the other women who served the Lord. They too had experienced the saving power of Christ and their fellowship and conversation would have been of real benefit to her.

The change in Mary's life had been a drastic one; she had become a new creation in Christ, 'old things are passed away; behold all things have become new,' 2 Cor: 5:17. But for a fruitful life, which brought glory to God, discipleship was essential. And discipleship is the product of 'abiding in Christ,' John 15:4-8. Mary had the privilege of hearing and seeing the Lord and being with His apostles and friends. We have the privilege of learning discipleship and growing to maturity in our local church - the God-ordained place for all believers, whose Head is Christ Himself. Eph. 4:11-16.

THE CROSS AND THE TOMB Mark 15:40-47

We read nothing more about Mary Magdalene until the crucifixion, although we know that she was still with the women who ministered to the Lord. They had travelled together from Galilee to Jerusalem to be near at hand during this crisis time.

The commitment of these women was total. The disciples had failed the Lord in Gethsemane, "Could you not watch with me one hour?" Matt: 26:40; the women watched for many hours at Calvary. They saw the nails being hammered into the hands and feet of the Lord, John 19:17-18; they heard the taunts and jeers of those who passed by. Luke 23:35-37; and they felt the chill horror of the three dark hours and the cry of the Saviour: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" Mark 15:33-34. The darkness must have entered Mary's own soul as she watched and waited John 19:25. But other women were there with her Matt. 27:54-56. They had worked together, now they wept together; and as they stood 'watching these things.' Luke 23:49 they showed their willingness to share as well the fellowship of His sufferings. cp. Phil. 3:10.

Mary Magdalene's devoted service did not end when Christ died. With another Mary she went to Joseph of Arimathea's garden and waited to see where the Lord was laid (Mark 15:47) and how He was laid (Luke 23:55). These details were very important; Mary wanted to be quite sure that she knew where the Lord's body had been placed and she needed to know the amount of spices and perfumes required for the embalming (Luke 23:56)

FELLOW WORKERS Luke 8:1-3; Matt. 27:61.

Paul often spoke of those who worked with him in the service of the Lord. They were his 'fellow workers,' Col. 4:11 - close companions, who brought much help and encouragement to the apostle.

Mary Magdalene was a person who had learned the value of working with others. From the time of her healing to the events at Calvary she was with the women from Galilee, always ready to serve the Lord. To outsiders it may have seemed a restricted environment but within the group and near the Lord, Mary's spiritual potential had ample scope for development and her talents could be fully used.

The fruit of the Spirit was evident in her service - love, goodness, faithfulness Gal. 5:22-23. And Mary had another special attribute - a willingness to take responsibility for the difficult task, to go the extra mile for the Lord Matt. 27:54-61. What was said by Paul could have been echoed by Mary, "Join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern," Phil. 3:17.

We should take note too of Mary's companion - 'the other Mary' Matt. 27:61. What a help it is for those who lead and take special responsibilities, when they have faithful support and reliable back-up from others. Mary Magdalene could never have completed all the preparation before the Sabbath had she been without the help of the other Mary.

Yet in all this activity there was quietness and peace. 'Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment.' Luke 23:56. For Mary and the other women the rest was as important as the activity because it involved obedience to God's Word and reflected God's own rest 'from all His work which He had done.' Gen. 2:2.

MARY MAGDALENE - The Servant of the Lord

EXAM 9

(Use EXAM FORM A to send in your answers)

Choose the letter of the correct answer.

1. After Mary's deliverance from seven demons she became
 - a. Happy
 - b. Changed
 - c. Hard-working
 - d. Outgoing

2. Why did Mary keep close to the Lord and His disciples?
 - a. It was helpful spiritually
 - b. She enjoyed the travelling
 - c. She was kept busy
 - d. The peaceful atmosphere was a blessing

3. What is essential for a fruitful life?
 - a. Opportunity for service
 - b. A call to the mission field
 - c. Abiding in Christ
 - d. Ability to preach and teach

4. Where can we grow to maturity?
 - a. At Christian camps and holidays
 - b. In our local church
 - c. At home study groups
 - d. All the above

5. The women had travelled from Galilee to
 - a. Bethlehem
 - b. Jericho
 - c. Jerusalem
 - d. Beer-Sheba

6. After the crucifixion the two Marys went to
 - a. The Garden of Gethsemane
 - b. The Upper Room
 - c. Joseph of Arimathea's garden
 - d. Bethany

7. Mary Magdalene had learned the value of
 - a. Advance planning
 - b. Consistent obedience
 - c. Listening carefully
 - d. Working with others

8. Mary's special attribute was
 - a. An ability to organise
 - b. A willingness to go the extra mile
 - c. Her faithfulness in difficult circumstances
 - d. Her helpfulness to others

9. Mary was able to complete the work before the Sabbath because
 - a. She had a supportive friend
 - b. The disciples came to help
 - c. Most of the work had been done beforehand
 - d. She was efficient

10. The women rested on the Sabbath because
 - a. They were tired
 - b. This was God's commandment
 - c. Their preparation was complete
 - d. It was the law of the land

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

When we come to know the Lord is it important to make a clean break with old habits? Why?

Lesson 10 - MARY MAGDALENE - The Resurrection

EARLY IN THE MORNING John 20:1-15.

Each one of the gospels emphasizes the fact that it was very early in the morning that Mary Magdalene and her companions came to the sepulchre. 'As it began to dawn...' Matt. 28:1; 'Very early in the morning,' Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; 'When it was still dark,' John 20:1. This was an hour which the Lord Himself knew well - 'Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight.' Mark 16:35. As the women made their way to the garden they had no thoughts of resurrection. Their minds were occupied with the problem of removing the large stone at the entrance of the tomb Mark 16:3 and Mary's immediate reaction to the empty sepulchre was close on panic. She ran to the homes of Peter and John with the news, "They have taken away the Lord..." John 20:2. The disciples returned with her to the sepulchre where they did their own investigation and then they returned to their own homes, leaving Mary alone with her grief.

Eventually she looked inside the tomb, but even the sight of the angels seemed not to register. Her mind and heart were completely taken up with the disappearance of the Lord, and her reply to the question of the angels "Why are you weeping?" displayed the extent of her personal devotion,. "Because they have taken away MY Lord and I do not know where they have laid Him." Mary had served the Lord continually since her deliverance from seven demons; He had given new meaning and purpose to her life and now she was deprived of this final ministry of love. Her frustration and disappointment even stopped her from recognising the Lord.

There are times when similar feelings keep us from appreciating the presence of the Lord. Like Mary, we mourn the loss of our careful, prayerful plans, not realising that the Lord has something far better for us. Mary was looking for her crucified Saviour, and there before her stood the living Lord.

THE CALL AND THE RESPONSE John 20:15-16.

God has been described in the psalms as 'a very present help in trouble,' Psalm 46:1 and the writer goes on to say that His help would come 'just at the break of dawn,' v 5. The Son of God always reflects the character of His Father and there in the garden, at the rising of the sun Mark 16:2, Jesus was present to bring help to Mary. The Lord understood perfectly her dilemma and

if tears of distress marred Mary's sight then the Good Shepherd would 'call His own sheep by name... for they know His voice,' John 10:3,4. He spoke her name only once... it was enough.

The voice of the Lord is mentioned many times in the Old Testament. It is powerful and full of majesty; it shakes the wilderness Psalm. 29; for Elijah it was a still, small voice 1 Kings 19:12; and when Adam and Eve heard the voice of God as He walked in the garden it made them afraid because of their sin Gen. 3:8-10. But Mary's sins had been forgiven; the Lord Jesus was her Saviour and for her it was 'he voice of my Beloved.' Song of Sol. 2:8. It was a voice she had often heard - demonstrating power and authority John 7:46; showing tenderness and compassion Luke 7:11-13, speaking to particular people Luke 19:5. And the Lord still speaks to us as individuals - but do we respond to His voice? Mary did.

Since coming to the tomb Mary's emotions had been the dominating factor in her thoughts and behaviour. She had been taken up with grief and despair because of the loss of Christ. Then she heard His voice speak her name and everything changed - 'the voice of the Lord is powerful.' At such an emotional moment we might expect Mary to have responded, "My Saviour," but instead she used the title of respect and authority "Rabboni, my Master." The sound of His voice brought her from the sphere of passing emotions to the sphere of resolution and will - the characteristics of a true servant of the Lord.

MARY'S SPECIAL COMMISSION John 20:16-18.

Mary's last recorded words, "My Master," tell us everything we need to know about her attitude toward the Lord. When the Lord spoke she responded as an obedient, loving servant. Whatever the situation - even the overwhelming joy of the resurrection - the Lord was her Master and His authority and Word ruled in her life.

First He told Mary, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father." In future the relationship of Master and disciple would not depend on the physical presence of the Lord, for the message that Mary was to take to the disciples concerned a new, spiritual relationship, established in heaven. "I ascend to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God."

In Genesis we read of Adam and Eve being sent from a garden, their relationship with God spoiled by the sin of disobedience Gen. 3:23. Mary is sent from a garden too, but with strengthening words of comfort and assurance, "Go and tell My brethren," Matt. 28:10. She had come to the garden prepared to do a final service for her Master, but the Lord Himself had prepared a more important work for His servant to do. John 20:18. He had seen Mary's faithfulness in the 'little' and knew she could be trusted with the 'greater'. The Lord uses those who are ready to serve and often in ways above all that they ask or think. Certainly that was Mary Magdalene's experience and her life is a perfect illustration of Paul's example to Timothy of 'a vessel (equipment) unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work,' 2 Tim. 2:21.

MARY MAGDALENE - The Resurrection

EXAM 10

(Use EXAM FORM A to send in your answers)

Choose the letter of the correct answer.

1. The women went to the tomb
 - a. In the cool of the evening
 - b. Just before noon
 - c. Very early in the morning
 - d. Late at night.
2. They were concerned about
 - a. Whether they had enough ointment and spices
 - b. The stone at the entrance of the tomb
 - c. The attitude of the soldiers
 - d. Whether they would be arrested
3. Mary Magdalene ran to the house of
 - a. John
 - b. Matthew
 - c. Simon Peter
 - d. Thomas
4. The disciples left the tomb and went
 - a. To the home at Bethany
 - b. To the Mount of Olives
 - c. To the temple
 - d. To their own homes
5. The angels asked Mary
 - a. "Why have you come?"
 - b. "Why are you weeping?"
 - c. "Who are you looking for?"
 - d. "What do you want?"
6. Mary's devotion to the Lord was shown by
 - a. Her tears
 - b. Her words
 - c. Her panic
 - d. Her faithfulness
7. Mary thought the Lord was
 - a. Joseph of Arimathea
 - b. A disciple
 - c. The gardener.
 - d. One of the soldiers

8. The voice of the Lord is
 - a. Powerful
 - b. Still and small
 - c. Full of majesty
 - d. All the above

9. The characteristics of a true servant are
 - a. Deep emotions
 - b. Resolution and will
 - c. Physical strength
 - d. Mental ability.

10. The Lord uses those who are
 - a. Mature
 - b. Fit and well
 - c. Academic
 - d. Ready to serve

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Are YOU ready to serve the Lord? Is there any way in which you have felt challenged as you worked through this course?