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The Finding of Jesus in the Temple (and other Marian Mysteries)

**The things which Mary pondered in her heart,
how can we know?
Her relationship with her divine Son,
how can we understand?
How can we overhear the interchange between them?**

**Let us look at the Word of God
and prayerfully seek Our Lady's guidance.**

1. The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

“How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk.2:49). Let us begin by looking at this statement of Jesus to His Mother when she found Him in the temple while He was yet a boy. It seems straightforward enough, and so, how is it Mary and Joseph “did not understand the saying” (2:50)? The question must not be as straightforward as it seems.

To understand this scene, first see that when Mary and Joseph discover Jesus in the temple, He is “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.” And notice that the verse following says that “all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers” (2:46,47). It should intrigue us that He who is asking questions is somehow answering as well. Is the Word of God confused; is there some mistake?

We can better understand how questions may show understanding and be answers in themselves if we recall Jesus’ discussions with these same teachers of the faith during His (adult) public ministry – how often He taught them by asking questions! “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?” (Lk.6:9). “Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?” (Lk. 20:4). “If David thus calls Him Lord, how is He his son?” (Mt.22:45). Countless times the Lord taught His hearers with questions; and He does so now with the teachers. And He does so now with His Mother.

Mary and Joseph have been looking for Jesus; they have been searching the temple area, but He is not about. The anxiety of separation is upon the one who gave Him birth. Then she overhears His voice in the court reserved for the priests and teachers of the Law – a place especially excluded to women and children – and she is driven toward Him.

She likely runs into a guard whose duty it is to prevent those prohibited from entering. She pleads with him to let her see her Son, but he responds, “O woman, what have you to do with me?” (cf. Jn.2:4). Perhaps at this moment she hears Jesus pose this question to the teachers: “What then is this that is written: ‘The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner?’” (Lk.20:17).

In great fear she cries out, “Y’shua!” In shock the teachers look up, and nod to the guard to let her enter. And so she runs to her Son, falls on her knees, begs an explanation... then hears His profound response: “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s House?”

What does He mean by this? What is He trying to tell His dear Mother (and the Mother of us all)? If He is a worthy Son – and none is more worthy than He – He would do His best to settle her heart, to remove her very apparent anxiety. And this He does, with great love.

What is He telling His Mother but that He is with her, always, that He has never left her? She is the Temple in which He dwells! What is He doing here but foretelling the destruction of the temple in which He has been teaching the elders and indicating the new Temple being constructed, the New Jerusalem, His Church, of which Mary is Mother and Model, and in which we all find our home... even as we find Jesus dwelling in us?

And so, the Lord speaks to us all what He whispers so gently to His Mother – It is in you I remain; you are my Father’s House. And so we should never fear but always realize the blessing upon our souls, the Spirit that is within us. “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1Cor.3:16).

But it is not simply this separation from her Son that has caused such fear in the Blessed Mother; it is not just that she has seemed to lose Him upon this earth. What her heart is pondering, and what she becomes terribly aware of in finding Him here among the teachers, is His call to crucifixion. The Cross begins to overshadow her and she now senses the sword Simeon prophesied would pierce her heart even as it pierces that of her beloved Son.

It is the ministry of Jesus that will bring His death, His speaking the truth that will arouse murderous jealousy among the leaders of the people. And though now that anger may be muted by the age of the Child, Our Lady can see it on the horizon... and so she takes Him from the temple, seeking to preserve the life of her Son.

The boy Jesus might have begun His ministry here, at this time, but He is obedient to His Mother and Joseph, and leaves with them. It cannot but be that He remain in His Father’s House, and so He stays with Mary. He continues at her side as she shall be at His side when the time for His ministry comes, when she comes to understand He will never leave her and calls her grown Son to reveal Himself, to do His Father’s will... at the wedding feast of Cana.

2. The Annunciation (and the other Joyful Mysteries)

Before we move forward to consideration of the start of Jesus' public ministry at Cana, let us take a step back to the mysteries preceding the finding in the temple.

We have already spoken of the sword prophesied by Simeon to pierce the heart of Mary even as it pierces the body of her Son. Another related matter to note about the presentation of Jesus in the temple is the two turtledoves offered as sacrifice according to the dictates of the Law. We should see that these two innocent doves represent Jesus and Mary and the sacrifice the Savior makes for our sins, in which His Mother so intimately shares (and in which we are all called to share as well). One sees them being slaughtered even as Simeon declares his prophecy to Mary.

The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is a mystery most profound. All I will say of it is that this dark cave, home to the lowest of animals, becomes the brightest and most pleasant place on earth, transformed as it is by our Savior's presence.

Mary's visitation to Elizabeth offers us much to consider about the role of Our Lady in the salvation of the world, particularly her effect on her Son's precursor, who will go before Christ to prepare His way. She indeed goes before the Baptist, as it were, bringing Jesus to him and serving to awaken him in his mother's womb.

The stirring of John in the womb of Elizabeth at the sound of Mary's voice is a mystery not often considered in all its depth. It is more than that he is happy to be in the presence of God. It is enough to fill Elizabeth with the Holy Spirit and move her to proclaim Mary Mother of the Lord... and Our Lady to answer just as inspired.

What is not realized in pondering this mystery is that Elizabeth has secluded herself for the first five months of her pregnancy, and that it is likely she is still in seclusion when Mary visits. It also seems forgotten that Elizabeth is of advanced years – thus her seclusion, that by such rest she might better protect the child in her womb.

But the most poignant matter overlooked is that John has likely remained dormant all this time, and so when he leaps in his mother's womb it is the first time that he has moved, that he has shown life (like the awakening of the old Law to the presence of the new Way!).

Thus the awesome wonder upon Elizabeth's soul, and thus the expression of such blessed joy. One sees Mary coming to her reclining kinswoman, the curtains drawn... and bringing the light of day into the room.

Now as we come to consideration of the Annunciation, we will look more closely at the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth, for it will shed further light on this essential mystery of the Gospel.

The angel's proclamation that Mary will be the Mother of the Son of the Most High is indeed the key mystery in the history of the salvation of man. I believe there are two particularly important things to point up regarding this sacred event: Mary's vow of perpetual virginity and the source of that vow.

First, that Mary is vowed to perpetual virginity could not be made more apparent than it is in the angel's visit. (Why it is not seen in its unmistakable, simple clarity, I do not understand.) Gabriel declares the favor of God upon Mary and that she will give birth to the Savior. Mary responds, "How can this be, since I have no husband?" (Lk.1:34). Now, at this time Mary is betrothed to Joseph; they are as good as married. In fact, Matthew calls Joseph "her husband" (1:19). Common sense would tell us that if it were announced to any woman about to be married or as good as married that she is going to give birth to a son, her understanding would undoubtedly be that her husband or husband-soon-to-be would be the father of that child. Yes? Then why does Mary question the angel as she does? Why does she not acknowledge Joseph as her husband? The only possible reason for her question is that she does not expect to have relations with Joseph – and so with no man – that she has taken a vow of perpetual virginity. The question makes no sense otherwise. She cannot be saying (as many falsely presuppose): "I don't have a man to father this child," for she clearly has a husband at hand.

I would like next to explore the origin of Mary's vow, considering further her relationship with Elizabeth. One should remember first that what causes Mary to accept the angel's announcement and give her full consent to God's will is Gabriel's statement that Elizabeth is now in her sixth month. Till this moment Mary has been fearful of the angel's presence and uncertain of his word, and of his origin (though his explanation of how this will be has probably begun to sway her).

As an aside, and to further solidify the case for Mary's perpetual virginity, it should be recognized that Mary's doubt is not like that which causes Zechariah to be struck dumb. His is a doubt of the LORD's power to do as He says. Mary does not doubt God's power, and so she is not chastised for her question. She inquires of the angel because what he says seems to go *against* the will of God, against the vow she has so solemnly made. She does not wish to break her vow and can only hesitate at the bidding of any being who seems to invite her to do so.

Then why does she change, why does she immediately give her wholehearted acceptance of the LORD's call, losing all doubt about the angel and his message, at the pronouncement of Elizabeth's being with child? It is not simply because the power of God has been proven to her. (Again, she does not doubt this.) It is because this word *confirms* her vow of virginity – it comes as an answer to her deepest prayer.

I propose, indeed I see in my mind's eye (and it inevitably brings tears) that Mary made her vow in the temple in her youth as a prayer to the LORD to take away her beloved kinswoman's reproach and bless her with a child. In an absolutely Christlike gesture – one which already reveals her union with her Son's selflessness, with His sacrificial love for others – Mary offers her own hopes for motherhood that Elizabeth's hopes might be fulfilled.

I believe that Elizabeth came like Hannah to the temple to beseech YHWH for the blessing of a child. (We note that upon the meeting of these two women and their sons in the womb, it is Hannah's song (cf. 1Sm.2:1-10) Mary echoes at the prompting of the Holy Spirit.) Whether Mary was present in the temple because she lived there from her youth as Tradition holds or because she had come there with all good Jews (including Elizabeth) for the Passover feast or another feast, it matters not. Mary overhears Elizabeth's heartfelt prayer (and her tears), and in response makes her vow and her prayer to God.*

And so when she hears the angel's marvelous words, she is completely overwhelmed with joy that God has answered her prayer, that Elizabeth is so remarkably blessed... and in that joy, and great love, all doubt and fear flee and she says: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the LORD; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk.1:38)! And so she will be both Virgin and Mother. So she is enveloped by the marvelous love and awesome wonder that is God.

3. The Wedding Feast at Cana

After Jesus is taken from among the teachers in the temple by Mary and Joseph, we do not encounter Him again until His Baptism in the Jordan by John, until He is thus prepared for His public ministry. And His public ministry begins at Cana, where He reveals, particularly to His disciples, that the Spirit of God is upon Him, that He is the One promised by the prophets. He does this by changing the water for washing into delectable wine.

It is, of course, at His Mother's request that the Son of God accomplishes this miracle. And this is no mere coincidence: it hearkens back to the finding in the temple. It seemed Jesus might begin His ministry then, but He was obedient to Mary and Joseph, who had no word of His revealing Himself at such a young age. He makes allowance for His Mother's fears and remains particularly subject to our humble condition in the home at Nazareth.

But at Cana Mary sees it is time to let her Child go into the world, to take the first step on a path that will lead invariably to the Cross. She knows what awaits Him but is ready now to accept the Father's will. And so she encourages Jesus to go forward on the narrow path... for we are very much in need of salvation.

I believe the Lord's words to His Mother – "O woman, what have you to do with me?" (Jn.2:4) – are the same as those that were spoken to Mary by the guard who restrained her from entering the restricted area of the temple, where her Son sat among the teachers. Jesus employs them, along with the following statement ("My hour has not yet come" (ibid)), to emphasize to His Mother what she is now calling Him to do. He is not refusing to do as she requests but making sure she is ready for the consequences, consequences she was not prepared to face in the temple in His youth.

There is great poignancy in Jesus' question here, for beyond asking if she is ready to have Him begin His ministry, if she realizes what the consequences will be – that this first step indeed leads to the Cross – He is making apparent to her, and to us all, how much her concerns (and ours) *are* His concerns. Far from denying His assistance to those in need, He is revealing by His question how deeply He cares for all souls, how much He makes our troubles His own... to the point, of course, of dying on the Cross for our sins.

Yes, His Mother's concern affects Him deeply, and therefore He cannot turn from her plea. But here we see as well how Mary takes our concerns upon herself, and then brings them to her Son. We see not only Jesus taking up His Cross, but also His Mother allowing her heart to be pierced – so much does she have to do with Him.

And so, from now to the end of His ministry upon the wooden beams, Mary will remain at her Son's side, joined with Him in His sacrifice. She shall not shy away from walking with Him along the *via dolorosa*; she shall not fear standing beneath His bleeding body or cradling His lifeless corpse. She will remain strong, knowing in her heart the glory to which He leads all who follow in His way.

And to glory she shall be the first to come, following Him closely into the kingdom. She is made Queen of Heaven and earth by the holy offering of her life in union with Jesus' own; filled with the Spirit of God, she is raised to the gates of Paradise, and there enters to shouts of joy from the angels as she takes her place at the King's side.

And we shall join her; we shall come to the eternal gates if in this life we give ourselves in union with her Son as she has done. If we accept the call of the LORD, if we set our hearts on doing His will... if we take upon ourselves the Cross He offers for our salvation and that of the world, we will soon follow Him through the gates of the kingdom.

Have no fear. You are the temple of YHWH and He is with you. The grace upon His Mother, He would share with you; and so, give your "yes" to His call, and be prepared to lay down your life for all.

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*Notes on Mary's vow of perpetual virginity:

Perhaps upon seeing Elizabeth so distraught, Mary prays, almost without thinking – so imperated by charity is she – something like, "LORD, take my own fertility that my sister (mother/kinswoman) might be blessed," then places her arms around Elizabeth and speaks gently into her ear: "The LORD hears your prayer."

We should remember, too, that Mary is immaculately conceived, and so, though she could not say "I am the Immaculate Conception" at this time, in her heart she must have some sense of her call, some inclination to the blessing she will know as the Virgin Mother of the Son of God.

Finally, she may not have been able to reveal her vow to Joseph at their betrothal, having to go on faith, trusting as Abraham that the LORD would somehow make her path clear.