



By Mrs. Ernestine Lutes

Women do not hold a prominent place in Biblical writings. We are thankful for the accounts of a few outstanding examples of noble, unselfish womanhood. I am sure the name of Mary of Nazareth is loved and remembered best of all. There is ample reason for this, though she was almost surely a peasant girl, little known at the time. Both she and her carpenter - fiancee were descended from King David; but it is doubtful if their neighbors took note of the fact, if they were even aware of it.

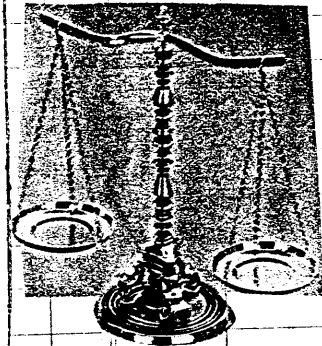
We can be sure that Mary was thoroughly surprised when the angel Gabriel appeared to her, greeting her with the words: "Hail thou that art highly favored; the Lord is with thee." (Luke 1:28). Some versions add: "Blessed art thou among women"; but recent scholars believe this was not part of the original text. Mary was indeed shown a marvelous favor by the Eternal God when He chose her to be the mother of His Son. No other woman had received such a blessing, or ever will again. Yet we should remember what Jesus said when a woman in the crowd exclaimed how very blessed was His mother. His answer was: "Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it." (Luke 11:28) This indicates that Mary was blessed because she did this very thing. She heeded God's word as given by the angel; she believed the promise, though unable to understand how it would be fulfilled; and she was entirely willing to be used of God according to His will. (Luke 1:38)

We do not know how much Mary realized at the time about the reproach and sorrow that would come to her because of the virgin birth of her Son; but I am sure she was willing to endure anything necessary for fulfilling the will of God. That is the reason Mary was "blessed among wo-

men." We are sure she was repeatedly reproached and humiliated when her pregnancy became known, before her marriage to Joseph. Even her beloved deemed it expedient to "put her away", breaking the betrothal quietly to shield her from publicity. (Mt. 1:19) The Law dealt very sternly with unfaithful women. (Num. 5:12-22) God sent an angel to relieve Joseph of all doubts, but the innocent girl suffered keenly.

Even in the hour of child-birth she was turned away from the inn, to find shelter with the animals. Her heart was filled with Joy as she held her precious Baby in her arms, but wise, old Simeon predicted, "A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also." (Luke 2:35) No doubt Mary remembered these words as she stood by the cross of her dying Son, the sword of pain piercing her, even as it did Him. But her Son had said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Mt. 5:8)





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Friendly Fancies

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Watching the inauguration of our new president was a moving experience. The swelling melody of the Marine band and of the great choir from the Morman Temple, as they rendered "The Star Spangled Banner" and "This is My Country", made one "stand tall" with patriotism. The sight of "Old Glory" floating gallantly in the wind brought a silent prayer that this beautiful flag may ever float over our country — "The land of the free and the home of the brave".

The pagentry of it all was fascinating; yet in spite of the routine, we knew that this was all being enacted by real people, with joys, sorrows, weakness, frustrations and fears, similar to the ones experienced by each one of us. It was a day of triumph for some; of bitter disappointment for others.

I was especially pleased to notice the cordial atmosphere between the in-going and out-going presidents and their families. This is the attitude that may save America from many of its ills. Let us all look for the best, not the worst, in our associates, and in our public officials. We need to lay aside partisanship and prejudice, so we can be united for the welfare of all.

I hope to remember the suggestion of President Nixon that we listen to the words, not merely the voices, of others. Perhaps this is the key to unlock the convulsive conditions of riot and strife that

have torn our country in recent years. We have heard the voice of protest; the shouts and jeers; but have we heard the words the protesters are trying to utter? It is my prayer that our new president and his co-workers will be able to hear the words, the specific message of the rebellious ones; and that they will be able to answer with words and actions that are plainly understood; that the adversaries may be "silenced with reason, not with noise". We are in danger of believing that anyone is wrong who differs from us. It may be enlightening to learn their point of view, and to consider it carefully. May the coming years "bring us together".

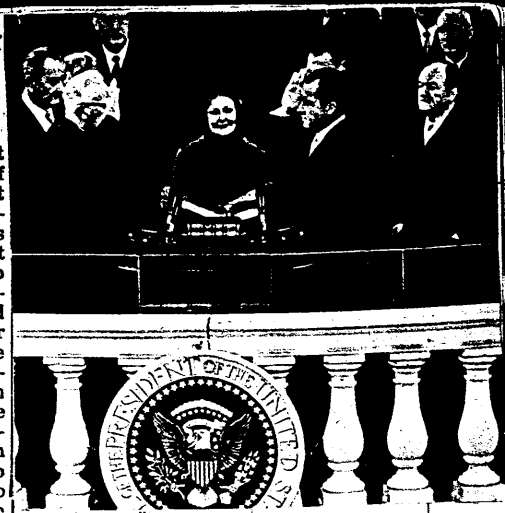
I was thankful for the prayers that were offered at the inauguration, for the new administration; thus reminding them, and us, that our country's destiny is in the hands of a higher Power; and thus calling on this great Power for the help that is so vitally necessary for our country and its leaders, if we are to have peace and freedom. It is the duty of each one of us to uphold our country and our leaders with frequent prayer, and with good citizenship.

"I exhort that prayer and intercession be made for all that are in authority, that we may lead a peaceable life, in godliness and honesty". (I Tim. 2: 1, 2) "Fear God; honor the king". (I Pet. 2: 17)

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We find a prayer in the 69th Psalm that is worthy of careful thought. It is: "Let not them that wait on Thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake; let not those that seek Thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel." (v. 6) The Psalmist realized his own weakness, his ability to say or do the wrong thing; and he cried out for divine help and guidance, that he might not cause shame and confusion to others who would be following him, or looking to him for guidance or example.



put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face." (14: 3) We notice that the idols mentioned are in their hearts, not in a shrine for public observance. Because of this false worship, which they may have fancied was unobserved by others, a stumblingblock was erected before them by their iniquity, and others were being caused to fall. Malachi wrote: "Ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant." (2:8)

The apostle Paul, writing of Christian freedom from rituals, added the warning: "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. When ye sin against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." (I Cor. 8: 9,12) "It is good . . . not to do anything whereby thy brother stumbleth or is offended or made weak." Rom. 14: 21)

Returning to the original verse, we realize that a stumbling, careless Christian often causes deep shame to others who must share the reproach that his behavior brings to his family and his church. Let us say with David, "Let not others be ashamed for my sake, O Lord."

We all need to recognize this danger. A kind heavenly Father forgives our stumbling when we cry to Him in sincere repentance; but what about others we may have led astray? Will they, too, come back to God? Or will they continue on the downward way that leads to spiritual destruction?

The Levitical law forbade putting a stumblingblock (obstacle or hinderance) before the blind. (Lev. 19: 14) It is far more serious to cause a spiritual fall. Isaiah admonished, "Prepare the way: take up the stumblingblock out of the way of the people." (57:14) Ezekiel said, "These men have set up their idols in their hearts, and

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"With all thy getting, get understanding". (Prov. 4.) We are constantly confronted with things we do not understand. With some things it is not serious, but with others, understanding is vital. "The days are evil; therefore be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is". (Eph. 5:17) How can we understand what is the will of our Creator? Sometimes it is difficult, requiring much Bible study and prayer. Jesus said, "When He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth". (John 16:13) Opinions differ as to how this is brought about. Some say the Holy Spirit guides us as we read the Bible, so the message is made plain. Others feel that He speaks to them more directly. Either say, we can be sure of His guidance only if we have close fellowship with Christ, through study, prayer, and service.

Another area where understanding is badly needed is our dealings with other people. So often we misjudge or condemn, simply because we do not understand his motive. A small beggar was taken into a convent and cared for. The pious monks were shocked to find him dancing before the image of the Virgin Mary, not understanding that it was the only way he knew to express his gratitude for the food and shelter that had been given to him. Misunderstanding has ruined many friendships, broken many homes and many hearts. "We would love each other better if we only understood".

We criticise our president, our representatives, and all others in

positions of responsibility; and many times it is because we do not understand their problems. Neither do they understand many of the problems of the common people. So much patience is needed, as well as the need to promote understanding among all classes of people.

Many international crisis arise largely because people and nations do not understand each other. It is hoped that the Peace Corps can do much to correct this situation.

Scripture says: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths". (Prov. 4: 5, 6) "The fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding". (Job 28:28 "We do not cease to pray for you that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will, in spiritual understanding". (Col. 1:9) "I will pray with the spirit and with the derstanding". (Col. 1:9) "I will with the spirit and with the understanding also". (I Cor. 14:15) "Be not children in understanding; be men". (I Cor. 14:20)

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It is difficult to assess the true value of many things. "How precious may be to others that which to me is only an incumbrance." Money has value only for what it can supply. It is useless to one dying of thirst on the desert, or to one shipwrecked on a lonely island. It cannot buy love, health, happiness, or eternal life.

It may be well for us to take inventory at times, and decide what we value most. Our soul's salvation should head the list, along with the salvation of our loved ones. With this asset we will never be spiritually bankrupt, although we may lose all else.

Health and happiness are treasures of great value; as are freedom of worship and fellowship with those we love. "Wisdom (spiritual) cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx or the sapphire." (Job 28:16)

In the depth of his bereavement and illness, three men attempted to "comfort" Job by assuring him that God was punishing him for wrong doing; (which was not the case) He replied bitterly, "Ye are forgers of lies; ye are all physicians of no value." (Job 13:4 Do our friends ever have reason to feel that our friendship and counsel is of no value? Do we try to understand and comfort them, or merely impose our dogmatic opinions upon them? We need to remember the errors of Job's friends.

Jesus told this parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found, and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all he has and buys that field." (Mat. 13:44 RSV) Why? Because this treasure had more value for him than all of his other possessions combined. Do we regard God's kingdom as this value? We should.

Opinions differ as to the meaning of the next parable, of the "pearl of great price." Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant man seeking goodly pearls." Some say Christ is the Merchant, and He sacrificed even His life to purchase the "pearl" (the Church) for Himself. This seems to agree with the words: "Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Cor. 6:20). We know that Christ puts great value on the souls of men and "gave His life a ransom for many". Matt. 20:28) "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." Matt. 18:14). Mathew wrote: "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of Him that was valued." 27:9). How do we value our Lord and Saviour?



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The yearning of our loving heavenly Father for His wayward children is expressed often in the Scriptures. "The Lord hath spoken," I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me." (Isa. 1:2) This plea is echoed in the New Testament: "The world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not; He came unto His own and His own received Him not." (Jn. 1:10,11) Jesus cried out with tears, "Would that even to day you knew the things that make for peace! But they are hid from your eyes." (Luke 19:41, 42 RSV) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Matt. 23:37)

As He staggered up the hill to Calvary, Jesus turned to the weeping women and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children". (Luke 23:28) He still yearned for their welfare and devotion.

Ezekiel expressed both God's yearning and his own crying, "Make a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel? I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore, turn yourselves and live!". (Ezek. 18:31, 32) Jeremiah's yearning is evident

as he said, "Give glory to the Lord your God, before He cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains. If ye will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; mine eyes shall run down with tears because the Lord's flock is carried away captive." (Isa. 16,17)

"I have spread out My hands all, the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way not good, after their own thoughts" (Isa. 65 2) Though this was written about 700 years before the birth of Jesus, it could have been said by Him. None yearned for souls more than He; none showed greater compassion for the needs of men, and none was treated worse. Even on the cross He cried, "Father, forgive them". Some believe He used a quotation from Psalm 22 in His dying cry to appeal to the Jews as their Messiah; also that His words, "I thirst", expressed His yearning for souls, as well as His physical need.

For what do we yearn? Can we say with the Psalmist: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for the living God." (42:1,2) When Bev Shea was offered a large sum of money if he would take up secular singing, his answer was given in the song: "I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold".



"It is the Spirit that quickeneth (gives life) the flesh profiteth nothing". (Jn. 6:63) "Without Me ye can do nothing". (John 15:5)

These Scriptures are not intended to discourage honest ambition, but rather to remind us of Jesus' instructions, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you". (Mt. 6:33) Doing this, our labors will not be multiplied by zero, but by the "unsearchable riches of Christ." (Eph. 3:8) Jesus said, I am come that you might have life, and have it more abundantly." (Jn. 10:10) He added another warning: "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Mt. 16:26) The only answer is—zero.

Paul had more education than average, but he wrote: "I know nothing by myself". He quoted from Isaiah: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent". (I Cor. 1:19; 4:4) "Though I have all knowledge and have not love, I am nothing". (I Cor. 13:2) He had come to value his own importance at zero, but he did not lack confidence. He wrote: "As dying, behold we live! as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things!" (II Cor. 6:16)

In the last book of Scripture we read: "Thou sayest, 'I am rich and have need of nothing,' and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich and clothed". (Rev. 3:17, 18)

Let us pray that our value to the Lord's work will not be expressed by zero.

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"Zero is the digit that signifies nothing. Added or subtracted it leaves the number unchanged, and any number multiplied by zero gives zero". So says the encyclopedia. Well, are we interested in zero — nothing? Let us see what some Scriptures have to say about it. Job compared his friends to ice in the brook after the warm days come: "They go to nothing and perish; now ye are nothing." (Job 6: 19, 21) Is that the value of our friendship to others in need — just zero? Do we melt away and disappear when we are needed?

We are interested in multiplying our assets, but if we multiply by zero, the end is just that — zero. "When he dieth he shall carry nothing away". (Psa. 49:17) "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out". (I Tim. 6:7) Jesus said, "Lay up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal". (Mt. 6: 20) The only way to rise above zero when we come to the end of the way is to: "Set your affections on things above". (Col. 3:1)

