

INTRODUCTION

Christmas is a wonderful season because of the unique music we only sing once a year. Since we only hear Christmas music once a year we may have trouble with some of the lyrics. For instance, a second grade teacher in Atlanta, Georgia asked her students to write out the words of their favorite Christmas songs, and here are some of the results she got:

1. On the first day of Christmas my tulip gave to me.
2. Deck the Halls with Buddy Holly.
3. He's makin' a list, chicken and rice.
4. Olive, the other reindeer.
5. With the jelly toast proclaim.
6. In the meadow we can build a snowman; the pretend that he is sparse and brown.
7. You'll tell Carol, "Be a skunk I require."
8. Noel, Noel. Barney's the king of Israel.

Barney isn't the king of Israel, Jesus is. And that's what this lesson is about.

There have been many wonderful songs written about the birth of Jesus. For instance one of my favorites is a line from "Oh, Holy Night" that says: "Long lay the world in sin and error pining; till he appeared and the soul felt its worth. A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn." (words by Adolphe Adam)

But for the past few years, I've had new favorite: "Mary, Did You Know?" The words were written by Mark Lowery, who is a Christian singer and comedian. In 1984 he wrote the words as part of a Christmas program for his home church in Nashville. The words were used as narration spoken between the songs. "I tried to picture Mary holding the baby Jesus on the first Christmas morning and wondered what she was thinking about that child," he says. "She knew he was special—the Virgin Birth was her first clue—but could she ever imagine all the things that he would do while he was here?" Long after the musical the power of those questions lingered with Lowery. In 1990 he shared them with harmonica virtuoso Buddy Greene who put them to music, and since that time, the song has blessed millions of people.

Today's message is intended to answer some of the questions Mark Lowery asked Mary, thus the reason for the title, "Mary, Now We Know." Let's read the section of scripture where the angel Gabriel came to announce Jesus birth to young Mary. As with most people who see and angel, Mary was terrified. Let's begin reading in Luke 1:30:

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, “the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.”

Certainly Mary was shocked and amazed to receive that news from Gabriel. I’m sure she had a lot of questions, but she placed her trust in God, with whom nothing is impossible. Two thousand years later we have a lot more answers about Jesus. So let’s examine six of the profound questions that might have been in the mind of Mary.

One of the questions in the song asks: “Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?”

1. NOW WE KNOW: JESUS EXISTED BEFORE BETHLEHEM

Each of us has a birthday we celebrate. The Bible doesn’t teach that we had any prior existence before our birth, except in the mind and heart of God. Although we celebrate the birthday of Jesus at Christmastime, He didn’t come into existence when He was born in Bethlehem. In John 17 Jesus prayed, “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” (John 17:5) Before Bethlehem, Jesus had walked where angels trod.

If I asked you where you were and what you were doing at this time yesterday, you could give me an honest answer. But if I asked you tell me where you were and what you were doing 1,000 years ago, your only honest answer would be, “I don’t know.”

But Jesus claimed many times that He existed long before He became flesh. In John 8, the religious leaders were bragging about being children of Abraham and Jesus said, “Abraham saw my day and was glad.” The Jewish leaders were dumbfounded. They said, “You aren’t even 50 years old and you claim that Abraham knew you?” Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” Mary, know we know that your little baby walked where angels trod.

To me some of the most powerful lyrics in the song ask the question: “And when you kiss your little baby, you’ve kissed the face of God. Mary did you know?” “Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?”

2. NOW WE KNOW: JESUS IS GOD IN PERSON

To me idea of kissing the face of God is an amazing image. The only way for God to have a face is for Him to have flesh. The Bible says God is a Spirit, and the Old Testament taught that God is invisible. But the Bible says about Jesus, “He is the image of the invisible God.” (Colossians 1:15) If you want to know what my wife is like, I could show you a picture, an image, and you’d have a good idea. Jesus came to show us what God looks like.

Outside your house on a telephone/power pole you may see a cylinder shaped like a garbage can with antennas. It's called a transformer. It takes the high voltage power coming from the substation and reduces it to a level to operate the appliances in your house. If that transformer wasn't there, your house couldn't take the power surge. That's why they sometimes trip and you lose power—they are overloaded so your house doesn't get the power surge.

That's similar to why Jesus came in the flesh—He's like a Divine Transformer. The Old Testament taught that if any person ever looked at God, they would die. God's brilliance and glory is so great that it would be like looking into the sun from a distance of thirty feet: You wouldn't survive it. But Jesus came veiled in human flesh so we could relate to Him. There's a line from "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" that contains powerful theology: "Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see; Hail the Incarnate Deity!" (Words by Charles Wesley)

"Incarnate" means to "put on flesh." When I was in high school I had the opportunity to be in a group of athletes introduced to legendary football coach, Bear Bryant. After that, whenever his name came up among my friends, I said, "I've seen him *in person*." If they said, "No you haven't!" I said, "I did, too! Bear Bryant - in the flesh!" Jesus was God in person—in the flesh! God is the Creator, and the song asks if Mary knew Jesus was "Lord of all creation." The Bible teaches there is only ONE God, and He has expressed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a tri-unity. Jesus was in existence with God at Creation. That's why God said, "Let US make man in OUR own image." The Bible says, "For by him all things were created;... all things were created by him and for him." (Colossians 1:16)

Mary, now we know. You were kissing the face of God. Jesus *is* Lord of all creation.

The song also asks: "Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new? This child that you've delivered will soon deliver you."

3. NOW WE KNOW: JESUS CAME TO GIVE NEW LIFE

It was probably difficult for Mary to believe her baby boy would deliver her and make her a new person. The birth of Jesus certainly changed Mary's life. Without the birth of Jesus she would have probably lived and died an obscure Jewish woman. But because of Him, we admire Mary as the one who found favor in God's eyes and as one who is greatly esteemed above all women. Her baby changed her life as well as the life of millions. Without Jesus, Mary would be nothing. The same can be said for each of us. The Bible says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (II Corinthians 5:17)

There's something really exciting about the word "new." Everybody loves to get something new. Marketing experts have long known the two most powerful words in advertising are "new" and "improved." One reason there's such anticipation during the Christmas season is that people get new things—new toys, new clothes, new bills. The same folks singing "Jingle Bells" in December will be singing "Juggle Bills" in January. But much better than a new pair of shoes, or a new car, or a new house is to receive a new heart, and Jesus is the source of a new heart.

Many of the questions in the song address the same subject. They include:

“Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?”

“Mary did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?”

“Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm the storm with his hand?”

“The blind will see; the deaf will hear; the dead will live again. The lame will leap; the dumb will speak the praises of the Lamb!

4. NOW WE KNOW: JESUS IS STILL PERFORMING MIRACLES

The Bible records that Jesus performed many miracles including walking on water, healing the sick, and even raising the dead. Even the enemies of Jesus admitted he performed miracles; they just attributed them to Satan. In the four gospel accounts, we read about 37 miracles Jesus performed. The first was turning water into wine at a wedding feast in Canaan and the last one was the miraculous catch of fish at the Sea of Galilee after His Resurrection.

But these are only the miracles we can read about. There were many other miracles not recorded. The Bible confirms: “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30-31)

A miracle is a supernatural event that overrides force of nature. Throughout history, there have been stories about beings who had supernatural powers, like Hercules or Ulysses. But Jesus is the only miracle worker whose identity is historically verifiable. So don't confuse the story of Jesus with some of the legends of history.

One of best movies this season is “The Incredibles.” It's a computer generated movie about a family of superheroes, including a boy named Dash who is so fast he can run on top of water. It's great entertainment, but, of course, it's fantasy.

People who don't know the Lord scoff at the idea that Jesus actually walked on water. But if He is the Creator as He claimed to be, then a miracle is a simple task for Jesus. You don't have to sacrifice your intellectual integrity to believe Jesus walked on water, healed the sick, or raised the dead.

Faith in Jesus Christ is not rational or reasonable, but neither is it irrational or unreasonable. It is supra-rational and supra-reasonable. In other words, it transcends our logic.

There's no way you can go back in history and conduct a scientific experiment to *prove* Jesus performed miracles. All we have are the eye witness accounts of those who were there. But the best way to know Jesus performed miracles then is to understand Jesus is still performing miracles today. I've seen Him change a worthless wife-beater into a respectable husband and father. I've seen Him change an alcoholic into a sober person. I've seen Him change a drug addict into a productive citizen.

Iris Ballew, who has spoken at our church, was once a prostitute in Houston, Texas. One evening somebody from a local church cared enough to tell her how Jesus could change her life. She said

that she got on her knees right there and gave her heart to Jesus. She said, "I knelt down a tramp and stood up a lady." Jesus is *still* performing miracles today.

Another question in the song is: "Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?"

5. NOW WE KNOW: JESUS WILL RULE IN A FUTURE KINGDOM

Of the promises Gabriel gave to Mary, all of them have come true except one. She did become pregnant, and she did bear a son, and she called Him Jesus. He was great and He was called the Son of the Most High. But there was one part of Gabriel's promise that has yet to be fulfilled.

Mary must have been surprised when Gabriel said, "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." World rulers have come and gone and kingdoms have risen and fallen, but the Bible predicts that when the literal reign of Jesus begins it will be a kingdom that will never end.

The prophet Isaiah foretold, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders...Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever." (Isaiah 9:6-7)

I love all the Christmas songs (except Grandma got run over by a reindeer). But some of them contain theology that is a little suspect. For instance, "Away in a Manger" is beautiful, but to think cattle were mooing, and "little Lord Jesus no crying He makes." I doubt that.

I prefer the Christmas hymns that serve up man-sized portions of good theology, like "Joy to the World" written by Isaac Watts (1674-1748). He based the lyrics on these verses. He wrote: "He rules the world with truth and grace; and makes the nations prove; the glories of His righteousness, and wonders of His love."

But wait, is that really happening now? Is Jesus ruling the world now? Is the government upon His shoulders? Look again. When was the last time you saw the general assembly of the United Nations get on their knees and say, "Jesus, you are the ruler of the world, what would You have us do?" Don't hold your breath. You won't even hear them saying that in Washington or Austin, or down at the Smith County Courthouse.

This is a prediction that will be fulfilled after Jesus returns to earth. He will set up His earthly kingdom in Jerusalem, and it will be a perfect time of peace and justice. This is the time when men will beat their swords into ploughshares and the lion will lie down with the lamb. How do we know it's going to happen? Because Jesus said it would, and He has never lied!

The final question we'll consider in the song is:

"Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb? This sleeping child you're holding Is the Great I Am."

6. NOW WE KNOW: JESUS CAN TAKE AWAY SIN

The Great I Am is God's name. At the burning bush Moses asked God to identify Himself, and God said, "My name is 'I Am.'" Jesus used that designation many times to identify Himself. He said, "I am the light;" "I am the Bread of Life;" "I am the Living Water;" "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Jesus also claimed to be the Lamb of God.

Each year a perfect lamb, without spot or blemish, was sacrificed for the forgiveness of the sins of the nation of Israel. Then the High Priest would take another lamb, a male ram, and lay his hands on the head of the lamb. He was symbolically transferring the guilt of the sinners onto this animal. Then a priest would lead the lamb into the wilderness. It was a picture of the lamb taking away their sins.

At the beginning of His earthly ministry, John the Baptizer was doing his work near the Jordan River when Jesus approached him. The Bible says, "John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29)

The story of Christmas is the story of God coming to earth and taking on human flesh. It begins with the lovely chapter of a baby born in Bethlehem. People love babies because they're so innocent and pure. Whenever you see a baby you say, "Oooh."

But Jesus didn't take on human flesh so He could just be an adorable baby. He took on human flesh to do the one thing God was incapable of doing—God needed a body in order to die. Jesus was the Lamb of God who was slain before the foundation of the world.

We are correct in saying that on that first Christmas morning, Mary had a little lamb. He was the Lamb of God. There is a poem that says:

Mary had a little Lamb
He was born on Christmas day.
She laid him in a manger bed
To sleep upon the hay.

Angels filled the night-time sky
And they began to sing.
Shepherds heard them all proclaim
The birthday of a King.

Wise men saw a blazing star
Up in the sky that night.
They followed it until they found
The King of love and light.

Mary had a little Lamb,
But He wasn't hers, you know,

He was the very Son of God,
The One who loves us so.

The Father of this little Lamb
Loved the world so much
That He sent his only Son to earth
So we could feel His touch.

He came to give us joy and peace
And take away our sin.
So when He knocks on your heart's door
Be sure to let Him in.

Why do I love this precious Lamb?
What can the reason be?
The answer is quite plain to see
It's because He first loved me!

CONCLUSION

The song, "Mary, did you know?" is full of questions. Maybe Mary knew, or came to know the answers to these questions herself. But you can know the answers. They are found in the Bible and in the changed lives of the millions who have placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

One of the nicest things about our partnership with our adopted city in China is that we have been able to bring students over each summer to study for a few weeks at either Tyler Junior College or UT Tyler. The members of our church are so kind to open their homes and hearts to these students. They learn about the love of God through worshiping here, and they experience it by your generosity and kindness.

When we were in China last week, one of them who was here last summer gave me a Christmas card. The card said, "How can I ever repay you and the wonderful people of Tyler? For you have given me the greatest Christmas gift of all—you have given me Jesus." That's the reason for the season, to tell the world that Jesus can answer the big questions they face in this life and in the life to come. The most important question you'll ever answer is: Have you turned from your sins and placed your total trust in Jesus?

OUTLINE

Now we know:

1. Jesus existed before Bethlehem

Jesus said, "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." *John 17:5*

2. Jesus is God in person

"He is the image of the invisible God." *Colossians 1:15*

"For by him all things were created...all things were created by him and for him." *Colossians 1:16*

3. Jesus came to give new life

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" *II Corinthians 5:17*

4. Jesus is still performing miracles

"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." *John 20:30-31*

5. Jesus will rule in a future kingdom

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders...Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever." *Isaiah 9:6-7*

6. Jesus can take away sin

"John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" *John 1:29*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes