

## **Mother’s Day Prayer<sup>1</sup>**

For our mothers, who have given us life and love,  
that we may show them reverence and love,  
we pray to the Lord...

For mothers who have lost a child through death,  
that their faith may give them hope,  
and their family and friends support and console them,  
we pray to the Lord...

For women, though without children of their own,  
who like mothers have nurtured and cared for us,  
we pray to the Lord...

For parents, who have been unable to be a source of strength,  
who have not responded to their children  
and have not sustained their families,  
we pray to the Lord...

Loving God, as a mother gives life and nourishment to her children, so you watch over your children on earth. Bless our mothers and all women, that they may be strengthened as Christian women. Let the example of their faith and love shine for all to see. Grant that we, sons and daughters, family and friends, may honor them always with a spirit of profound respect. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *BOW, 438 (modified)*

**Message: A Mother's Life****Happy Mother's Day**

The church has an interesting relationship with Mother's Day. Without a doubt, we love, honor and respect our mothers and fathers. And we have a special Sunday service in our United Methodist Book of Worship. Mother's Day reached national standing in the Methodist church in 1912. The parallels with the old English Mothering Sunday are interesting, as it which focuses on returning home and honoring your mother. It also parallels the Mother's Day for Peace, introduced in 1872 by Julia Ward Howe in Boston, MA, as a day dedicated to peace.

Many of the special services are civic holidays, which give the church pause. Rather than focusing on the wide variety of things for which we're grateful in the world, we prefer to focus on God, the source of all good things, during worship. So, for example, the revised common lectionary for Year A offers lessons from Acts 16 – Paul and Silas miraculous' release from prison, or John 17 – Jesus' prayers for his disciples. Both are good passages and meaningful. My initial inclination was to preach from them.

**I stopped and thought: we're working on revitalizing our church.**

More specifically, we've been praying for God to show us ways to bless others. What better place to start than by honoring and blessing our mothers, because we all had one. More fundamentally, we honor and bless all women for who and what they are: our loved ones and God's children. Exodus 20:12, the ten commandments narrative, tells us how important it is. The first thing that follows the retelling of God making creation in six days, resting on the seventh and consecrating it as the sabbath, is this: "*Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*"

**Honoring our mothers is important.** It's the first thing we're to do after praising and honoring God. I call your attention, though, to the second part of that commandment. It tells us about the benefits of honoring our parents: long life with God's blessings! That's an interesting aspect, isn't it? There are implications beyond the obvious aspects of child care while we're growing up.

**What are those implications?**

Context isn’t much help. Exodus 20:13 says, “*You shall not murder.*”

**Where do we look in Scripture for help?** Proverbs 31 is a familiar passage people turn to for guidance. The verses are an oracle taught to an ancient king of Israel by his mother. The problem is that they give a lesson on what it means to be a godly, capable wife. While marriage and motherhood are a wonderful combination, Proverbs 31 is more about the character of a woman and less about the benefits of honoring our mothers.

**The Spirit put one person in my mind as I reflected.** I raise her up to you for consideration: Mary, the mother of Jesus. If you’re like me, that’s an “ah, ha” moment. So let’s spend a few minutes looking at what the Bible tells us about Mary, her relationships and the benefits that come from them.

**The first relationship Mary had was with God.** Luke 1:26-37 tells us about Mary’s encounter with the angel Gabriel. Mary was raised in a Jewish family and worshipped God. We know that by the rites and rituals she and Joseph did and the words she spoke. Mary’s faith was simple and strong. When Gabriel came to her, she didn’t faint or run away. She willingly agreed to be the mother of the Messiah, the Son of God, even though she was a virgin and engaged to be married. She said, “*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*” The first lesson we learn from Mary is to have faith and say “yes” when God calls.

**The second relationship Mary had was with Joseph, her husband.** When Joseph found out Mary was pregnant, he was certainly shocked. After all, she was a virgin, it was a small town and the engagement period was a year long. We know he cared for Mary from Matthew 1:18-25. Otherwise, she would have been publically shamed or even stoned. An angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph and he willingly married her. Joseph didn’t force himself on Mary. Instead, they waited until after Jesus was born to consummate the marriage. Mary and Joseph must have loved each other because they had a houseful of children. Mary trusted Joseph. She went with him to Bethlehem even though she

was nine months’ pregnant. Later, she went with him to Egypt because of a dream. They shared a faith in God and did all the right things for their children. The second lesson we learn from Mary is, if you marry, find a spouse who loves you and who willingly says “yes” to God.

**The third relationship Mary had was with her family and friends.**

Mary was close to her cousin Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptizer. We know this because she visited Elizabeth and spent time with her during her pregnancy. Elizabeth was an older mother with a high risk pregnancy, so this shows compassion and care. There was a spiritual bond as well, as John kicked in Elizabeth’s womb when Jesus, inside Mary’s womb, came near. Elizabeth’s husband, Zechariah, was a priest in the temple, so the faith connection continued, even though a reminder was needed in his case. Later, Mary was accompanied by others. The apostle John cared for her. The third lesson we learn from Mary is to love your family and to encourage them to say “yes” to God.

**The fourth relationship Mary had was with her children.** Jesus and his brothers and sisters were raised well by Mary and Joseph. Their parents made sure they were circumcised and sacrifices were made for them in the temple (Luke 2:22-24). This is the equivalent of infant baptism today. Later, they visited the temple so Jesus could learn from the teachers (Luke 2:41:51). The Bible tells us Jesus “*grew, became strong, filled ... and increased in wisdom and stature, and in divine and human favor*” (Luke 2:40,52). Later, at the wedding of Cana (John 2:1-11), Mary went to Jesus and asked him to help. She knew her son and told the servants to follow his instructions. The result was Jesus’ first public miracle. Mary knew her children well, raised them to have faith and trusted them. That’s a great lesson for us all.

**Everyone benefitted from their relationship with Mary.** God’s Son was born, human and divine, through Mary’s willingness to place her whole being in God’s hands. Joseph enjoyed a long, fulfilling marriage with Mary and they had a houseful of children together. Mary’s family and friends were loved and supported, in good times and bad, with all she had to give. Mary’s children were raised well. They were seen as wise and favored by the people in their community. Mary’s children

were raised to believe in God and have faith. James became the head of the church in Jerusalem, following Jesus as a disciple.

**I believe that’s the intent of Exodus 20:12.** When women and men have faith in God, the rest of their lives are ordered and given meaning. It doesn’t mean that life won’t be challenging, with great loss, sadness and perhaps suffering. A long life without faith sounds empty to me. A long life filled with faith, love, laughter and hope sounds like a glimpse of heaven for those of us living in the shadows of darkness on earth.

**God’s promised benefits take on special meaning in Mary’s case.** Not only did Mary benefit, but we all benefit from the honor and love God gave her. The love God gave to her is love we all receive. Mary had a challenging life. From traveling on the back of a donkey in the cold when she was nine months’ pregnant, to fleeing to Egypt to escape Herod’s assassins as a refugee, to raising an amazing, and certainly precocious child, having a fulfilling life with Joseph and her children, to seeing her oldest child become something more than she could understand only to wait at the foot of a Roman cross as he breathed his last. This would crush many people, but not a woman who put her faith and hope in God’s promise. That’s what Mary did and we all benefit. That’s because her son didn’t just die on the top of a hill, crucified by soldiers. Jesus overcame death and the grave to rise again so we all can be free and receive the benefits of God’s promise: eternal life in heaven. All we have to do is believe and live.

**There’s an important aspect of Mary and her faith we don’t want to miss.** Even though God was guiding her every step of the way, she was often confused and uncertain. Luke 1:29 tells us Mary was perplexed and confused by the angel Gabriel and his words. Luke 2:19 tells us Mary heard the words of the angel from the shepherds and she treasured and pondered them in her heart. Simeon and Anna amazed her when she and Joseph took Jesus to the temple to be purified on the eighth day (Luke 2:33-34). The appearance of foreign magi bearing expensive gifts (Matthew 2:1-12) surprised her, as did the night Joseph packed the family and moved several hundred miles away to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15). After confronting twelve year old Jesus who decided to stay behind

without telling anyone, Mary was anxious but astounded to find him debating with the teachers in the temple (Luke 2:41-51). She didn’t understand him, but he was obedient and she treasured her experience in her heart. No matter whether Mary was confused, perplexed, surprised, feeling out of control, anxious or astonished and amazed, Mary was true to her faith, her husband, her family and her children. God was always there, during good times and during the times when Mary was afraid she was losing everything she held dear.

**Today, we lift up Mary as an example** of what it means to live life as a godly person of faith, as the mother of Jesus, our Savior, the very Son of God. She is worthy of our respect and honor, as are all godly mothers and Christian women. We learn a lot about faith in difficult times from Mary. Mary is one example of a woman of faith and a great one, but she isn’t the only one. I encourage each one of us to spend time reflecting on women of the Bible. Their lives can teach us much about honor, respect and what it means to live a life wholly devoted to God.

**Do that and you too will know the promise of Exodus 20:12; the benefits of long life in the kingdom of God, filled with hope, love and faith.**

Let us pray:

*Lord, thank you for reminding us that faith, hope and love aren’t superhuman qualities. Thank you for the lessons we learn from Mary, the mother of Jesus. She struggled with joys and concerns of life as we do today. Help us to willingly hear your loving call and to respond with our whole being, trusting in your love and grace. We long for your love and for long days with you in heaven. We commit ourselves to you in faith and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Exodus 20:11-12 (NRSV)**

For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

**John 19:25b-27 (NRSV)**

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.