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THE CHARACTER AND KNOWLEDGE OF MARY, THE MOTHER OF CHRIST

A. Keith Thompson

Abstract: *The Virgin Mary is arguably the archetype of the virtuous woman and even the divine feminine on earth, but we know very little about her. She is remembered in Christianity in a variety of ways including with cathedrals built in her honor. Though many seek her intercession when they pray, that does not seem to accord with Luke's account of her self-effacing and private character. This article considers what Latter-day Saints know about Mary from the scriptures, distinct from others of Christian faith who seek to honor her in different ways. That discussion also includes surmise as to what she may have learned from the wise men on their visit of homage shortly after the nativity and what she may have passed on to John in accordance with the two-way charge Jesus gave to both of them from the cross recorded in John 19. There is also consideration of the commonality of the teachings of her two most famous sons.*

Because I believe God's choice of Mary as the mother of Christ marks her as His preeminent example of the virtuous feminine, I have always wanted to know more about her. In this essay, I therefore consider what we do know about the character and knowledge of Mary, though that is closely protected by what Luke reports as her consistent choice to keep what she knew in her own heart (Luke 2:19, 52). In part one, that consideration will include a brief discussion of her foreordination to be the mother of the Son of God and the limited discussion of that possibility in the teaching of non-Latter-day Saint Christian scholars and theologians. Unlike her most famous son, I observe that she does not seem to have been an indefatigable conversationalist.¹ Indeed, she appears to have gained most

1. S. Kent Brown, *The Testimony of Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 27–28, 299, 383–84.

of her knowledge through personal revelation following unheralded study and reflection,² and it is clear she believed in constant prayer (Acts 1:14).

In part two, I discuss what we know of Mary from the Gospels and particularly the infancy narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. That discussion includes consideration of the scholarship of non-Latter-day Saint scholars who generally do not believe that prophets can foretell events beyond their own time even though Matthew and Luke clearly believed otherwise. I also introduce two speculative ideas in the spirit of the “Musings on the Birth of the Savior Jesus Christ” by Kristine Wardle Frederickson.³ First, I suggest there was a lot of unrecorded conversation between the wise men, who came a great distance, and Mary and Joseph, Christ’s parents. I ponder what they might have discussed and the material that those conversations would have given Mary to reflect upon throughout her life. Secondly, I suggest that Christ’s direction from the cross that Mary regard John as her son and that John regard Mary as His mother, may have deeper significance than many have realized (John 19:26, 27). These were unlikely instructions concerning aged care since, except in Roman Catholic tradition,⁴ Mary had other competent sons and also because she was unlikely to have been more than 50 years of age when Jesus died.⁵ Jesus may have been asking

2. Compare with Jesus’s own learning, which may largely have come from personal revelation (Matthew 3:25, JST).

3. Kristine Wardle Frederickson, “Musings on the Birth of the Savior Jesus Christ,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 34 (2020): 179–94, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/musings-on-the-birth-of-the-savior-jesus-christ/>.

4. See, for example, Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), who observes the Roman Catholic belief that Mary was a virgin all her life both because of her immaculate conception and because she did not ever have sexual relations with her husband Joseph (pps. 64, 132, 258, 303–6, 314, 361, 398, 518, 530, 570, 605–7, 701).

5. Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3. Note that Mary was likely between 12 and 14 years of age when Jesus was born. Hayyim Schauss (“Ancient Jewish Marriage,” My Jewish Learning (website), last accessed January 30, 2020, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ancient-jewish-marriage/>) says only that “[i]n biblical times, people were married in early youth.” Charles Pope says “[y]oung women were married almost as soon as they were physically ready approximately aged 13” (“Marriage and Family at the time of Jesus,” *Community in Mission, Creating a Culture of Encounter* (blog), March 26, 2017, <http://blog.adw.org/2017/03/marriage-family-time-jesus/>). If Mary was between 12 and 14 years of age when Jesus was born, she would likely have been in her mid to late forties when Christ died. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, says that Mary’s betrothal would “usually [have been] entered into when the girl was between twelve and thirteen years” of age and that “would constitute a legally

His mother to complete John's spiritual education so that he could complete his foreordained future mission, including the book of Revelation, which includes his symbolic record of the stellar events that may have surrounded Jesus's birth as the Messiah.⁶ If that is so, then John as the second son of thunder was being instructed to pay patient and humble attention to the woman God the Father foreordained to be the mother of His Only Begotten Son (Mark 3:17). Most of the consequences of these speculations may be appreciated by all believing Christians since they suggest that John's Gospel and his subsequent letters and book of Revelation include the influence of Mary's instruction and insight. In part three, I further review how the wise men may have known of the birth of Christ, and I use the astronomical insights of Ernest Martin and Frederick Larson and the critique of Raymond Brown as the foundation for that discussion.

Then, in part four, I discuss the resonances between the teachings of Jesus, particularly in the Sermons on the Mount and Plain and those of His half-brother James in the Epistle of James. In that analysis, I engage some of the work of James D. Tabor even though I disagree with his reason for the analysis.⁷

My conclusion is that Mary's character and her knowledge have resonated through time because she planted seeds of example and instilled faithful confidence by her trademark humility and her unwavering testimony (Luke 1:38, 46–55). Male and female, we would

ratified marriage in our terms" (123). See also Brown's doubt of Mary's perpetual virginity since "this approach flourished at a time when Christian women were entering ascetic or monastic orders to live a celibate life," and it is unlikely that "a twelve-year-old [Palestinian Jewish] girl would have entered marriage with the intention to preserve virginity and thus not to have children" (304). Brown accepts that it is more correct to refer to Jesus's siblings as "stepbrothers" and sisters than as "half-brothers" and sisters if one accepts that Mary was not their biological mother (605–7). Brown also observes that Luke does not appear to have been aware of the tradition that Jesus was an only child (398).

6. Part of the nature of John's mission after the crucifixion was foreseen by Nephi more than 600 years beforehand. See 1 Nephi 14:19–28. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, notes the idea that "[t]he passage in Rev 12:1–5 has been advanced as another support for the Matthean narrative of Herod's attempt against Jesus" but without giving a reason, says "it would be hazardous to identify the dragon as a symbol for Herod" (226).

7. James Tabor strives to prove that both Jesus and James were traditional Jews schooled in and tied to the Mosaic Law. His thesis is that the Apostle Paul was the true founder of modern Christianity and the cause of its separation from Judaism (*Paul and Jesus: How the Apostle Transformed Christianity* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013]).

do well to ponder her faith in the face of life's crises, to identify her righteous behavioral patterns, and to emulate them in faith so we can learn and bless others and "our children"⁸ in eternity.

Part One — Was Mary foreordained to be the mother of the Son of God?

There are no direct references to Mary in either the Doctrine and Covenants or the Pearl of Great Price,⁹ but in Nephi's view of his father's vision of the Tree of Life, he said both that the unnamed virgin who would bear the Son of God was "beautiful" (1 Nephi 11:15) and "exceedingly fair and white" (1 Nephi 11:13).¹⁰ Since he saw her only in a vision and apparently did not see her speak or act, he could not otherwise comment on her character and knowledge. But Alma the Younger may have seen more. He learned from undisclosed sources that "the Redeemer" (Alma 7:7) would be born of "a virgin" named "Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers" and that she would be "a precious and chosen vessel, who [would] be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost" (Alma 7:10). Alma's reference to Jerusalem as the land of our forefathers seems to understand Jerusalem as a city-state like Zarahemla, which would have been familiar to his readers,¹¹ though Alma's expression has been explained in other ways by different apologists¹² and criticised by Book

8. Abinadi observed that the seed of Christ would be those who believed on his words (Mosiah 14:10; 15:10). In a similar symbolic way, those who learn from and stand on the shoulders of other teachers on earth are the children of those teachers.

9. Though Mary is not directly mentioned by name or mission in Abraham 3:22, 23, it is safe to assume she was foreordained as one of "the noble and great ones" of whom Abraham was there informed.

10. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, notes views that the idea of Mary's being favored in Luke 1:28 and 30 may have included the idea that she was "graceful, beautiful" and even "charming," but he concludes that "Mary's physical beauty has nothing to do with the" angel Gabriel's greeting and that he was only referring to the privilege accorded her "of conceiving the Son of the Most High" (326).

11. For more detail see Bruce E. Dale and Brian Dale, "Joseph Smith: The World's Greatest Guesser (A Bayesian Statistical Analysis of Positive and Negative Correspondences Between the Book of Mormon and the Maya)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 32 (2019): 100–101, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-smith-the-worlds-greatest-guesser/>. Note also their use of Michael D. Coe and Stephen Houston's work, *The Maya*, 9th ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2015).

12. See, for example, "If Jesus was born in Bethlehem, why does Alma say he would be born at Jerusalem?" *Book of Mormon Central*, February 1, 2018, <https://>

of Mormon skeptics.¹³ Some Christian scholars also consider that Isaiah's reference to a young woman conceiving and giving birth to a child to be named Immanuel is at least a parallel reference to Mary as the mother of Christ (Isaiah 7:14).¹⁴ But Alma understood that a precious virgin named Mary had been chosen to be the mother of the Redeemer of all mankind.¹⁵ Mary's character qualities were thus foreknown to the Father and some seers long before the Redeemer was made flesh and came to live among His people on earth (Alma 7:7).

Raymond Brown has discussed in detail the non-Latter-day Saint Christian scholarship around Christ's preexistence and whether Isaiah's prophecy and sign to King Ahaz in chapter 7 verse 14 that a virgin would conceive and bring forth a child to be named Immanuel, meaning "God with us," indicates early Christian belief that Mary's role as the

bookofmormoncentral.org/qa/if-jesus-was-born-in-bethlehem-why-does-alma-say-he-would-be-born-at-jerusalem.

13. See, for example, Wayne Jackson, "The Birthplace of Jesus: Bethlehem or Jerusalem?" *Christian Courier*, last accessed January 30, 2020, <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/940-birthplace-of-jesus-bethlehem-or-jerusalem-the>; and Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson, "Was Jesus born 'at Jerusalem'?" *Mormon Research Ministry*, last accessed January 30, 2020, <https://www.mrm.org/jerusalem>. Note also Brown's (*Birth of the Messiah*) discussion of the connection of Bethlehem with Jerusalem without the Book of Mormon context (421–23n44).

14. Other interpretations limit Isaiah's reference to the conception of someone known to both King Ahaz of Judah and Isaiah, or to Isaiah's own wife as a sign to King Ahaz that he should trust the Lord rather than an alliance with Syria or Ephraim. See, for example, discussion of Brown's scholarship below and in the text supporting footnotes 16–19.

15. Though Terryl Givens has identified the idea of preexistence in human theology, philosophy, poetry and literature, mainstream Christianity continues to deny it even though it is harder to deny when an author from any of those disciplines accepts the idea that God intended for man to become like Him (as in the doctrine of theosis) (*When Souls Had Wings, Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* [Oxford University Press: 2010]). Origen's theology of preexistence (ix, 58, 91–99) is more troubling where the preexistence of Mary is concerned for a number of reasons. The largest of those reasons is that much of his theology has been treated as heretical in Western Christianity because of its inconsistency with the doctrine of original sin (Givens, *When Souls Had Wings*, 92–95, 125, 127). Secondary reasons include his idea, upheld in Roman Catholic Christianity, that Mary was a virgin for life (see his commentary on Matthew 13:54, 55, "Origen's Commentary on Matthew (Book X)," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 9: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A. D. 325*, ed. Allan Menzies [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994], 424) and that Jesus dwelt in John after the crucifixion so that Mary was John's mother (see his commentary on John 19:26, "Origen's Commentary on John (Book 1)," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 9: 299–300).

mother of the Son of God was foreknown. He suggested that Matthew used Old Testament quotations to help his early Christian readers “prove to the Synagogue that God had foretold the career of Jesus ... down to the least detail” and that all “lay within God’s foreordained plan.”¹⁶ But while Brown acknowledged that Matthew used Isaiah’s prophecy about the conception of a virgin in precisely that way (Matthew 1:22, 23), he was very careful not to disagree with the scholarship that says Hebrew prophets could not foresee the distant future and that the reference to a virgin in Isaiah 7:14 meant nothing more than that a young girl known to King Ahaz in Isaiah’s own time would give birth to a child to be named Immanuel.¹⁷ Brown chose not to engage with scholarly questions about the authorship of Isaiah at all in his book about the infancy narratives. What remains is Brown’s understanding that Matthew saw Isaiah’s prophecy that a virgin would conceive and bring forth a child to be named Immanuel “as scriptural support for both the Davidic and the divine aspects of the Who and the How of Jesus’s identity.”¹⁸ Ironically, Brown did not take similar care to avoid treading on scholarly eggshells when it came to Isaiah’s prophecy “to the House of David,” popularized by George Fredrich Handel in his oratorio *The Messiah*. Here, Brown seemed convinced by the Old Testament exegesis of both Matthew and Luke, which Brown said continued a gospel tradition before they wrote. Brown noted that Matthew and Luke both accepted that Isaiah had seen

the coming birth of a wonderful child who would be the sign of God’s continued presence ... [and who] was to be given governance and to sit upon the throne of David, and to be called, “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6–7)¹⁹

16. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 97–99.

17. Ibid., 143–53. Note that even some Latter-day Saint scholars are attracted by the idea that the Isaiah 7:14 prophecy was not a prophecy of Mary’s forthcoming virgin birth. Joseph Spencer has recently suggested that this prophecy by Isaiah referred to the forthcoming birth of Ahaz’s son named Hezekiah (Joseph M. Spencer, *The Vision of All: Twenty-Five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi’s Record*, [Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016], 209 and 211). Note also Donald Parry’s criticism in “An Approach to Isaiah Studies,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 34 (2020): 250–53, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/an-approach-to-isaiah-studies/>.

18. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 149.

19. Ibid., 161.

In this passage, Brown seems to rejoice in his ability to ignore the Politically Correct shackles of contemporary biblical scholarship and confess with both Matthew and Luke his own witness of the divinity of the Son who would be born to the most famous virgin of all time.²⁰

Whether it is accepted that Mary was one of God's choicest preexistent daughters or not, the authors of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and modern Latter-day Saints accept that her role as the mother of the coming Messiah was known and prophesied in advance of her birth.²¹ It also seems to be accepted by those infancy narrators that the young woman chosen as the mother of the Son of God had to check all the female-virtue boxes accepted in ancient Israel as set out in King Lemuel's famous summary of his mother's words:²²

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.

She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.

She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.

20. Ibid., 160–61.

21. Isaiah 7:14. See also 1 Nephi 11:13–21, 2 Nephi 7:14 and Alma 7:10.

22. Note that although opinions as to what constituted feminine virtue likely changed between the time of King Lemuel in the Old Testament and Mary's time on earth at the beginning of the New Testament, it is doubtful King Lemuel's Old Testament view of feminine virtue would have been frowned upon in Mary's time since observant Jews were such good students of scripture, including the book of Proverbs. Whether Professor Mariotinni is right that Lemuel was the king of Massa, this description of feminine virtue does appear to have been accepted in the 10th century BCE when Solomon is traditionally accepted to have reigned and contributed to the Book of Proverbs (Claude Mariotinni, "Who was King Lemuel?" *Dr Claude Mariottini, Professor of Old Testament* (blog), May 18, 2009, <https://claudemariottini.com/2009/05/18/who-was-king-lemuel/>). Other biblical scholars incline to the view that Lemuel is Solomon himself and that Solomon is the author of the whole book of Proverbs.

She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.

She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night.

She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.

She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.

She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.

Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.

Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.

She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.

Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.

Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.

Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.

Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates. (Proverbs 31:10–31)

Though Mary had not had time to establish herself as an accomplished and industrious woman if she was only 13 or 14 years of age at the time

Jesus was born,²³ God the Father had already seen in her the qualities He wanted in the mother of His Only Begotten Son. To identify those qualities, we have only the brief accounts of the four gospel writers as source material.

Part Two — Mary’s character and knowledge as revealed in the Gospels

Luke provides us with more insight into Mary’s character than the other gospel writers. His first quill strokes in that characterization are the journey to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth and her hymn of praise (known as the *Magnificat*) when Elizabeth recognized her unique role and mission:

My soul doth magnify the Lord,

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.

For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden; for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;

As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. (Luke 1:46–55)

23. For example, see “Mary, a Teenage Bride and Mother”, *Truth or Tradition*, September 12, 2013, <https://www.truthortradition.com/articles/mary-a-teenage-bride-and-mother>; and Gerald N. Lund, *A Celebration of Christmas* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 31. The former source suggests she may have been as young as twelve when betrothed, and the latter estimates 16. See also the sources referred to above at note 7.

Raymond Brown has said that “no serious scholar would argue today that the Magnificat was composed by Mary.”²⁴ “[S]uch finished poetry” as the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus* (Zacharias’s poem of praise recorded in Luke 1:67–79 when his tongue was loosed after he confirmed his son John the Baptist’s name), the *Gloria in Excelsis* (the song of the angels heard by the shepherds in Luke 2:13, 14) and the *Nunc Dimittis* (Simeon’s poem of praise when he met Joseph and Mary and the infant Christ in the temple in Luke 2:28–32) “obviously ... could not have been composed on the spot by ordinary people.”²⁵ They are most likely pre-Gospel Christian canticles or hymns Luke adapted for his narrative to summarize the traditions about these parts of the nativity story passed along to him by his various informants.²⁶ In the case of “Mary’s Magnificat,” the authors were likely the poor and downtrodden Anawim members of the early Christian church who had passed all their worldly possessions to the Twelve for distribution to the poor and who thus understood what it was to be lowly, humble, and hungry but hoped for exaltation at the judgment day.²⁷ All the words of the Magnificat alluded to the great Israelite exodus story and Hannah’s canticle of praise when she learned that God had heard her prayer and that Samuel would be born to her.²⁸ But there is no suggestion in Brown that Zacharias, as a seasoned priest, was incapable of expressing developed prophetic sentiments in his poem of praise because it is Jewish rather than Christian in flavor.²⁹

In part, Brown seems to think Zacharias could have composed a poem, but Mary could not, because he accepts what he calls Luke’s assumption that the Holy Spirit did not begin its prophetic ministry among men until after the day of Pentecost.³⁰ But, with respect, that assumption is unjustified and is Brown’s assumption rather than Luke’s. While Luke certainly crafted his infancy narrative from existing sources as a historian rather than as a personal eyewitness,³¹ he credits the content of these hymns respectively to Mary, Zacharias, the shepherds who heard the angel’s song, and to Simeon himself. And here perhaps Latter-day Saint understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit can make

24. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 340.

25. *Ibid.*, 346.

26. *Ibid.*, 347–52.

27. *Ibid.*, 350–55, 361–65.

28. *Ibid.*, 355–62.

29. *Ibid.*, 377–92.

30. *Ibid.*, 378.

31. See also Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2006), 15.

a contribution to more accurate understanding of the composition of these poems/hymns of praise than is possible if we rely only on the studied insights of scholars. That is because modern revelation has confirmed the ancient insight that perfect praise can come from the mouth of babes,³² the most prominent example having occurred during the Savior's Nephite ministry when "the multitude ... saw and heard ... children ... [and] babes ... open their mouths and utter marvelous things," which were too sacred to be recorded (3 Nephi 26:16). In that context, it is not difficult to accept that Mary could have expressed and remembered such a "refined hymn of praise"³³ under the "special inspiration of the Holy Spirit."³⁴

In the eighth century, the Venerable Bede noted from this poem-become-hymn both Mary's submissiveness to God's will and her recognition that she would be famous through all the generations of time because God had chosen her as the mother of His Son.³⁵ Brown confirms that Mary consented to God's will in these matters, observing that unlike Sarah, whose response was to laugh,³⁶ the spirit of Mary's psalm says that like her

32. Consider, for example, the idea picked up in Matthew 21:16 from Psalm 8:2 and in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where he wrote:

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence. (1 Corinthians 1:27 — 29)
See also Doctrine and Covenants 1:19, 35:13 and 128:18.

33. Lawrence E. Frizzell, "Mary's Magnificat: Sources and Themes," *Marian Studies* 50, (1999): 41, https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol50/iss1/6.

34. Ibid.

35. Paul A. Iacono, "The Magnificat of Mary, A Beautiful Analysis By the Venerable Bede," The Fra Angelico Institute for Sacred Art, December 22, 2012, <https://fraangelicoinstitute.com/2012/12/22/the-magnificat-of-mary-a-beautiful-analysis-by-the-venerable-bede/>.

36. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 319. Note, however, that Sarah's laugh referenced in Genesis 18:12 has been interpreted in a variety of ways. While Brown said it manifested her cynicism, others have observed that God was unhappy in the following text because she thus manifested a lack of faith (Kristine Gift, "Sarah's Laughter as Her Lasting Legacy: An Interpretation of Genesis 18:9–15," *Midwest Journal of Undergraduate Research* 2, [2012], <http://research.monm.edu/mjur/files/2019/02/MJUR-i02-2012-7-Gift.pdf>). But Kristine Gift also notes Tammy Schneider's observation that the words translated as laughter in Genesis 18:12 can also mean excitement and joy (pp. 100–101). The Joseph Smith translation also uses that translation in the case of Abraham's laughter, but Kevin Barney thinks that

Son,³⁷ she always chose the Father's will. Bede also notes Mary's awareness of the fact that God had made her a central player in a covenant history that began with father Abraham.

Others have noted that Mary's references to Hannah and other faithful women in Israel show her sense of what it meant to be a virtuous woman in that tradition.³⁸ Though it is her son as Messiah who would ultimately bring justice and equality to the whole world and who would "crush the serpent's head" (Genesis 3:15), it was Mary's duty as His mother to help Him develop and hone those capacities. Mary's psalm suggests she was fully aware of her responsibilities as a mother to enable this special Son to develop leadership that would displace the proud and feed the hungry in time and eternity. But those duties were not going to involve her in any break with tradition. She would follow as perfectly as she could the examples of righteous mothers in Israel before her.

Most of the remainder of our direct scriptural knowledge of Mary, like this psalm, comes from Luke. Only Luke records the testimony of the shepherds and the circumcision visit to the temple where Anna and Simeon made their prophecies. Mary knew an angel had testified to shepherds that her child was the Christ, the Savior of the world, and that He would eventually bring peace and good will to the earth. Even though those shepherds publicized what the angel had told them, Luke suggests that Mary did not tell anyone what she knew of her son's destiny; she simply let the shepherds' testimony add to what she already knew.

Without the benefit of an understanding of contemporary culture in Israel at the time of Christ, it is forgivable for modern Latter-day Saint readers to conclude that Mary was "hiding her talents"³⁹ and failing in her missionary duty to "open her mouth"⁴⁰ and share her testimony of her son's divine mission and destiny. Though even now personal advocacy of the qualities or calling of a loved one can be unseemly, in Mary's day,

translation does not work and presents it as a case of the Prophet Joseph Smith protecting the Patriarch Abraham from the censure here given Sarah by the angel with his translation (Kevin Barney, "He Rejoiced," *By Common Consent*, March 11, 2018, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2018/03/11/he-rejoiced/>).

37. Matthew 26:42. Compare also the sentiments he expressed in "the Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2) and the preexistent words attributed to him by Moses in the Pearl of Great Price (Moses 4:2).

38. Steven Wedgeworth, "The Meaning of the Magnificat," *Wedgewords* (blog), December 14, 2014, <https://wedgewords.wordpress.com/2014/12/14/the-meaning-of-magnificat/>. See also Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 355–62.

39. Compare Matthew 25:14–30 (24–30); Luke 19:14–27 (22–26).

40. Compare Doctrine and Covenants 60:2, 3.

Jewish women followed the Graeco-Roman norm, which denied any female the right to speak in public unless she were invited to do so by the men in attendance. Such an invitation by the presiding men would signal that the other men present would not be offended by her sharing.⁴¹ Paul's misunderstood first letter to the Corinthians confirms that these cultural practices were followed in the early Christian communities.⁴² So how are we to interpret Mary's interaction with Simeon in the temple, and how was Mary to interact with the wise men when they came with entourage to her home in Bethlehem when her son was a toddler? And how was Mary to share her knowledge and build the faith of other members of the church when their culture did not accommodate our modern Latter-day Saint testimony meeting practice?

Perhaps Mary sensed before Simeon's warning that opposition to her son's work would also bring her great soul pain. Perhaps, the further warning to Joseph of the need to seek sanctuary in Egypt after the visit of the wise men underscored the need for this family to fly under the radar. But whether her silence was a cultural requirement or not, it seems clear, particularly after the flight to Egypt to avoid the reach of King Herod, that Mary was not inclined to seek the limelight either for herself or her son. The testimony of Anna and Simeon in the temple before the flight from Herod affirmed what she already knew about her son's foreordained mission of universal salvation and redemption. He would not only redeem Israel, but He would lighten the Gentile world.

41. See, for example, Armin D. Baum, "Paul's Conflicting Statements on Female Public Speaking (1 Corinthians 11:5) and Silence (1 Corinthians 14:34–35)," *Tyndale Bulletin* 65, no. 2 (2014): 247, <http://www.armin-baum.de/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Pauls-Conflicting-Statements-on-Female-Public-Speaking-and-Silence-Tyndale-Bulletin-65-2014-247-274.pdf>). Compare with a contrary view expressed by Professor Karen L. King at Harvard University's Divinity School. She believes that women were very active in ministry, including administration of the Eucharist during the New Testament era and that our scriptural texts were altered by scribes to suppress accurate accounts of the leadership of Mary Magdalene, among others ("Women in Ancient Christianity: The New Discoveries," *PBS Frontline* [April 1999], <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/first/women.html>). Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes observe that "many of the modern works written on chapters 11–14 [of First Corinthians] are ... far more certain about conditions than they should be. [W]e don't know how often they met, how big their congregations were, the role played by the local leadership, [or] to what extent they understood a hierarchy of authority" (*New Testament Commentary, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017], 514).

42. Baum, "Paul's Conflicting Statements," 259n54.

Luke does not seem to have known the story of the wise men nor of the flight to Egypt, which is odd if one of his eyewitness sources was Mary as Raymond Brown accepts (Luke 1:1–2).⁴³ Thus, if the stories about Simeon and Anna came from Mary, they did not come directly, since she would surely have told him about the wise men and the flight to Egypt rather than have Luke believe the family returned to Nazareth in Galilee immediately after the temple visit within six weeks of the child's birth (Luke 2:21–39). Matthew is thus the only gospel writer who mentions the visit of the Magi. Those ancient seers seem to have come, if not from a Semitic people in Mesopotamia, then from that direction.⁴⁴ However, they did not arrive in Bethlehem until the young child was walking.

There are three reasons we can reasonably infer that the child Jesus was walking when the wise men came to Bethlehem from Matthew's text, but the first two are more significant than the third. The first is the Greek word translated into English as "young child" in both verses 12 and 13 of Matthew's second chapter. The second is Herod's direction that his soldiers should kill all children under two years of age in the "coasts

43. See also Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 238. Brown's acceptance that Mary's testimony was one of Luke's sources requires us to accept either that he never spoke to her personally but rather spoke to others who knew her or that Luke consciously edited "the flight to Egypt" story out of his narrative.

44. "From that direction" here refers to the east, since they saw His star "in the east" and came "from the east to Jerusalem ... to worship him" (Matthew 2:1–2). Ernest Martin suggests from Herodotus "that they [we]re originally one of the six tribes of the Medes, a priestly caste similar to the Levites among the Israelite" (*The Star That Astonished the World*, 2nd ed. [Portland, OR: Ask Publications, 1996], 24). Brown (*Birth of the Messiah*, 167–68) notes Herodotus's view that they were Zoroastrian priests but also notes Mann's view that they were "Babylonian Jews who dabbled in black magic and star worship." Edersheim notes from Philippians and Josephus that they were "Eastern (especially Chaldee) priest-sages" who "practice[d the] magical arts" whose "mysterious and unknown [researches] ... embraced much deep knowledge, though not untinted with superstition" (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, rev. ed. [1886; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993], 203). Those who accept that Isaiah could see beyond the confines of his own time and space have considered that this journey of homage was foreseen by that prophet when he wrote:

And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord. (Isaiah 60:3, 6)

of Bethlehem” in response to the astrological coordinates unwittingly provided by the wise men during their visit to Jerusalem (Matthew 2:16).

The Greek word *paidion* means literally a young child in training and normally refers to a child aged under seven. That Greek word *paidion* stands in contrast to the word *brephos* as used in Luke 2:12 when the text clearly referred to the newborn babe. Some modern translators have been inclined to translate *paidion* into English as “toddler”.⁴⁵

In the 19th century, Edersheim suggested Herod’s wicked logic before ordering the murder of innocent children under the age of two in the vicinity of Bethlehem:

[W]ithout committing himself as to whether the Messiah was already born, or only expected ... [he asked] them the question of His birthplace. This would show him where Jewish expectancy looked for the appearance of his rival, and thus enable him to watch alike that place and the people generally, while it might possibly bring to light the feelings of the leaders of Israel. At the same time he took care diligently to inquire the precise time, when the sidereal appearance had first attracted the attention of the Magi. This would enable him to judge, how far back he would have to make his own inquiries, since the birth of the Pretender might be made to synchronize with the earliest appearance of the sidereal phenomenon. So long as any one lived who was born in Bethlehem between the *earliest* appearance of this “star” and the time of the arrival of the Magi, he was not safe. The subsequent conduct of Herod shows, that the Magi must have told him that their earliest

45. Ray Geide discusses opposing views on his website - “How old was Jesus when the Wise Men Came?” *Ray on the Bible*, last accessed January 30, 2020, <http://breakthroughversion.com/rayonthebible/howoldwasjesus.html>. Gary Amirault is an exponent of the “toddler view,” “The Christ Child and the Wise Men,” *Tentmaker*, December 1998, <https://www.tentmaker.org/articles/ChristChildandWiseMen.html>. Similarly, the “Light the World Nativity” video released in December 2019, depicts the wise men bowing down before an infant child that can walk, see The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “The Christ Child: A Nativity Story, #LightTheWorld,” Gospel Media, 17:56, Nov 23, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/video/2019-09-0050-the-christ-child-a-nativity-story-lighttheworld?lang=eng>.

observation of the sidereal phenomenon had taken place two years before their arrival in Jerusalem.⁴⁶

It is of course possible, contrary to Edersheim's logic, that the child was younger than two and that Herod merely enlarged the infanticide period out of an abundance of jealous caution. But the third point is now also made. The family had moved from the stable or cave they had occupied on the night of the birth and now occupied a house where the wise men found the "young child with Mary His mother" (Matthew 2:11) with Joseph not mentioned at first. This third reason does not prove the age of the child because if the family had decided to stay on in Bethlehem after the birth, it is doubtful they would have stayed in the inhospitable lodgings of the birth night any longer than absolutely necessary. But it is reasonable to infer from Matthew's lack of mention of Joseph at the beginning of the visit, that the Holy Family had stayed on for longer than a passing visit since, otherwise, Joseph would likely have been found with the family when the wise men arrived.

While Joseph may not have been at home when the wise men arrived, given the custom of the day which prevented women talking to strange men, it is likely he returned before the formal visit began and the wise men paid homage and presented their gifts. It is also unlikely the caravan of the wise men arriving in that village would not have been brought quickly to his attention wherever he was if not at home. It seems clear that Joseph knew the details of their visit and departure because

46. Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 205. McConkie notes that

Herod was [not] in a class by himself ... [i]n ordering the slaughter of a host of innocent children ... He was but following the iniquitous path of all autocratic rulers, rulers whose thrones rest on the bones and are bathed in the blood of the slain. Ghenghis Khan, Caesar, Nero, Gadianton, Hitler, Stalin, Kruschev, and thousands of others are guilty of similarly gross crimes and mass murders. (Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965], 1:106).

Martin, *The Star that Astonished*, 6 notes that in the year 63 BCE, the year Augustus Caesar was born, the Roman Senate ordered all boy babies to be killed who were born in that year because prophetic dreams and astrological signs suggested that a 'King of the Romans' was to be born ... [which would have been] anathema to the government of the republic.

Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 204–5 has noted scholarly estimates of how many boys were killed in Herod's slaughter with numbers ranging from 20 to 144,000. Like McConkie, Brown also notes many precedents for "attempts by a wicked ruler to kill the hero whose birth had been foretold" (227n39).

Matthew recorded the warning they received not to return to Herod, which would not have been known if they had already left the family and Bethlehem. Indeed, it seems likely the wise men spent at least one night in Bethlehem, some of them perhaps enjoying the hospitality of the Holy Family. Joseph was clearly alert to Herod's jealous and violent reputation, but that is not the reason the family left, perhaps the very next night. Joseph was a visionary man.⁴⁷ He had been convinced in a dream to take Mary as his wife despite her pregnancy, and now an angel warned him that Herod would seek Jesus's life (Matthew 2:13).⁴⁸ His caution and care also explain why the family left Bethlehem by night, perhaps the very next night, without leaving a forwarding address (Matthew 2:13, 14).

Part Three — What did the wise men discuss with the Holy Family?

The Bethlehem visit of the wise men invites further reflection upon what Mary knew and understood about the conception, fatherhood, and birth of her son. For if the wise men did spend a night in Bethlehem, how much of their time was spent with Joseph and Mary, and what did they talk about? Joseph and Mary would surely have asked why they came and what signs they saw in the night sky, and the wise men likely told Joseph and Mary all they had told Herod and his priests and more. And if Joseph or Mary even indirectly informed Matthew about this visit of the wise men, and if Mary and John later spent significant time in one another's company, as Christ directed them (John 19:26,27),⁴⁹ is it also possible that Mary told John of those signs in the night sky which had brought the wise men to Jerusalem and Bethlehem?

From Matthew chapter 2, we know the wise men knew that what Edersheim has called a "sidereal appearance"⁵⁰ signalled the birth of a new king among the Jews. Their observance of the night sky told them to come to the land of the Jews if they were to pay homage to that infant king, but they did not know where in that land to seek him. Since they

47. Brown says that though Matthew's account notes that Joseph had three visions in the infancy narratives, he receives "two supplementary divine communications," which are described in the original Greek with the same words (*Birth of the Messiah*, 129).

48. Ibid., 129 notes that Joseph's five angelic dreams did not need an interpreter and that he responded to all five "to the letter" (203). According to Brown, this was part of Matthew's purpose in connecting "Joseph the legal father of Jesus and Joseph the patriarch who dreamed dreams and went to Egypt" (29).

49. Brown doubts that Mary lived at John's house (238n6).

50. Edersheim, *Life and Times*, see n46 and supporting text.

had seen His star in the east (Matthew 2:2), they reasonably came to the capital city of the Jews, perhaps expecting that He would be related to the existing ruler or that they could find news of Him there. But neither the king of that land nor his sages had recognized the sign that caught the attention of the wise men, and Herod's sages had to search their scriptures for mention of the origins of anyone who might match the expectations of the wise men. That search also shows that the wise men did not know the prophecy of Micah which said the only future king known in Jewish scripture would be born in Bethlehem Ephratah (Micah 5:2), the birthplace of their ancient king David (I Samuel 16).

For Raymond Brown, the symbolism from Micah revealed more than the fact that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah. Though

[t]he setting for prophecy [in Micah 4–5] is the humiliation of Jerusalem/Zion by the Babylonian armies ... which leads the nations to judge that Jerusalem/Zion is finished (4:10–11) ... Micah contends that the nations do not know the thoughts of the Lord (4:12). The sufferings of Jerusalem/Zion are not terminal, but are like those of a woman in labor. When her time to bear has come, the Lord will rescue her from her enemies (4:10; 5:2(3)). The final result will be triumph. Jerusalem/Zion is the mountain of the house of the Lord, and peoples and nations will flow to it (4:1–2). Jerusalem/Zion is Migdal Eder, the Tower of the Flock to whom the former kingdom will be restored (4:8). This victory will be achieved by a ruler from David's place of origin, Bethlehem Ephratah ... where a king descended from a shepherd would rule.⁵¹

Brown continued that “these motifs in Micah 4–5 ... have parallels in Luke 2:1–20.

Micah's flow of peoples and nations to Jerusalem resembles the movement of the whole world effected by the census of Augustus, a movement which brought Joseph to the city of David. Micah's twice-mentioned “woman in birth pangs” resembles the birth motif in Luke ... [and] “this day” of the

51. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 421–22. Brown's primary references in this passage are to the verse numbering in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament book of Micah.

birth of Jesus (2:11) is the fulfillment of “the time when she who is in travail has brought forth.” (Micah 5:2 [3])⁵²

Though Brown elsewhere observed that it is no more than a guess for readers of the infancy narratives to surmise that “Mary told John of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus,”⁵³ noting that “[t]he passage in Revelation 12:1–5 has been advanced as another support for the Matthean narrative of Herod’s attempt against Jesus,”⁵⁴ the virgin’s birth with a dragon ready to destroy the child in John’s image is an easy connection to make from this “complicated compound citation”⁵⁵ no matter how “difficult” it may be.⁵⁶

If Mary and Joseph were unaware that Jesus’s birth had fulfilled Micah’s prophecy before the visit of the wise men, they knew it afterward. But if Mary also learned and understood all that John recorded in the twelfth chapter of Revelation, then she also knew that constellations which had existed for eons, including one known as “the Virgin,” seemed to have told the story of the birth of a regal son in the tribe of Judah in Israel.⁵⁷ And because of Gabriel’s annunciation, she also knew her virgin birth was to bring the very Son of God into the world (Luke 2:26–35). If she reflected on the connections between the revelation of Gabriel and the explanations of the wise men, it is not difficult to understand why this already righteous and submissive young woman would have withdrawn to the safety of her own counsels and those of the Holy Spirit.

52. Ibid. Note again that Brown’s references to Micah are to the verse numbers from the Septuagint and are slightly out of synch with the King James Version.

53. Ibid., 238.

54. Ibid., 226.

55. Ibid., 51n26. See also 102, 175 and 184–86.

56. Ibid., 675n256.

57. Martin, *The Star that Astonished*, chapters 1 and 4. Martin surmises that the astronomical events which brought the wise men to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem included the conjunction of Jupiter (which he calls the King Star) and Venus (the mother) in the constellation of Leo (the star sign for the tribe of Judah since Judah was named as the Lion’s whelp in Genesis 49). He also notes other astronomical signs which saw Jupiter stop in the belly of the constellation of the Virgin and crown the child born of the virgin as a king. For another similar view of what the wise men saw on their journey to Jerusalem, see Frederick A. Larson, “A Coronation,” *The Star of Bethlehem* (website), last accessed January 30, 2020, <http://www.bethlehemstar.com/starry-dance/coronation/>. See also John C. Iannone, *The Star of Bethlehem: The New Evidence* (self-pub., Createspace Independent Pub, 2013); crediting Frederick Larson for many of his insights and Jeffrey D. Holt, *From the East, A Book of Mormon Perspective on The Three Wise Men* (Sandy, UT: Sounds of Zion, 2002).

With whom, apart from Joseph, could she discuss these things? For even if Gabriel's prophecy before her conception meant that her nativity was foreordained, the fact that she had "know[n] not a man" (Luke 1:34) and that a constellation in the heavens witnessed such a birth, there were very few people with whom she could discuss these things within the bounds of becoming modesty. The need for spiritual understanding from another woman also presents as a primary reason for her earlier visit to Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea since culture would likely have forbidden discussion with other men (Luke 1:39–56).⁵⁸

If the wise men did explain the significance of these things which appear to have played out in the night sky, there was also much to be concerned about. For in Frederick Larson's view, no sooner had that Virgin in the night sky given birth to a royal child, than the forces of evil, characterised in the image of a terrible dragon sought to devour and destroy the child.⁵⁹ Mary and Joseph would therefore need to be very watchful if they were to protect the child which had been entrusted to their care.

Did the wise men realise all the safety consequences of what they recounted to Joseph and Mary? If they did, it is hardly surprising that Joseph was alert to the warning he received from an angel to leave Bethlehem perhaps the night after the wise men had departed (Matthew 2:13, 14). What is clear from Matthew's account of the wise men's visit of homage is that those seeric visitors were warned that they should not return to Herod as arranged, and they left the land of the Jews by another way (Matthew 2:12). We do not know what the wise men were told in the warning they received nor how it connected with what they had discussed with Joseph and Mary or what they had discussed with Herod and his sages beforehand. That they were warned not to return to Herod suggests they recognised danger to themselves and perhaps also to the child and His family, even if they

58. See above n41 and discussion in the related text.

59. Larson, "The Birth of a King," *The Star of Bethlehem* (website), last accessed January 30, 2020, <http://www.bethlehemstar.com/starry-dance/the-birth-of-a-king/>. Brown says that "even were we sure that the author of Revelation was referring to the physical birth of Jesus, it would be hazardous to identify the dragon as a symbol for Herod," but he does not explain the hazard (*Birth of the Messiah*, 226). Brown's interpretive hazard appears to vest in the difficulty in explaining the meaning of any of the book of Revelation and the failure of modern scholars to accept that prophecy might have been intended to have parallel or multiple fulfillment. Note the idea of the multiple meaning and fulfilment of prophecy in Elder Dallin H. Oaks, "Scripture Reading and Revelation", *Ensign* (January 1995), (<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1995/01/scripture-reading-and-revelation?lang=eng>).

did not connect Herod with the dragon — a connection which Frederick Larson accepts but which Raymond Brown doubts.

Other insights into Mary's character and knowledge from the New Testament

Because I have already noted the close connection of John the Apostle and Mary, Jesus's mother, after Jesus's death and resurrection (John 19:26, 27), I briefly discuss why the connection was so strong.

Christ was on the cross, the agonies of Gethsemane had returned,⁶⁰ the soldiers had cast lots for His clothing, and His mother and John looked on together. Jesus then said to His mother, "Woman, behold thy son!" and to John, "Behold thy mother!" (John 19:26). The record of the interchange ends with John's simple comment that "from that hour [John] took her unto his own home" (John 19:27).

Most commentators, including those responsible for the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Bible,⁶¹ consider that by these instructions, Jesus placed His mother in John's care. But with respect, that may misread the order of Jesus's instructions and perhaps His intent. Certainly, it is possible that Jesus addressed His mother first out of respect, and His intent was therefore what most commentators say it was. But those instructions are odd in a number of respects. The largest and most obvious of those is that even though Mary was probably a widow and perhaps a widow twice by the time of Jesus's death,⁶² she still likely had at least four competent

60. Elder Bruce R. McConkie expressed his opinion that the pains of Gethsemane returned while Christ was on the cross in his final General Conference address in April 1985 ("The Purifying Power of Gethsemane," *Ensign* [May 1985], <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1985/05/the-purifying-power-of-gethsemane?lang=eng>).

61. John 19, Headnote (Latter-day Saint edition). Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 2:602. James E. Talmage said John "immediately assum[ed] the new relationship established by his dying Master" (*Jesus the Christ* [Provo, UT: Deseret Book, 1982], 612). Dean Frederick W. Farrar agrees (*Life of Christ* [London: Cassell and Company, 1909] 519) as does Cunningham Geikie noting that "[n]one of His 'brothers or sisters' were there" (*The Life and Word of Christ* [New York: Hurst & Co, 1877], 784–85).

62. See, for example, the view that Clophas may have married Mary in a levirate marriage after Joseph died (James Tabor, "Sorting out the Jesus Family: Mother, Fathers, Brothers and Sisters," *Taborblog, Religion Matters from the Bible to the Modern World* (blog), December 19, 2015, <https://jamestabor.com/sorting-out-the-jesus-family-mother-fathers-brothers-and-sisters/>). Note that other interpretations of the "Marys" in the gospel suggest this Tabor interpretation is the simple result of a confusion of those "Marys."

sons who could take care of her.⁶³ Secondly, it seems unlikely that Jesus's half-brothers would accept their oldest brother's unheard direction that John was to be their mother's caretaker in the future. For one thing, that would breach the principle behind Moses's fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12), which Jesus had so strongly endorsed when He clashed with the Pharisees over their use of temple trusts to defeat their obligation to care for aged parents.⁶⁴ It thus appears reasonable to ask whether there is another explanation, and there may be.

Since God the Father had trusted Mary and Joseph to raise Jesus, and since Mary had clearly been adjudged a competent teacher, it is possible that Jesus was indicating to Mary and John that He wanted Mary to complete John's spiritual education in some way. That interpretation of Jesus's instructions from the cross to Mary and John raises additional questions, including in what respects John's education may have been incomplete. We may infer incompetence against his own parents or impatience and other character failings in John that may not be so unjust.⁶⁵ But it is also possible that Jesus's instruction operated as a kind of code by which Jesus indicated to His mother that He wanted her to confide all she knew of Jesus's mission and the fulfilment of prophecy so that John could record it.⁶⁶ And that interpretation gains some

63. Mark 6:3—James, Joseph, Judas and Simon along with “sisters.” In Matthew 13:55, Joseph is Joseph, and Simon appears to be older than Judas. The names of the sisters are not given in New Testament scripture, but there are reputed to have been two named Mary and Salome (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 78.8–9 and compare *Gospel of Phillip* 59:6–11 with *Protoevangelium of James* 19–20). Note that other sources suggest Jesus had three or more half-sisters (Robert J. Matthews, *Selected Writings of Robert J. Matthews* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999], 232–33).

64. Matthew 15:1–20; Mark 7:1–24.

65. For example, John was nicknamed a “son of thunder” or Boanerges, in apparent reference to his impatience during his apostolic training (Mark 3:17).

66. Note, for example, the view of Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes in *The Revelation of John the Apostle* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2016) that some scripture is provided in code. There, they have written in relation to “Interpretive Methodology”:

God gave the vision and preserved it for a purpose. He meant his Saints to understand it. It is not, however, a book for the spiritually faint-hearted or intellectually lazy, mainly because one cannot use a straightforward approach in tackling it. The reason is that God gave the visions in a kind of code. Both John and Nephi knew that to be the case, but Nephi articulated the reason why. He explained that the Bible would go through the hands of the “great and abominable church ... [and] they (will take) away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and

traction given Nephi's account of John's foreordained role as a heavenly recorder noted above (1 Nephi 14:19–28). The consequence of this for our understanding of John's Gospel, his later epistles, and his apocalyptic book of Revelation is that John also had Mary as one of his sources. But because Mary was such a circumspect source,⁶⁷ this interpretation may also explain why John would use the third person rather than refer to himself in his gospel.⁶⁸ Further, if one of the reasons Jesus told Mary to provide John with further spiritual tuition was so John could learn to suppress his own personality in favor of the greater good of the Father's work,⁶⁹ then that character trait presents as one from which other aspiring disciples of Jesus should learn as well. This understanding also suggests that Mary might deplore the too frequent use of her name⁷⁰ and the creations of orders in her honor.

There are two other gospel accounts of Mary's interaction with her messianic son. The first is John's account of the first miracle at Cana in Galilee, where she effectively asked Him to resolve the fact that the

also many covenants of the Lord" ... This was done in a deliberate attempt to pervert the gospel and lead the people astray (1 Nephi 13:14–28). The problem was how to get the message, so much of which was designed for those living in the last days, through the editors of the great and abominable church. God knew how. (18)

67. In his record of the nativity, Luke twice observes Mary's inclination to reflection (Luke 2:19, 51) in continuation of his recognition of her humility during the visit to Elizabeth and her expression of the Psalm which has come to be known as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55).

68. John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20. Bauckham says that the reason many names were omitted from the gospel texts was to protect the identity of those living when the relevant gospels were written (*Eyewitnesses*, 127). Luke was a clear exception to this rule, as his book was dedicated (*ibid.*, 301).

69. For example, Luke records that Jesus rebuked James and John for their wish to call down fire from heaven upon Samaritans who would not let Jesus's party pass through their village on their way to Jerusalem, teaching them that He and they were "not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:51–56 [56]). And then again, in the final week of Jesus's mortal life, when "the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him", desired that He would "Grant that these my two sons, may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom", there was no apparent demur from either of her sons there present. In consequence, Jesus taught all the Twelve that they were called to be servants and ministers rather than princes (Matthew 20:20–28), which is a lesson similar to that earlier recorded by Luke. Some scholars think this fiery temperament was one of the reasons Jesus named James and John, Boanerges, or the sons of thunder (Mark 3:17).

70. See also D&C 107:2–4.

wedding family had run out of wine in breach of custom (John 2:1–3). His reply is reasonably interpreted as a gentle rebuke — “Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come” (John 2:4). But it may also be interpreted as a mother prompting her son to step forward, or a mother who has given enough that she is entitled to ask an unselfish favor of both her son and His Father. Since by the time John wrote his gospel, he had Mary as one of his primary informants, it may be that she is the direct source for this account.⁷¹ If so, it stands in remarkable contrast to the self-effacing way she acted in every other circumstance where we see any trace of her personality. But if this was a family wedding, as some have surmised, it is in character with her approach along with some of her children in the events recounted by Mark in chapter 3 and Matthew in chapter 12. In Mark’s account, He had just called the Twelve (Mark 3:14–19) and was immediately confronted by the Jerusalem scribes who dogged Him with their refrain that His power to cast out devils came from the devil and that He was thus a servant of the adversary of all righteousness (Mark 3:22).⁷² He pointed up the illogicality of their reasoning (Mark 3:23–30; cf Matthew 12:25–37) but was informed that His mother and at least some of His half-brothers sought His attention (Mark 3:31–32; cf Matthew 12:46–47). He used the interruption to explain that all who kept the commandments would be His brothers and sisters (Mark 3:33–35; cf Matthew 12:48–50).⁷³ But the interaction does not suggest that He disavowed His family ties, though He elsewhere acknowledged that the call to such service would create conflict within many households (Matthew 10:34–37). And though Jesus appears thus to have made it clear that nepotism would form no part of His kingdom on earth or in heaven, Mary was still there as His mother at the cross and at the tomb.⁷⁴ She was prepared to minister to His body when the angel announced the resurrection to the women at the tomb.⁷⁵ And in

71. Some have questioned why, unlike Matthew and Luke, John did not begin his gospel with a birth narrative or include any related stories. Brown’s answer is that the author of the Gospel of John relied on proof of Christ’s preexistence rather than miracles surrounding His birth, to prove His divinity (*Birth of the Messiah*, 284, 481).

72. In Matthew’s account, the encounter follows a council of the Pharisees as to how they might destroy Him (Matthew 12:14) and they prosecuted their plan by presenting a possessed man who was immediately healed after which they ran their argument that His power to cast out devils came from the devil (Matthew 12:22–24).

73. This teaching may have been an oblique reference to the doctrine that all those who qualify for a place in the celestial world will be joint-heirs with Christ.

74. Matthew 27:55–56, 61; Mark 15:40–41, 47; Luke 23:49, 55–56; John 19:25–27.

75. Matthew 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–7.

Matthew's account, with those women, she also became a personal witness to His resurrection before any of the Eleven, though her testimony does not seem to have convinced them until they had seen Him for themselves.⁷⁶

The final New Testament reference to Mary's character and practice comes after the post-resurrection 40-day ministry had ended with Christ's ascension into heaven (Acts 1:9–11) during the period when all the disciples had been instructed to return to Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Ghost. There we learn simply that she was gathered with the other disciples under the leadership of Peter as Chief Apostle when Matthias was called to take the place of Judas Iscariot in the Twelve (Acts 1:15–26). Luke's record in Acts says simply that she continued in prayer with all the other disciples (Acts 1:14). She had known from the time of Simeon's prophecy perhaps 34 years earlier in the temple, that she would also have a cross to bear. She knew perhaps more than any mortal could know of the hand of the Father in the affairs of men, and yet she too had to walk by faith and set an example for others who drew faith from her example.⁷⁷

Part Four – Insights into Mary's character and knowledge from the common teachings of her children

Though I acknowledge debate about the identity of the author of the New Testament epistle of James, in this article I am proceeding on the basis that the author was Jesus's half-brother and the first Bishop of Jerusalem.⁷⁸ My purpose in this part is to identify the similarity between the teachings in this epistle and those of Jesus Himself. James Tabor has identified 30.⁷⁹ I also recognise that Martin Luther denied the epistle of James was the work of an apostle because of its emphasis on works in the process of justification rather than grace, which he deemed all-sufficient.⁸⁰ However, the reason Luther rejected the epistle of James,

76. Matthew 28:9–10. See also Mark 16:13 and Luke 24:1–9, 22–23.

77. For these and other reasons, Raymond Brown calls her the first disciple (*Birth of the Messiah*, 357, 364, 621, 629 and 647).

78. Paul acknowledges Jesus's half-brother James as an Apostle in Galatians 1:19.

79. James D. Tabor, *Paul and Jesus: How the Apostle Transformed Christianity* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2013), 41–45.

80. Though some commentators suggest that Luther recommended the epistle of James be left out of the New Testament and that he placed it at the end of his German translation without page numbers, others explain that he simply denied it helped Christians understand the essence of faith and how Paul had explained the reconciliation of man to God which that faith in Christ had achieved (see, for example, "Did Martin Luther Really Want James Taken Out of the Bible,"

coupled with the similarities between the epistle's teachings and those of Jesus himself, is the point I think bears review, as both of these holy men were raised by the same mother. For if Jesus was entrusted by God the Father to Mary's care and tuition, and James received the same attention, then the coincidence between the teaching of her two sons at least suggests the impress of her instruction.⁸¹

Though there are many bases from which to take issue with James Tabor's thesis that Paul is the real author of Christianity,⁸² Tabor's identification of significant commonality between the teaching of Jesus and James does suggest Mary's common influence even though that possibility for the similarity is not canvassed in Tabor's work.⁸³ Tabor introduces his discussion of these similarities with the observation "that the ethical content of [the letter of James] teaching is directly parallel to the teachings of Jesus that we know from the Q source."⁸⁴ Tabor shares the view of many other Christian scholars, that the four Christian gospels are not the earliest writings about the life and ministry of Christ but maintains that all drew content from a lost source called "Q" by scholars and recorded around 50 CE.⁸⁵ Tabor also doubts any of the gospels were written by those for whom they are named, though he does credit the authors named with input into those final gospel products.⁸⁶ Despite the speculative nature of much of Tabor's research, his comparison of the ethical teaching of Jesus and James from source material he does trace to these two half-brothers, is relevant because it relies on the same material accepted as canonical by orthodox Christians everywhere since the 27 books of the New Testament were consolidated into the current scriptural canon.

Tabor connects "thirty direct references, echoes and allusions" from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) and the Sermon on the Plain

Zondervan Academic (blog), March 6, 2019, <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/martin-luther-james-bible>).

81. Another compelling view is that James simply alluded to the teachings of Christ without attributing them in his general epistle.

82. Tabor, *Paul and Jesus*, 6.

83. *Ibid.*, 37 where Tabor observes that they were "nursed with the same milk."

84. *Ibid.*, 41.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*, 8, 71. Richard Bauckham comes to this same conclusion after in-depth consideration of all the scholarship till 2006 (*Eyewitnesses*).

(Luke 6) into the Epistle of James.⁸⁷ His summary includes the following table.⁸⁸

Jesus's Teachings in the Q Source	Teachings of James
Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20)	Has not God chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. (2:5)
Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments ... shall be [called] least in the kingdom. (Matthew 5:19)	Whoever keeps the whole Torah but fails in one point has become guilty of it all. (2:10)
Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" shall enter the kingdom ... but he who does the will of my Father. (Matthew 7:21)	Be doers of the word and not hearers only. (1:22)
How much more will your Father ... give good gifts to those who ask him. (Matthew 7:11)	Every good gift ... coming down from the Father. (1:17)
Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. (Luke 6:24)	Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. (5:1)
Do not swear at all, either by heaven for it is the throne of God, or by earth for it is his footstool ... let what you say be simply "Yes" and "No." (Matthew 5:34, 37)	Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath but let your yes be yes and your no be no. (5:12)

Tabor also notes connections between the practice of Jesus and James in "the practice of anointing the sick with oil," citing Mark 6:13 and James 5:14,⁸⁹ and their connection of confession of sins and prayer as "the way to salvation."⁹⁰ Though Tabor suggests James was "directly echoing and affirming what he had learned and passed on from his brother Jesus,"⁹¹ it is also possible that both learned the same principles at the knee of Mary and Joseph in "Family Home Evenings" in Nazareth during their spiritual formation as Jewish children. While Tabor argues strongly that the Jewish obsessions of both Jesus and James⁹² distinguish

87. Ibid., 41.

88. Ibid., 42.

89. Ibid., 43.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid., 5, 15, 31, 43, 97, 149–51, 176, 184, 212. Tabor would doubtless similarly see Mary as a traditional Jewess.

them from Paul and make the latter the true founder of Christianity, Tabor spends no time identifying what in Jesus's teaching so irritated the Jewish orthodoxy of His day.

The point in this discussion of Mary's character and knowledge is the identification of similarity in the doctrinal outlook of her two most famous sons and the spirit of the only things we directly know about her from the scriptures. In all, there is an unmistakable thread of humility, of submissiveness to the will of the Father and the certainty that prayer connects us very literally with the power of heaven both in time and in eternity. Mary and Jesus's similar expression of their humility in the Magnificat and Gethsemane have already been noted.⁹³ But James's expression has the same humble spirit. For not only does he exhort his readers to patience in trial directly on three separate occasions in five chapters,⁹⁴ he also wrote:

[T]he wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality; and without hypocrisy.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. (James 3:17, 18)⁹⁵

The connection made by all three between prayer and the powers of heaven is marked. Jesus, of course, taught prayer throughout His ministry, but in the single verse we have about Mary after the crucifixion and resurrection (Acts 1:14), Luke records that she was with the early saints in earnest prayer for Peter's release from prison. James's most famous affirmation of the power of prayer comes from his fifth chapter where he said:

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

And He prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. (James 5:16–18)

93. Above n37 and supporting text.

94. James 1:2–4, 12; 5:7–8, 11, 13.

95. See also James 4:7, 10 where he admonishes his readers to “[s]ubmit [them] selves to God, and he will draw nigh to you” and to “humble [them]selves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

None of this asserts that Mary taught Jesus, James, or Jude all they knew. In the case of Jesus's education, the Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 3:24, 25 says Jesus did not need mortal instruction:

And it came to pass that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come.

And he served under his father, and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him.

While Jesus evidently learned the things of the Spirit by direct instruction from the Holy Ghost and thus proceeded from grace to grace (D&C 93:12–14), it is unlikely this passage intends to convey that He was not socialized and taught language and Hebrew scripture within the family circle by the parents chosen for Him by God the Father. Nor should it be surprising that the patterns developed within that family, to which He must have contributed, manifested themselves in the teachings of the Apostle James when he came to the gospel.⁹⁶ One of the things Mary seems especially qualified to have taught the infant Christ was how to recognize and respond to the influence of the Holy Ghost, who became His principal teacher.

Conclusion

Before she was a mother, Mary recognized the hand of God in all things and deferred to His will in the faith that He knew best for her and all of us. Like us, she could not see all the threads of His handiwork woven into the tapestry of human experience. But she trusted that God would bring about His eternal purposes and that those purposes were never frustrated. Scripture does not include many of her biographical details. Tabor surmises that is because the Pauline apologists were responsible for all New Testament scripture, including the versions of the gospel canonized in our modern bible. But I suggest it is more likely the consequence of Mary's humble desire to work unseen like the Father of her holy son. While Jesus was not self-effacing and could speak and act with dangerous boldness when that was required to emphasize truth or call out hypocrisy, He learned to be the servant of all through the Holy

96. The Gospel accounts do not name any of Jesus's half-siblings among His disciples before the resurrection. That supreme miracle and its witnesses seem to have been a large factor in the conversion of at least James and Jude, the authors of the New Testament epistles which bear their names.

Ghost and the example of the divine mother whom His Father had chosen for him. The fact that James similarly extolled humility and meekness, suggests the nature of the instruction that all of Mary's children received at her knee and witnesses the nature of her example and character.

If Mary is to female virtue what Christ is to the divine masculine, then it seems in all our virtue-getting, we need to get humility, meekness and obedience to God the Father before we get anything else.

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