Dear Mary,

I am writing this letter to you, hoping to get some answers to my many questions. The mention of you in Scripture is so brief, there are gaps in your story that I am curious about. I suppose I should be thankful that the Gospel writers didn’t take it upon themselves to assume what you were thinking during these major events. Good for Luke for not inserting words into your mouth.

There are no postbiblical writings that fill us in on your side of the story. Nothing from early church founders to help us understand. All we get are a few brief mentions like this one in Luke. Brief mentions for such an important person in our faith story. I’m curious about your story. I’m curious about the various labels that have been attributed to you.

Dear Mary, you’ve been called “the model for all Christians.” I know, my Protestant tradition has sort of shied away from paying attention to you. Our brothers and sisters in the Catholic tradition offer you much reverence and praise, but our branch of Christianity has set you aside. Not wanting the focus to be too much on you and not enough on Jesus. I’m not sure what the right framework is, but I can’t help but think that you deserve more credit. Did you feel any pressure, knowing you’d become a model for the rest of us? A woman of faith who obeyed God and loved Jesus? You set quite a standard for the world. I wonder how it was knowing you’d been given that task.

Dear Mary, you’ve been called an “exemplary disciple.” This seems fitting, since you are one in a line of many who have responded to God with “here I am”. Moses, Abraham, Samuel, Isaiah and more have all spoken those words. When God called, they answered. And so did you. Without hesitation. Without questions. Without resistance. It’s like you had this inner knowing that God was calling you to a very special role and you knew better than to question it. I wonder, did you speak those words with fear? Did you tremble as you responded to God, saying you’d be willing to bear his son? You’re probably familiar with the history of your people and their interaction with God. It isn’t always filled with warm fuzzies. There was the destruction of humanity and creation, save Noah, his family and 2 of every animal. There was the exile, when God’s people were oppressed and sent away to Babylon. There were times of drought and starvation. Times when God seemed to be punishing them or perhaps just abandoning them. Was it hard to trust God after the people suffered like that?

Dear Mary, you’ve been called “The Blessed One.” Did you feel blessed during this experience? Did you feel blessed when God selected you to be Christ’s mother? To be a vessel for God? Your body is placed in the same category as the burning bush, the Ark of the Covenant, the Temple. All places where God has resided. And then you came along and God selected you as the body in which the incarnation would be made real. Did you feel blessed by this? I think I would have felt overwhelmed.

Dear Mary, perhaps the role you are best known for, is mother. Mother Mary, what was it like to be impregnated by the Holy Spirit? I know this caused a bit of drama with your betrothed, Joseph, and I’m glad that worked out as it did. But what about your experience with pregnancy? As an expectant mother, awaiting the birth of my own child, there are so many things I want to know about your experience. You were so young when you carried Jesus in your belly. Some say you may have been 12 or 13. I can’t say for sure, but I think I was still playing with Barbies at that age. But you, you were impregnated with the One who would change the world. Did being younger make the pregnancy easier? Did you have more energy than I did during the first trimester? Were you still able to do all of your work? Because I was napping every chance I got. Was pregnancy an emotional time for you? Were you brought to tears by the most mundane things as I am these days? Those hormones can be tumultuous, as I’m sure you know. How did you handle being around others? Did you struggle as I do when encountering women who experience infertility or miscarriage? Did you feel ashamed of the joy in your belly, wishing you had a solution to ease the pain of others? Did you know what you were getting into when you travelled with Joseph to Bethlehem to register? They say it isn’t a good idea to travel in the third trimester, a caution I considered as I travelled to Colorado this past weekend. I am thankful I am not the woman who gave birth on a commercial flight recently. That doesn’t sound comfortable. Giving birth in a stable doesn’t sound comfortable either. I wonder if you set aside your needs for comfort, knowing you needed to travel to Bethlehem, and that your son would be born there. The prophets had stated that he would be born in Bethlehem, from the line of David. Were you aware of that going into this? As you travelled those dusty roads, that donkey bumping you along. Did you know all of this would take place in a stable? No midwife in attendance, just the barn animals standing by. Was that in your birthing plan?

Dear Mary, perhaps the most radical label you have been given is “prophet.” More than just an incubator, Mary you were a prophet who spoke of things to come. Your words in the magnificat speak of the world changing, taking a turn because your son would really shake things up. Is this what you were thinking about when the shepherds arrived and were making a fuss, but you were still and silent, pondering things in your heart? What sort of theological reflection were you doing in that moment, and in the days and years that would follow? You weren’t told the details of how your son would die, but surely you knew he would face a short lifespan. You knew the world couldn’t handle the message he had to bring. That he would speak on behalf of the marginalized and the poor. Those whom society preferred to overlook. He would be crucified for these teachings. Yet all of those years you remained with him as his disciple and even at the base of the cross, watching him suffer. You must have known this was all for a greater purpose and not for nothing.

Dear Mary I think my favorite name for you is Theotokos: that beautiful Greek word that Luke uses to call you “God bearer”. The mother of God. The one who carried God for those 9 months and continued to nurture in the years following. You were the one who embodied love incarnate. What did that feel like? This is a status we all strive to achieve, to be God-bearers. To carry Christ in our hearts and on our minds, but it is a struggle. We easily lose sight of our role in the incarnation, to bring Christ to the world. But for you, it was a bit easier. You didn’t know this back then because scientists only discovered in the past few decades that once a child is born, a few cells from that child remain in the mother’s body. The baby leaves a trace. Mary, did you know that you physically carried Christ with you even after you gave birth to him? That he was always with you on the cellular level as well as a spiritual one. The marvels of biology dance so well with theology, don’t they?

So Mary, I write this letter you to with even more questions, but my rambling has gone on long enough. I believe we have much we can learn from you, the one who was closest to Christ than any other person. Thank you for having the courage to respond to God with “Here I Am”. Thank you for putting your body through the aches and pains of pregnancy and labor, so that Christ may enter the world, bringing love and grace and reconciliation. Thank you for setting an example for us as a Christian, as a disciple, as a prophet, as a mother, as a God bearer. May the world look to you as a guide for how to carry Christ with us as we welcome him to the world this Christmas.

Sincerely, a Pregnant and Curious Pastor