

**Letters to Mary from a
Young Mother**

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iUniverse, Inc.
New York Lincoln Shanghai

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For David and Isaac,
in thanksgiving to God for the gift of you,
and to Bernie, for all his love and support.

A Mother's Prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for my children.

Help me to always remember
that they are your children first.

Help me guide them to become the people
You want them to be.

Please give me patience when mine has
reached its end,

energy when I am exhausted, and
love that knows no limits.

Help me to rejoice in my children's happiness, and
to be with them in their sadness.

Help me to see the world through their eyes—
their wonder at the newness of it all.

Most of all, help me to always realize how precious
each day with my children is and how much
I have been truly blessed.

Amen

Introduction

Being a new mother can be a very lonely experience. Conceiving and giving birth to a child is life-changing for the woman involved. Her relationships with all her loved ones are altered. She may feel overwhelmed by the changes in her body, and the challenge of caring for a small child whose very existence is completely dependent on her. It is possible, even with a strong support system of family and friends, to feel very lonely indeed.

Of course, we are not alone. God is always with us. He gave us life and gave our children life and entrusted them to our care. He walks beside us every step of the way. Sometimes, the image of God can be somewhat remote, however. Intellectually, I know that he is pure Being, unlimited by gender, time and space. He is pure intellect, pure love, pure goodness. On a practical level, I still picture him as an old man with a white beard ready to catch me in my every sin and dole out punishment—the picture of him that I was presented with in my youth.

Jesus' mother Mary, on the other hand, has always seemed much more approachable. Like many Roman Catholics, I was brought up with a strong devotion to Mary. She is our mother in heaven, given to us by Jesus to watch over us. She is always there, ready to hear my prayer and help me through my daily trials and tribulations.

I always thought of her as the woman in the pictures, however, with beautiful flowing robes—Mary, Queen of Heaven and Earth. It was not until I conceived my first child that I began to think of her as the human woman that she was and is. Unlike God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Mary is not divine. She is human, like us in all ways but sin. Two thousand years ago, she was a simple Jewish girl who conceived and bore a child, an extraordinary child, yes, but a human child nonetheless. Jesus, although fully divine, was fully human, and he came to the world as a helpless infant. The child we see idealized in art, resting peacefully in his mother's arms, halo firmly on his head, needed to be fed, and changed, and rocked to sleep. While Jesus was probably never a rebellious teenager, he was a baby, needing to learn how to talk and walk and explore the world. Mary had to help him become the person he was born to be. There was also the housework to be done, and food to be prepared, and a husband to take care of. Yes, Mary was a human mother, and as such is connected to mothers in all

times and places, from Eve to the present day. She is a fellow traveler on the journey of motherhood. As such, she understands our joys and our frustrations and provides an ever-ready willing ear.

Dear Mary,

I found out today that I am going to have a baby. We tried for so long, it seems hard to believe that it finally happened. I think that I am in a state of shock. I'm happy, but scared. My whole life is going to change. I'm not living for myself anymore; I'm living for this baby. This baby depends on me. I don't know how to be a mother. We told our parents and our friends the good news and they are all very happy for us. It feels good to have that support, but I still feel very overwhelmed.

How did you feel when the angel told you that you were going to have a son? You expressed surprise but trusted in God. Did you wonder what Joseph would think? What your mother would say? Who did you tell? Did you lay awake at night wondering what God had in store for your life?

Help me to trust in God the way you trusted in God. Help to have faith that He knows best.

Dear Mary,

I started working on a baby quilt today. I like that I can do something tangible for the baby. I'm eating well and getting my rest, and taking each day as it comes.

How did you get ready for Jesus' arrival? Did you make his clothes and blankets? Did you dream of holding him and seeing what he looked like?

Dear Mary,

I am so tired, more tired than I have ever been in my life. All of my energy is going into helping this baby grow. I can barely drag myself through the days.

How did you ever find the energy to go help your cousin Elizabeth with her child? Help me to have the strength to do what I need to each day. Help me to still make time for caring for others.

Dear Mary,

I planted some fall tulip bulbs today and realized that by the time that they bloom, my baby will be here. Time is moving so swiftly. Being pregnant has made me so aware of the passage of time. I'm showing now—there is no mistaking that tell-tale sign of a round belly. It's strange to lose my shape. My body is not my own anymore. It just keeps growing.

Did you mark the days going by of your pregnancy? How did you feel about the changes in your body?

Dear Mary,

I had my first ultrasound today. It was so amazing to see this baby inside of me. The baby has two arms and legs and everything looks just as it should be. I have been showing the pictures they gave me to everyone! It makes it all so real. There is a child inside of me!

When did it really hit you that there was a child inside of you—the enormity of that? In your quiet moments, did you think about what your child looked like, whether he was healthy and growing as he should?

Dear Mary,

The baby moved today! It was just a quiet flutter in my belly. I was sitting at my desk at work. At first, I thought I just had a twitch, but it kept happening and I realized it was my little one. It is such a strange and wonderful sensation to have another human being inside me. That baby is a distinct person with his or her own immortal soul. How incredible is that?!

Where were you when you first felt Jesus move inside you? How did you feel? Were you in awe at the wonder of it all?

Dear Mary,

I had my second ultrasound today. I'm far enough along that they were able to tell that I am having a boy! His name is David. I wanted to know what sex the baby is. I like to be able to call him by name—it gives him an identity. But that is scary as well. He will be here so soon. I don't feel ready at all.

You knew that you were having a boy from the moment of conception and that his name would be Jesus. Did you touch your belly and call him by name? Did you talk to him in the quiet of the night? Were you ever scared by what God was calling you to do?

Dear Mary,

I babysat my friend's daughter today. Emily is 15 months old and she is beautiful—so sweet and intelligent. We spent a good portion of the day playing peek-a-boo, and I just loved to see her smile and hear her laugh. She was so peaceful while she took her nap, laying in her bed in perfect happiness. I thanked God for her.

When you were helping Elizabeth with her baby John, did you marvel that you were soon going to have a child of your own?

Dear Mary,

The baby kicks hard enough now that you can actually see it through my stomach. My husband Bernie loves to put his hand on my belly and feel the baby kick. He pokes him so that the baby pushes back! It's amazing to interact with a child who isn't even born yet. Little David already has a personality!

Did Joseph ever feel baby Jesus kick? Did you talk about your life together and what it would be like once the baby arrived? Did you wonder what type of personality Jesus would have?

Dear Mary,

It's Christmas. We are celebrating the birth of your child! You will be happy to know that the spirit of giving is alive and well. The other day at work I received a surprise present. I went out of the office for a few minutes and when I came back, there was a beautiful little stuffed bear for the baby from "Santa Claus." I have no idea who gave it to me, but it was so sweet and thoughtful, I almost broke into tears right there!

It really is a special Christmas—our last one as a married couple without children; at the same time our first one as a family, because David is with us, even if we can't see him yet. We got together with both of our families and had a wonderful time. Next year, though, I think that things will be very different! A whole new chapter of our lives is starting.

Did you have traditions in your family that you knew would change once Jesus arrived? Did you wonder how your relationships would change?

Dear Mary,

It's New Year's Day! David will be born this year in just a few short months. I face this year with such trepidation. I love David and I love when he plays inside of me, but I'm scared of his coming out. I realize that it is only one day of my life, and that God will be with me through my labor, but I am still very scared of the pain. I'm also afraid of being a mommy and that I won't know how to take care of this little guy. The coming of the new year has just made all of these changes all the more imminent.

Did you ever feel scared? Did you wonder what labor would be like? Did you question your ability as a mother?

Dear Mary,

My co-workers threw me a baby shower. I was so surprised! It was so kind of them. They gave me several practical things I can use for David. It's amazing how one little person can need so much.

Did your friends give you gifts for baby Jesus?
Did they help you get ready for his arrival?

Dear Mary,

I have been feeling so restless lately, like I should go out and do everything that I won't be able to do once the baby arrives. That requires energy, however, and energy is one thing that I have in very short supply. I think that I will go take a nap.

Were there things that you wanted to do before the baby arrived? Were you tired and worn out and unable to do what you wanted?

Dear Mary,

The baby's room is finished. The rug was installed yesterday and my husband put the crib together today. It's strange to think that in two months we will have a little boy to put in that crib.

Did Joseph build a crib for baby Jesus? Did you ever walk by that corner of your home and imagine the baby sleeping there?

Dear Mary,

I have six more weeks to go. I'm starting to get excited. I know that it would be too soon for David to be born right now, but I am so looking forward to holding him and kissing him and playing with him. I hope the remaining time goes by quickly.

Were you excited as your time grew short? Did you look forward to holding baby Jesus and playing with him?

Dear Mary,

I am due one month from today. Two of the people in our childbirth class gave birth last weekend. They were at the hospital when we had class on Monday, and came in to show us their newborns. Boy, did that make it real! Everyone seems to be telling me labor horror stories lately. Why do women do that? I'm scared enough. I don't need any help to feel worse. It's not like I have a choice. Labor is something I have to get through. I just keep telling myself that it is only one day and then my baby will be here—and then the real challenge begins!

Did women tell you the stories of their labor? Were you frightened by what might await you?

Dear Mary,

Two weeks to go. The baby could come any time, and we are waiting. Only God knows when little David will choose to make his entrance into the world. I feel so huge and weighed down. I now know what is meant by the term “heavy with child.” I walk slowly and deliberately. I am glad that it won’t be much longer.

How did you ever manage to make the trip to Bethlehem in this condition? You must have been so uncomfortable.

Dear Mary,

I finished David's quilt today. Bernie and I have been trying to enjoy our last few days alone together. Everything is ready and waiting. And so am I.

Were you impatient at the end, or were you at peace, knowing that God was in control of everything?

Dear Mary,

The wait goes on. I feel like I am in a time warp of sorts. No matter what I am doing, whether I am working or relaxing, I am waiting. I feel restless and while I am trying to soak up every moment of these last few days of relative freedom and the specialness of having David inside me, part of me is eager to have labor behind me and David here. Every day is spent in anticipation, waiting for the one cramp that will be the start of something big. I know that Bernie is eager, too. Every day he asks me, "Where is my son?" and tells me that my one job for the day is to go into labor. So far, David is not cooperating, but he will be here soon. The question is just when "soon" is.

Please be with me in these last days.

Dear Mary,

Today is my due date, and still no David. I am so scared of becoming a mother. I'm scared of labor and the pain involved, but I am scared also of this new role that I am taking on and of losing the "me" that I have come to know and love. I've succeeded a great deal in keeping the "me" while I have been pregnant. Even though I have gotten rounder every day, I kept exercising and finished my master's degree and learned new things at work. Now all that is going to change and my first responsibility is going to be to this little boy. I love him so much but I am very scared of all the things that I am going to be surrendering. I know that there will be rewards. I just hope that God will get me through this. He supposedly never gives us more than we can handle.

Were you scared of losing your identity? Did you wonder who "Mary" would be once you were a mother?

Dear Mary,

I spent the day in the hospital though not in labor. I have had a terrible flu, and can't keep anything in me. I was dehydrated, and needed to be hooked up to an IV for a while to replenish my fluids. I'm home now but feel no better. I am hungry but eating has violent consequences.

Please be with me. Please ask God to take care of my baby and keep him healthy while I fight this flu.

Dear Mary,

I am thankful over the flu. I am scheduled to go to the hospital tomorrow evening to have labor induced. I don't want to go. I wanted to go into labor naturally. Now I have to go in and have pain inflicted upon me. I told Bernie I am going to run away so he can't find me, but of course I won't do that. I know that the baby has been in there too long and has to come out. I know that I need to face the music.

Please be with me in my pain.

Dear Mary,

Little David came into the world at 9:40 yesterday morning. He weighed 8 pounds, one ounce, and is 22 inches long. He has brown hair and dark blue eyes. We really can't figure out who he looks like. I guess he looks like David! Labor and delivery was not what I expected. Nothing went as planned. I had thought I'd spend labor walking off the pain, changing positions. I was strapped to the bed hooked up to fetal monitors. The only thing I could do was roll on my side and even that was difficult. The pain was so intense. For twelve hours, I felt like my insides were being squeezed out of me. The only thing that got me through was holding Bernie's hands and looking in his eyes. He was so supportive, and I was so thankful. Unfortunately, David was not coping well with labor, and I ended up having a c-section. I was groggy but conscious and it was amazing to hear his cry as the doctor pulled him out. It was a sound that I know I will remember for the rest of my life.

I don't think that it has sunk in yet that David is *my* baby. It really feels like someone just handed me a child and told me to take care of him. I guess being a family is something that we need to grow into.

Your labor did not go as you had planned, either. It must have been so hard for you, surrounded by the animals, away from family and friends. Did Joseph help you? Did you look to him for strength? How did you feel when you first held baby Jesus and heard his cry? Did you bond instantly or did it take some time?

Dear Mary,

David isn't breastfeeding well, and he just cries and cries. He was up until 1 am this morning. I was so tired. I just kept walking the floor with him, trying to calm him down, all to no avail. I eventually sent him to the hospital nursery where thankfully he slept. What am I doing wrong? I so want to be a good mother, and I feel like I am failing miserably.

Did motherhood come easy to you? Was Jesus at peace in your arms? How did you calm him when he cried?

Dear Mary,

It's Easter Sunday and I have been home from the hospital for two days. The baby blues have hit with full force and I am an emotional wreck. I just keep crying. We've had to bring David to the doctor's every day. He lost too much weight and became jaundiced. It hurt me so much to see them prick his little foot for a blood test. It probably hurt me more than it hurt him. I started pumping my breast milk and supplementing with formula, so at least now he is eating and gaining weight. I feel better about that.

We were actually able to make it to Church this morning. I was so glad to be able to go, and David was real good—he slept through the whole thing! A friend of mine ordered us Easter Dinner at a local restaurant. All Bernie had to do was pick it up. It was so kind of her. It's amazing how kind some people can be!

Did you have the baby blues? Did you cry uncontrollably? Did the people of Bethlehem show you kindness? How did you feel when the shepherds came to visit and worship your son?

Dear Mary,

It was a beautiful spring day, so Bernie and I packed David into his car seat and went out for a ride. We had to time it between feedings, but we were still able to get out for about an hour. I've been feeling so badly. I know that Bernie doesn't know how to help me. David has been getting up every two hours day and night to eat. We are both so exhausted, and I am still very sore from my surgery. It felt good to get out and get a little fresh air. I hope that I start feeling better soon.

How long was it until you felt human again after giving birth? What did Joseph do to help you?

Dear Mary,

I went to the doctor today to have my stitches out from my surgery—one more step on the way to recovery. Bernie is back at work and I still can't drive, so my sister and her children were kind enough to bring me. My nephew Jeffrey held the sleeping David in his arms during my appointment. He looked so safe and peaceful there. It is strange to think that I used to take care of my nephews when they were little, which doesn't seem that long ago, and now they are helping to take care of my child.

The doctor gave me the Ok to start going for walks. As soon as I got home, I put David in the baby carrier and we headed off to the drug store. Unfortunately, I came down with an infection, and needed to pick up a prescription. It was my first time out with David by myself. He just curled up and slept in the carrier, pressed against my chest. It was so liberating to go out. It was just a little walk and a simple errand, but I felt like I conquered the world. It's only been nine days and my perspective on everything seems to have changed.

When was the first time you took baby Jesus out on your own? Did you feel that it was a great accomplishment? How did you adjust to all the new changes in your life?

Dear Mary,

David is two weeks old already. It doesn't seem possible. My mother came three days this week to help me, which was much appreciated. It gave me the chance to get some rest. The baby wakes up twice during the night for feedings. I've started to grow fond of the late night feedings. It's so quiet and peaceful, and it is just him and me. I know that he won't be little long and I want to treasure every moment.

Did you treasure your time with Jesus in the quiet of the night? Did you stroke his cheek and watch him eat and thank God for him?

Dear Mary,

I look with amazement at this little boy who has so changed my life. He is so dependent on me and it scares me. Yet, he has his own personality, own will, and I fear how quickly he will grow up. He is so beautiful. I spent so much time wondering what he would look like and now I can't imagine him looking like anyone else. He is David and I love him so very much in a way I never before experienced. I only hope that I always appreciate the gift God gave me in him.

Were you amazed by baby Jesus, by the incredible gift God had given you? How did it feel to hold the Son of God?

Dear Mary,

David was baptized today. He cried a bit when they poured the water on his head, but who could blame him? We had a party with our families after. Everyone was passing him around, doting on him. It really was a wonderful day.

When you and Joseph presented Jesus in the temple, Simeon told you that someday “a sword would pierce your heart.” How did that make you feel? Were you afraid of what life held in store for you and your child?

Dear Mary,

David is almost a month old. He stays awake for longer stretches during the day now, and is starting to focus on objects and play a bit. I've been reading to him a lot. When he is awake, he likes to be entertained. I can't say that I blame him—I would be bored just staring out into space as well.

What things did you do with baby Jesus? How did you play with him?

Dear Mary,

Happy Mother's Day! David rewarded me by puking all over me during lunch with my in-laws. He has been doing that a lot lately. He gets plenty to eat and is growing well in spite of this unfortunate tendency. I think that I will always associate the smell of sour milk with David! Every one in my family claims that this is poetic justice, as I suffered from the same gastric ailment when I was a baby. I never thought the day would come that if I have only a little puke on me, I consider myself clean!

Did your standards of cleanliness change once you had baby Jesus? Did he have any ailments that made life a little more challenging?

Dear Mary,

Today was a good day. I got up with David at 5:30 am and fed him and we played for a while. Then we went in search for Daddy at 7:00 am, but Daddy was still sleeping so we crawled into bed with him and stayed there for an hour. It was so cozy with the three of us all curled up together. The sun was streaming in through the windows and the cool spring air was pouring in. It was one of those moments when you just have to take a deep breath and say "This is as good as life gets!"

Did you ever sleep in bed with Jesus beside you?
Did you feel his warmth and treasure the moment?

Dear Mary,

I love to walk with David and sing to him. I sing lullabies and church hymns and Christmas carols—really anything that comes into my head. He seems to enjoy it. It is such a precious time, with him curled up in my arms resting his little head on my shoulder.

What songs did you sing to Jesus? Did you enjoy your quiet times together?

Dear Mary,

Last night was so tough. David got up for his feeding and just wouldn't go back to sleep no matter what I did. I walked him and sang and walked him some more and ended up crying out of sheer frustration. I am so tired today.

Did Jesus ever cry in the night? How did you cope?

Dear Mary,

Today I went out of the house for the first time without David. My arms felt empty but I knew he was in good hands with his Daddy. It did feel good to get out a bit—to be my own person for a little while.

Did you ever leave Jesus with Joseph and go out into the village for a little while? Did you miss him while you were gone? Did you enjoy your time alone?

Dear Mary,

My little boy is growing up! I wonder how many times in the next 20 years I will repeat those words as each milestone is reached—each step taken. Last night he actually slept through the night. I have no idea if it will ever happen again, but he did it! It felt so good to get a full night's sleep. The more incredible thing though is that today David reached for a toy for the first time! He was lying on his back and his toys were hanging over him, and he reached out and hit it! You could just see his brain working—this is my hand and that is my toy and if I move my hand like this, I can make it move. He did it over and over and Bernie and I just stood there and watched with such amazement.

What was Jesus' first deliberate action? Did you watch with joy and awe as he grew and developed?

Dear Mary,

I'm so mad at Bernie right now. We were having dinner and he was complaining about how he had to get up with David at one o'clock this morning. Now, I didn't ask him to get up with him—he volunteered to start alternating nights. So, I said, "Yes, but I got up with him at 5 am," and he responded, "But you can take a nap—he sleeps most of the day!" He thinks that I sit around the house doing nothing all day! He has no idea how busy I am. I constantly have to watch and/or play with and/or comfort the little boy all day long. When he takes his nap, I have all the other things to get done. I'm trying so hard to be a good mother and I enjoy spending time with David, but it is exhausting, especially when, like today, he's in a bad mood.

Bernie's good and probably a great deal more helpful than other fathers, and maybe I have no right to be angry, but I am.

Did Joseph help you with Jesus? Were you exhausted by everything that you had to do?

Dear Mary,

I went to a friend's baby shower today. She already has two little boys, but she is having a little girl this time around, so she got lots of diapers and little girl clothes. Everyone there was saying how I look so much more mature and matronly now. It's funny, I didn't think that having David had changed me so much, but I guess you can't be fully responsible for another human being without it changing you. I suppose everyone has to grow up.

In what ways did having Jesus change you? Did you feel older, more mature? Did you wonder what had become of the girl you once were?

Dear Mary,

There are so many things that I'm worried I'll forget about David—like the way he turns his head, pushes out his bottom lip and sticks out his bottom when he stretches, or the soft feel and sweet smell of his baby hair, or the way he beats his head against my shoulder if I try to burp him and he is still hungry, or the little dimples in his pudgy knees. Even that wonderful laugh of his when he gets all excited! All these things I just want to freeze in my memory so that when he gets big, I can remember what he was like when he was very little.

What memories of Jesus did you write in your heart for always?

Dear Mary,

I went back to work last week. I'm just going back on a very part-time basis—10 hours a week. My parents are watching David for a few hours during the week and then Bernie takes care of him on Saturdays. It feels strange to be back, and at the same time it feels like I never left. So much has happened in my life, and yet life there has gone on much the same as always. It feels good to be doing something that makes me feel useful, however.

What in your life made you feel needed and useful? Did you ever do anything just for you?

Dear Mary,

It's July already. How is that possible? I had to leave my baby way too much this week. I left him Monday with my mom to go to work, Wednesday night with my mother-in-law to go to the dentist, Friday during the day to go to a meeting at work, Friday night with a friend so that I could go to another friend's wedding and Saturday so that I could go to work. I know that he was being well taken care of and I am fortunate to have so many wonderful people to help, but I missed him so much. I have grown so attached to him. He's my baby and I love him in a way I've never loved anyone. He's learned how to blow raspberries and he entertains himself for quite a while doing that. He also likes to watch his hands. He is so fascinated by watching them move. He's also starting to push himself backward! He's growing so quickly.

Did you have people you could trust to help take care of Jesus? Did he grow quickly and discover new things every day?

Dear Mary,

I took David to the park today. It was such a beautiful day! I pushed him in his stroller until he fell asleep, then I sat and read while he dreamed. How I enjoyed those couple of hours in the sunshine!

Did you ever spend time with Jesus outside?
Did you ever have the chance to rest and relax?

Dear Mary,

My little son decided to be a social butterfly today. I took him to the grocery store and he was just smiling at everybody! People stopped to talk to him and comment on how cute he is. He really does have a wonderful smile. You can't help but feel happy when you look at him—his eyes get tiny and his face just glows.

Did you ever take Jesus with you to the market? Did people in the village like to talk to him? He must have been a beautiful baby with a beautiful smile.

Dear Mary,

I keep feeling like my marriage is going through such a rough spot and it is not even anything vocalized. Bernie's a good father and I love to watch him and David play together. In fact, that has become one of my favorite things. I just don't think my husband has an appreciation for all the ways that my life has changed. I have many happy moments and I love being with David and caring for him. In fact, I hate to leave him. But at the same time, I mourn the life I left behind.

Did you ever look back with longing to the days before you were a mother? Did you and Joseph always get along, or were there days that you just didn't feel he understood?

Dear Mary,

I took yesterday off from work so Bernie, David, and I could spend some much-needed time together. It was so nice to have a Saturday off. I put David in the baby carrier and we went to a local museum. I'm so tired of working. It just doesn't hold any of the allure that it did before I had David. I'm not there much during the week so I don't get to connect with my co-workers the way I used to. It is just time that I have to spend away from my baby. Maybe eventually I'll be able to be home with him all the time.

What types of things did you do as a family?
What activities did you enjoy?

Dear Mary,

Labor Day weekend is here and with it, the cool fall air. The summer passed so quickly, and yet I know that all those days did come and go because David grew with each and every one of them. David and I went to his friend Emily's 2nd birthday party yesterday. They get along so well. David reaches out to touch her face and she gives him kisses. When we were leaving, she said, "Bye, bye, David. I'll miss you!" It was so sweet!

Bernie has been away at a parish retreat this weekend. When David and I were at mass Sunday morning, he sneaked away from the retreat to see us for a few moments. He gave me a kiss and in that kiss I felt a love that seems to have been missing for so long. Maybe that retreat is what we both needed. Maybe we can start to reconnect.

Did Jesus have friends that he liked to play with? Did you take delight in watching him interact with other children? Did you and Joseph ever have a tender moment when everything seemed right?

Dear Mary,

I'm sitting on our bed right now watching David sleep, all curled up, so peaceful in his dreams. It is moments like this that I truly savor.

Were there moments that were so special in their simplicity that you just had to treasure them for always?

Dear Mary,

David learned how to say “Dada” this week—his very first word! Bernie was in his glory. I wish that it had been “Mama” but I’m still happy that he is starting to talk.

What was Jesus’ first word? Were you excited to see his intellect developing?

Dear Mary,

David turned six months old yesterday. Somehow that doesn't seem possible, but it is. My little son is getting bigger every day. He's starting to look more like me, too. It is strange and wonderful to look down at this little face and see someone who resembles me looking back. I so love that little boy and the years are going to pass so quickly. I guess all I can do is enjoy each day as much as possible.

Did you see yourself in Jesus? Did he have your eyes or your nose? Did you marvel at how quickly he was growing?

Dear Mary,

Bernie has been gone away on business for the week, so it is has just been David and I for the duration. I never feel as safe when he is gone. David and I have been having a good time, but I miss having Bernie to talk to. I'm also tired from having to get up to check on the baby every time that he wakes in the night.

Were there ever times when Joseph had to travel and leave you and Jesus alone? Were you lonely or scared? Did you enjoy your time alone with the baby? Did you miss having Joseph to talk to? Did you ever feel so tired that you wondered if you could make it through another day?

Dear Mary,

I have come to the conclusion that I want to quit my job. I just don't know when. I need to have other income to supplement what I will be giving up. I just don't want to work outside the house anymore. I feel so tired and overwhelmed. I'm just not coping well with the pressures in my life. I feel so sad sometimes—not connected to anyone, not serving any real purpose. Something has to go, and I decided it was the job. I haven't told Bernie yet. I guess I'll just have to wait and see what happens.

Was there something that you loved before Jesus was born that just didn't hold the same allure after? Did having Jesus change your perspective on what was important? Were you ever sad and lonely? Did you ever wonder why God had chosen you for such an awesome task as being the mother of his Son?

Dear Mary,

I'm trying to get David to get an afternoon nap, but he is fighting with all his might. I can hear him playing in his crib, blowing raspberries and kicking his toys. He also has his first real cold at the moment with an ever-running nose. I feel so badly for him but I feel fortunate that it took six months for him to have a real illness. I knew it was only a matter of time.

How did you feel the first time Jesus was sick? What did you do to take care of him? Were there times that no matter what you did, he just would not go to sleep?

Dear Mary,

I took David to a playgroup for the first time today. It was fun to watch him play with the other little kids. It's good for him to make some friends. He didn't know what to make of these other little people coming over and taking the toys he was playing with, but that is a good life lesson for him to learn! It was good for me to get together with some other moms as well. They all seem so good at being mothers—they know all the right things to say to their children and seem so comfortable in their roles. I wonder if I'll ever feel that way.

I have been trying to introduce “real” food to David. He has rejected everything that I have tried. The child who puts everything he can get his hands on into his mouth wants nothing to do with food! He just looks at it, inspects it, and then puts it down. I'll just have to keep trying.

How did Jesus react when other children wanted what he was playing with? Did you have to help him learn to share? Did you ever feel that other mothers were better than you at being a mom?

What were the first foods that you gave Jesus? What did he like to eat?

Dear Mary,

David has another cold. I can't help but feel badly for him with his little nose running. He gets so upset when I try to aspirate it. He squirms and cries in protest, but it is for his own good. His top two teeth have poked through as well causing him some discomfort, so in general he has been an unhappy baby. He's still so cute, though, even when he is cranky. I never thought I could love anyone so completely.

I have been trying to teach him the concept of the word "No" as in "No, we do not throw food off of our high chair." Most of the time, he just laughs at me, but the other day after I grabbed his arm and said very sternly "No, we do not throw our food," he put his food down, lowered his head and wouldn't look at me. It broke my heart, but at least I know he knew that I was not happy with him. Sometimes it is hard to be a mommy, but I have to bring him up right and this is just the beginning.

Were you sad the first time you had to tell Jesus "No?" What had he done that had upset you? Did you ever find it hard to be a mother?

Dear Mary,

David is learning how to crawl! Well, creep actually, but still it is forward locomotion and that is what matters. Of course, Bernie was the first person to see him do this. It seems like even with all the time I spend with the little boy, other people are always the ones to witness his "firsts." In any case, it really is something to watch him scoot his little body around, getting into everything.

Did you enjoy watching Jesus learn new things and make new discoveries? Were you there when he crawled for the first time?

Dear Mary,

I used to enjoy going to Church so much. It was my time to rest and pray and enjoy the music. It is such a challenge to go with David. He babbles so loudly and wants to get down and play. He is so strong. If we don't put him down, he just screams and kicks. Most days, I leave mass exhausted with only the faintest feeling that I have been at all. I want David to grow up going to mass, however. I keep telling myself that Jesus was a baby, too, and that David has as much right to be there as anyone. I just need to keep getting through it.

Were there ever times when you needed to try to keep Jesus quiet? How did you manage?

Dear Mary,

I am so frustrated today—tense and wound up tighter than a string. Bills just keep coming in, and money is so tight. I wish that there were some way that I could make some money without having to sacrifice taking care of David. No amount of money is worth giving up being the one to care for him. Somehow, things have to get better. I keep praying about it. I know that it is always darkest before the dawn, but I don't want to know how dark it is going to get.

I know that you and Joseph lived a simple life. Were there ever times you worried you just wouldn't be able to pay your bills? How did you keep your faith that God would take care of you?

Dear Mary,

I yelled at David for the first time today—not an “I am trying to teach you” discipline tone but a real yell. It was just his name, but it was in anger and I am so ashamed. The little boy is trying every ounce of my patience. Right now, he is playing happily on the floor, but he has been in such a bad mood all afternoon. I took him out for a walk, thinking that would help, and it did, until we got home and his bad mood returned. So, I tried to put him down for a nap but he would hear none of it so I brought him into my bed with me and lay down with him. He proceeded to poke me in the eye and pulled on my hair, and every time I told him “No” he just laughed and did it again. Needless to say, sleep did not come. We got up and I gave him a bottle and let him play and then he pooped. I went to change his diaper; he is so strong now, he kicks his legs and I can’t hold him so he ended up sticking his feet into his poop. I was trying to clean it off and he kept kicking and that’s when I yelled at him. I know he’s not being bad, he’s just being a baby, but I just get so frustrated sometimes. I try to praise him when he is good but I am not even sure that he understands, and when he is not cooperating, I just don’t know how to react.

Were there ever times that you got frustrated with Jesus? Were there times that he was not cooperative, and tested every last ounce of your patience?

Dear Mary,

Bernie and I actually got to go out to dinner this evening on our own. We had a gift certificate and went out to dinner to celebrate the six year anniversary of when we started dating. My sister came over and watched David and put him to bed. It was so nice to go out just the two of us. It is strange how something we took so for granted before we had David is now such a rare treat.

Did you and Joseph ever have time away from Jesus? Did you relish your "alone" time?

Dear Mary,

It is two days before Christmas and I am exhausted. There have been so many get-togethers this week and I still have two more to go. It has been nice to see our family and friends, but my heart just is not in Christmas this year and that saddens me. I could never understand how people could view Christmas as something to be survived, but I admit that is how I feel this year. I have played Christmas music and read Christmas stories but nothing seems to be able to lift me out of this funk and put me in the right frame of mind. I miss the quiet peace that Christmas always brought me. My mother always said "Christmas is for children" and I understand better now what she meant. This is David's first Christmas and while he is too little to understand the meaning of it all (although I have tried to explain about baby Jesus), he is enjoying the new toys that everyone has been giving him. The consumerism of it all is bothering me more this year as well. I know that people enjoy giving David things, but they seem to go so overboard. Children used to be happy getting a simple toy for Christmas or a new pair of mittens. Now, they want for nothing, and what they receive loses its attraction so quickly. I want David to be happy with little things. If he can find joy in simple pleasures, he'll never be unhappy.

Please help me find my "Christmas Spirit."
Please let the peace of Christmas fill my heart.

Dear Mary,

It's Christmas, and I have to say that the spirit of the holiday did find me in spite of it all. The past two days have been somewhat more quiet and relaxing and that has done my heart some good. We went to mass last night. It was so crowded. Fortunately, David was good. We brought him a snack to munch on which helped to keep him quiet.

David didn't wake up until 7:15 this morning. That was the best gift I could receive—a full night's sleep! Unfortunately, Bernie woke up with a cold. He and the little boy curled up this afternoon and took a nap. I took advantage of the quiet to read a little. The day was simple and peaceful and beautiful and I am thankful.

Thank you for the gift of your Son. Help me to always remember what Christmas is really about.

Dear Mary,

David has learned to sit himself up from a lying down position. He has also been waking up during the night and staying awake for two hours playing which means that none of us having been getting much sleep. I am so tired. I don't think that there is enough make-up in the world to cover the bags under my eyes.

Did Jesus ever play in the night? What did you do? How did you cope with sleep-deprivation?

Dear Mary,

Happy New Year! This year, New Year's means very little to me, and I am not sure why. I will always remember the year that just passed for David's birth and all the changes in my life that resulted. His birth serves as a demarcation line in my life, an event that marks a time in which everything that came after differs from everything that came before. I can't imagine life without David now. I love that little guy so much and I revel in every new development. It is truly amazing to watch his brain at work. Yet, there are times I wish for a return to a simpler way of life when I could decide when and where I wanted to go somewhere, not having to conform to a napping and feeding schedule. But then, I think of something happening to my sweet child and my heart aches and my eyes fill up with tears. No, I would not want life without David.

Did you ever find it hard to plan your life around your baby's schedule? How did you bear the thought that you might someday lose your child?

Dear Mary,

I just tucked David into bed for the night. The little guy has been going through such a learning spurt lately. He's crawling on his hands and knees now—no more pulling himself across the floor. He's also learning how to kneel and pull himself up. Earlier today, he had kicked off his shoe so I put it up on the couch. When I turned around David was kneeling in front of the couch, shoe in hand, happy as could be! He's also learning how to stand leaning against something. He gets so frustrated when he stands next to the toy bucket in his room because he can see all the toys but his arms are not long enough to reach them! He's also learning how to play with blocks. When he succeeds in putting one on top of another. Bernie and I clap and the smile on his face is just priceless.

Did you reflect on the new things Jesus did each day? Did you and Joseph applaud his new accomplishments? Was there anything that frustrated him?

Dear Mary,

David has still been waking up every night around 3 am. I actually tried to let him cry it out one night last week but all we got was a tear-soaked baby who was no closer to sleeping at the end of an hour than he was when we started. So, the little guy has been spending the early morning hours tucked in between Bernie and I in our bed. He always tries to give me his blankie—I guess he figures I need it if I want to go to sleep! He did a poop in his diaper last night while he was in bed with us. Needless to say, Bernie was not amused. Most of the time, though, Bernie likes to have the little boy in bed with us. He says that he is warm and cuddly. Bernie really is very good with David. They have a wonderful time playing and he'll sit and rock him when he cries. He is a very good Daddy.

Did you like to watch Joseph and Jesus interact? Did you take joy and comfort in watching them play together?

Dear Mary,

I think that I am going through my late 20s crisis. Lately, I just feel like my identity has been lost and is blowing in the wind somewhere. All my priorities have shifted since David's birth. Some days, I want to quit work and be able to be with him all the time. I feel like so little of my time is my own. I'm tired and worn out, and some days I feel so unproductive. I'm just at one of those places in my life where something has to change, except I don't know how to get there from here, or for that matter, how to even discuss it with Bernie. The pediatrician's office called this week and asked for "David's mommy." I used to have a name. Now, even when I think about myself in my head, I refer to myself as "mommy." That is who I am and it is a wonderful thing to be, but it is also an incredibly hard, sleep-depriving job. It is easier to go to work! When I am at work, I feel like I actually accomplish something, but my heart isn't there, not the way it used to be. Many days, I just feel like a dull, uninteresting person. I know that there are far bigger problems in the world than my lack of identity, but I feel very lost.

Who were you? We know you as Jesus' mother, but who were you as a person in your own right? Did you ever miss the person you were before you were a mother?

Dear Mary,

David said “Mama” for the first time yesterday. Of course, he doesn’t know that I am Mama, but that doesn’t matter—he said it, and I was so happy I started to cry! He also learned how to pull himself into a standing position this week. So now, when I am sitting on the couch eating or reading, he will come over and stand up to check out what I am doing. It makes me so nervous to see him standing because I am always afraid he is going to topple backward and really hurt himself. Most of the time, when he falls, he seems to fall on his bottom, which is good.

He is learning so much, but sleep is still eluding him and us. We could not get him to go to sleep last night. He didn’t fall asleep until 10 pm and then he was up again at 1 am and 2:30 and up for the day at 6 am! I think that he might be suffering from separation anxiety. Every time I thought that he was asleep in his crib, I’d try to tiptoe away, but his eyes would open and the wailing would begin. It was like he could sense my leaving. I don’t know what we are going to do with the little boy.

Did you get nervous when Jesus started to stand? Did you worry he would get hurt? Did he ever have separation anxiety? Did he cry if you left him?

Dear Mary,

Bernie and I had a long talk last night after David had gone to bed. I told him how alone I've been feeling lately and I confused I feel. He said that he supports whatever decisions I make and that I can give my notice at work whenever I want. I still don't know what I am going to do, and I still feel very alone, but it is good to know that I have someone in my corner. I really do love Bernie and I know that he is trying very hard to say and do the right things to help me through this rough patch.

Did you and Joseph ever talk in the night after Jesus had gone to sleep? Did you share your feelings with him? Did he give you comfort?

Dear Mary,

When I got to my parents' house after work on Wednesday, David was taking his nap. When he woke up, all he wanted was Pepere. He reached out his little arms to him and wanted nothing to do with me. I know that it is wonderful for David to bond with other people and I am glad that he likes my father so much, but I was sad that he didn't want me. I so look forward to seeing his eyes light up when I have been away for a while.

Did Jesus ever look to someone other than you for care? Did you ever feel rejected by your child?

Dear Mary,

David is ten months old today. That doesn't seem possible. My baby boy won't be a baby much longer. He's trying so hard to stand up by himself! Pretty soon he'll be walking and toddling all over the place. He has been babbling so much lately—trying to tell us stories. It is really something to listen to him.

Did Jesus like to babble? Could you figure out what he was trying to communicate?

Dear Mary,

Some days are so hard with David. It seems that he always wants all of my attention all of the time. I enjoy spending time with him, but it is difficult to get everything done that I need to. Even getting supper on the table for when Bernie gets home is a challenge.

Was Jesus very demanding of you? How did you manage to get your chores done and supper on the table?

Dear Mary,

Some days change your life forever. Yesterday was one of those days. I gave my notice at work. I had such mixed feelings, but in the end the decision was made. Everyone took it well—they are happy for me to be able to stay home with David. Bernie's getting a raise at work, not as much as I made working, but we'll be able to swing it somehow. It's worth it to be able to stay home with my children. Yes, that's right, children. I also found out that I'm pregnant again! I guess God decided that David needed a little brother or sister. I was shocked and surprised at first, but the shock has worn off and I'm actually a little excited. I just don't know how I am going to manage with two children—I find it so hard sometimes with just one. I hope God will help me. He must have some purpose in mind for this new little person.

In other news, David took his first step today—to Bernie, and of course I wasn't there and didn't get to see it.

Did you get to see Jesus' first step? He must have been so cute—toddlng around your house, hanging on to your skirt.

Dear Mary,

David has learned how to give hugs. He wrapped his arms around me and put his head on my shoulder. It was so sweet. My little boy was showing he loves me. It made me feel so wonderful.

Did your heart fill with love when Jesus gave you hugs? Did you just want to hold him forever?

Dear Mary,

Bernie and David were playing today and just laughing and laughing. David has such an infectious giggle. Once he gets going, you can't help but laugh right along. I hope that he is always that joyful a person.

Did Jesus love to laugh? Did Joseph and you play with him and revel in his delight?

Dear Mary,

I had to take David to the emergency room today. I gave him peanut butter for supper and I noticed when I was giving him his bottle after, that he was starting to swell and breaking out in hives. I called his doctor and they told me to rush him to the emergency room. I hit rush-hour traffic on the way there and I was so scared for the little boy. I just kept trying to talk to him. I couldn't even formulate a prayer. I suppose at that moment, my whole being was a prayer. They took us right in when we got there. His poor little face was so swollen, but he was in remarkably good humor. He was so interested in what everyone was doing to him. It turns out that he has a peanut allergy. They had to give him a shot and steroids to stop the reaction. We have to carry an epi-pen with us wherever we go now and there are so many foods he can't eat. We need to watch everything. It is all so overwhelming. He is safely tucked in his bed now. I'm so thankful that he is OK. Thank God for modern medicine.

Was Jesus ever very sick? Did you pace the floor with worry? Did you feel God with you in your fear?

Dear Mary,

Thursday was my last day at work. My co-workers took me to lunch. It was such a nice send-off. They got me a beautiful card and a bunch of gift certificates. They are all such good people and I will miss them. I do feel that some stress has been lifted however, and it was nice not to have to go to work today. Bernie and David and I all went out for the day. That family time is so valuable.

When you moved from Bethlehem to Egypt and then from Egypt to Nazareth, was anyone there to send you off, to wish you well? Did you miss the people you left behind?

Dear Mary,

David fell down the stairs a little while ago. I think that I have been crying harder than he has. He has been learning how to crawl up and down them by himself. I was right there, but he lost his grip and I just couldn't catch him in time. Thankfully, it was a short flight, only 4 stairs, but I was so scared he broke something. He seems to be OK. I checked the medical book and it said to keep a close eye on him the next few hours. I tried to put some ice on the bump on his head but he wouldn't let me. I am so thankful that he is all right. What would I do if anything happened to my little boy?

Did Jesus ever fall and get hurt? How did you feel? Did you hurt more than he did?

Dear Mary,

David turned one year old today. It is hard to believe that tiny helpless little baby has turned into this semi-independent little person with a mind of his own (who at this very moment is fighting his bedtime with all of his might). He has grown so much in the last year and learned so much. It is truly amazing to look back on. And he is so cute and loveable. When he gives me a hug, it just melts my heart. At times I wonder what he will grow up to be, but I don't want him to grow up too quickly. I love my little boy and I want him to stay little for a while.

Did you ever look at Jesus and wonder about the person he would become—the role he was to play in the world? Did you ever wish he could just stay your baby forever?

As for me, I have survived my first year of motherhood. In a little over six months, another baby will be joining our family. Thank you for all your help. Please stay with me and guide me through this next stage of our lives. Please always walk this road of motherhood with me. Amen.

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