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Anticipating Pentecost with Mary

*They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.
(Acts 1:14, NIV)*

God is on the move. Far more than a churchy cliché, this reality carries the “threads” of the entire biblical tapestry and “seeds” for our future.

Pentecost is part of that tapestry, a storyline since creation. The storyline’s plot is the “with-God” life, as theologian Dallas Willard would say. It’s heaven intersecting with earth. It’s interactively knowing God in the here-and-now (John 17:3).

God Is in the People Forming-and-Sending Business

There’s a lot of *sending* in the storyline of the “[with God](#)” life.¹ God calls and cultivates a “sent” and “set-apart” people. They carry promises of “new beginnings” – God more fully revealed in the here and now.

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22-23, ESV)*

Those “sent” come as [witnesses](#) and ambassadors, appointed for specific times and places.² One may think of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, the Prophets, [John the Baptist](#) . . . and *Mary*.³

If ever there were a “sent one” in preparation for an in-breaking of new beginnings, would it not be Mary, the mother of the God-Man, Jesus our Lord? What might her “yes” to the “YES” of the Holy Spirit empower us to see, from Nazareth to the upper room to the streets of Jerusalem?

Mary as a Foretelling of the Power of “With-God” Living

The books of Luke and Acts chronicle “with-God” life, centered around the person and work of the Son who is sent and of the Holy Spirit who is present. God’s powerful good news breaks out as “new beginnings” amid Roman imperial rule.

¹ Link attached: <https://veritaslifecenter.org/post/815981361678729216/the-with-god-kind-of-life>

² Link attached: <https://veritaslifecenter.org/post/709343715833085952/willard-witnesses-speak-from-knowledge-of-what-is>

³ Link attached: <https://veritaslifecenter.org/tagged/witness>

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Luke mentions Mary by name more than any other Gospel writer—over a dozen times—and similarly, he mentions the Holy Spirit more than eighty times. Remarkably, both Mary and the Spirit are most frequently acknowledged in Luke 1, a chapter of new beginnings.

Luke has Mary present at major turning points when “mysteries” are unveiled: the mystery of Jesus’s incarnation (Luke 1), the cross (Luke 24:10), and the empty tomb (Luke 24:10). Mary is attuned to the “word of the Lord,” the action of God surrounding her.

Positioned for a Readiness to Act with God

Mary appears one last time in Acts 1:14, just before the Pentecost story begins, gathered in “the upper room” in Jerusalem with Jesus’s disciples, where “All these continued together in prayer with one mind, together with the women, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (NET).

The upper room in Acts 1 is an example of how to arrange patterns of life to receive new mercies.

A new kind of “family” emerges here, the family of God. Indeed, it’s the very kind of reality that Jesus’s own prophetic speech and action foretells, including Mary’s wrestling with her son’s shocking (yet reminding) words, “Who is my mother? Who is my brother?” (Luke 2:49).

Writing in his Acts theological commentary, Willie James Jennings reflects on Luke 1 and Acts 1, “. . . Obedience to God will make way for the Holy Spirit to touch human flesh and create the new.”⁴

Jennings ponders further:

At the beginning of Luke’s Gospel, Mary is the place of obedience that begins the new; and now in part two of Luke’s narrative, Mary is again present at the edge of destiny, but this time with the other disciples of Jesus. There is no map for this moment, just as there were no models for Mary . . . [Mary and the disciples are all] positioned in emergence, ready for transformation. Into what, they do not know. Here is where God likes to sit disciples of the Son, waiting, hoping in prayer.⁵

⁴Willie James Jennings, *Acts: Belief—A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, Belief Theological Commentary Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2017), 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

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What if, for Luke, Mary is modeling a life of obedience worth living among early communities of followers of Jesus? What if he is seeking to catechize and shape communities so that they can cooperate with divine favor chasing them (e.g., visitation in [Luke 1:27-30](#))?⁶ What if Luke is wanting to inculcate his hearers with a renewed mind for living differently—like Mary said, “be it to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38)?

“God gathers not according to our wishes,” Jennings exhorts, “but through holy desire for those who desire the holy.”⁷

As with Mary, am I willing to become apprehended anew by the Living God?

– Joseph E. Gorra

⁶ Link attached: <https://veritaslifecenter.org/post/183962859539/life-without-lack-living-into-the-fullness-of>

⁷ Jennings, 24.