

MARY, HUMAN LIKE US...

Written by Angela Anno

My mother's name is Mary. Every female in my family has "Mary" somewhere in her name. My paternal grandfather who was born on September 8 (Mary's birth date) made sure of that. We grew up going to Marian novenas and saying the rosary each day. If we fell asleep saying the rosary my Nona assured me that the angels would finish it.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a big part of my growing up, but as I grew older, her life seemed so holy, so far removed from mine, that it was hard to identify with her. When I was struggling with three children under 5 and told to pray to Mary for support, I found myself asking what did she have to say to me—after all she had the perfect child? The same thing happened when I became a widow—we had nothing in common. She had the son of God to console her.

But on the other hand, since she was human she must have been more like us than I usually think. After hearing the news that she was to be the mother of God and the angel left I can't imagine that she wasn't hurt by the stares and head shakes and gossip about her and Joseph. She believed in God and knew she was doing the right thing, but like the rest of us, I'm sure she had moments of doubt and uncertainty—especially when she was travelling through a war-torn area to register for the census in Bethlehem when she was nine months pregnant. When she and Joseph became refugees in Egypt, she certainly must have longed for her family and the familiar things back home. I'm sure our Guatemalan and Burundian refugees can identify with that.

While Jesus is God, he was also human. I can't believe that he was never fussy as a baby, never spit up on her best tunic, never got an earache or kept her up all night when he was sick, or dragged mud onto her freshly swept floor. I'm sure there was food she made that he didn't like, occasional bedtime struggles, and times his curiosity must have led him to explore farther than she and Joseph allowed. There must have also been the bouquets of wildflowers and weeds presented with big smiles and much love and the hand-made birthday presents she kept in a prominent place. Like all children, he was an individual and there was much she didn't understand about him and sometimes it worried her—like the time he stayed back at the temple talking with the scholars or later when he was a wandering preacher with no job and no prospects of a normal life. At one point she even thought he was crazy and gathered the family together to go to him and set him straight. As tensions about what he was saying and doing were increasing and people openly were saying they wanted him out of the way, I'm sure she had many sleepless nights and maybe even suggested he tone things down a little. She was a mother after all, and wanted her child to be safe. Children should bury parents and not the other way around.

And when things really began spinning out of control and he was arrested, she must have feared though she followed him all the way to his bloody crucifixion. And putting her own son into the grave must have ripped at her heart. This wasn't what she had expected when she said "Yes" so long ago. But God was faithful and turned her sorrow into the joy of the resurrection! Her beloved Jesus lives—death had no power over him! It all began making sense and she was glad she said "yes" to God despite the pain she had experienced. She realized that God had been with her all the time even when she felt lonely and afraid.

Do parts of her faith journey sound familiar? Does she seem more accessible, more like us? Like us, Mary could choose to trust God or live in fear. She chose trust. There's an old maxim that says "I don't know what tomorrow brings, but I know who brings tomorrow." Mary staked her life on that, and so can we.

