

Mary's story

On your marks:

Mary's 'yes' to God is arguably one of the most important 'yes's in the whole story of the Bible. For understandable reasons, the Protestant Church has perhaps rather neglected to focus its attention on the life of this remarkable woman, whose example surely is meant to inspire us all to say 'yes' to God as she did. What follows is a reflective version on the life of Mary that tells the gospel clearly and uses a series of pictures to accompany the story and which, just as Mary would wish, turns our attention on Jesus and away from herself.

Get set:

This story is inspired and shaped by the Godly Play style of storytelling and is designed to be told to a group of children and adults who are sitting in a semicircle in front of the storyteller, who slowly reveals the story from his or her right to left so that it can be 'read' by those watching.

For this story, I used a blue base cloth made up of seven rectangular pieces of blue felt. For each part of the story, I used a picture that could be laid flat on the base cloth or, for better visibility with a larger group, mounted on a small art easel, such as those that can be obtained from a craft store such as [Hobbycraft](#).

In [The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 2](#), Jerome Berryman suggests using reproductions of Giotto paintings for a version of his Christmas story. The pictures you will need are those that cover the key events in Mary's life, namely: The Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Presentation, the Visit to the temple to find Jesus when he was 'lost', at the cross and the Ascension or Pentecost. A complete set of pictures by Giotto for this are reproduced in Madeleine L'Engle's book [The Glorious Impossible](#).

Alternatively, a variety of artistic interpretations of these scenes can be found and printed off from the Internet.

It is best, as far as possible, to stick with the same style of painting or the same artist for all seven pictures.

As you tell each part of the story, lay down or unroll the blue base cloth and show the relevant picture. Don't rush the story and always focus on the picture, not your audience.

Go!

This is the story of a young woman who decided to say 'yes'. Some people think that 'yes' is an easy word. It's only a small word, but sometimes 'yes' can be the hardest word to mean with all your heart, and sometimes 'yes' can change everything. I wonder what you will think of the yeses in our story today.

Picture 1 (The annunciation), Luke 1:26-38

Mary was only a teenager when it happened. In Nazareth, in her own home, she saw an angel. 'You are very special,' announced the angel. 'God is with you'. Mary trembled and wondered whether what she was seeing and hearing was real. It is a frightening thing to meet an angel. 'Don't be afraid,' said the angel Gabriel. 'God has chosen you to have a child and his name is Jesus. He will be great. He will rule from David's throne. His kingdom will never end.' Mary knew she wasn't having a baby. She wasn't even married. So how could this happen? The angel said, 'God's Holy Spirit will overshadow you and bring this holy child to life inside you. Nothing is impossible with God.' Mary believed the angel. She said, 'Yes. I want this to happen just as you have spoken.' This was the first 'yes'. Mary said 'yes' to God.

Picture 2 (The visitation), Luke 1:39-56

But this 'yes' wasn't easy. What were people going to say? Who would believe her story in Nazareth? Her life was at risk. So Mary travelled to visit her cousin Elizabeth near Jerusalem. She too was having a baby and when they met, Elizabeth's baby jumped for joy inside her. It was as if that baby knew how special Mary's baby was. And Mary was so happy to be believed and to feel safe that she sang a song that magnified her joy.

With all my heart, to God I sing.
He's chosen me; He's my everything.
The world will say that I'm the one
God wants as mother to his Son.
God is great and God is good;
He's given us what he said he would.
He cares for people, just like me;
The ones who think they're secondary.
The big names, he has just bypassed
The rich are not the ones he asked.
The poor he helps - the forgotten ones;
Abram said they'd be God's sons.
With all my heart, to God I sing.
He's chosen me; he's my everything.

This was the second time Mary said 'yes'. This time she sang her 'yes' to God.

Picture 3 (The nativity), Luke 2:1-20

Joseph was a good man and had been engaged to Mary, until he heard about the baby. What should he do? How could he bear the shame? How could he protect Mary from all the gossip and the danger? Again the angel came and this time spoke to Joseph. Now he knew Mary was telling the truth and so he stood by her: on the journey south to Bethlehem for the Roman census, and among the crowds looking for a place to stay, and even in the stable at the back of the inn.

Mary had a baby boy and she laid him in a feeding box for cattle. That night the angels sang in the fields and shepherds ran through the streets and Mary knew that her 'yes' to God was not only a surprise for her, but also for the whole world. But her 'yes' had already taken her far from home and soon she would have to run away to another country. Mary wondered about it all and kept all the things in her heart.

Picture 4 (The presentation), Luke 2:22-35

Some weeks after the birth, Mary and Joseph travelled to Jerusalem to thank God for their new son. In the temple they met an old man called Simeon who took the baby in his arms and began to sing:

'Now I can go in peace; my long waiting cease; God's rescuer has come; a light for everyone.'

Who was this child, who caused first angels and now a priest to burst into song? And then Simeon turned to Mary and said that this child would be for the making or the breaking of many and that one day Mary would experience great pain and sadness, like a sword cutting into her heart. What was he saying? What was her 'yes' going to mean? Sometimes a 'yes' changes everything.

Picture 5 (Jesus lost at twelve years old), Luke 2:41-52

When Jesus was twelve years old, Mary and Joseph travelled with their friends to Jerusalem for one of the high and holy days. When the celebration was over, all the people from Nazareth went out through the great gate of the city and started on the road home. Suddenly Mary and Joseph discovered that Jesus was not there. They thought that he had been playing with the other children from the village as they walked together. They hurried back into the great city of Jerusalem to find him.

Mary and Joseph looked in the dark and narrow streets. They looked in the marketplace where they had bought their food. They looked where they had spent the night. They looked everywhere. Finally they even looked in the temple - and he was there. He was talking to the rabbis, the priests. When he spoke, they listened because he knew so much. When they spoke, he listened because he wanted to learn more.

Mary and Joseph then asked Jesus the question all parents ask their children, the question you can never answer. 'Why did you do this?' And Jesus said something very strange: 'Didn't you know I would be in my Father's house?'

Mary and Joseph did not understand. Their house was in Nazareth, where Joseph's carpenter's shop was. They did not understand, but they did not forget. Mary accepted what Jesus said. She said 'yes' to his strange words. This was the third time she had said 'yes' as she began to realise that her child was not her own son to keep.

Picture 6 (At the cross), John 19:25-27 but also references to Luke 8:19-21 and John 2:1-10

When Jesus was a man, he left his home in Nazareth and said goodbye to his family. He set out to tell everyone about the kingdom of God; to let people know what it is like when God is on the throne of their lives. Mary let go of her child. She had to say 'yes' again. Now anyone who did what God said was Jesus' brother and sister and his mother. Mary

simply told people: 'Just do whatever he tells you.' Say 'yes' to Jesus.

Perhaps Jesus had learned from Mary how to say 'yes' to God. And because Jesus said 'yes' to God, he went to Jerusalem for the last time. Because Jesus said 'yes' to God, Jesus went to the cross and poured God's love into the deepest darkness, so that it could no longer have the power to destroy people. Beneath that cross, Mary stood weeping, because she knew that her 'yes' was part of all this. It was like a sword cutting into her heart. Sometimes 'yes' is the hardest word to say even though it is the only word that can save the world. And Mary held her son in her arms once again and said 'yes' to God.

Picture 7 (the Ascension and/or Pentecost), Acts 1:14

God said 'yes' to Jesus. God raised him from the dead. Mary saw that great day. Mary was there on the mountain when they watched him go back to his Father and her Father. Mary was there when the Holy Spirit came to the 120 and to the thousands who decided to 'yes' to God.

This is the story of a woman who decided to say 'yes'. So you see 'yes' isn't an easy word but it is a word that can change everything. Mary said 'yes' to God and Jesus said 'yes' to God, so that God will always say 'yes' to us. And now we can say 'yes' to others in the name of Jesus.

- I wonder which part of this story you like the best.
- I wonder which part of this story is the most important.
- I wonder which part of this story is especially for you now.
- I wonder if there is any part of this story we could leave out and still have all the story we need.

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