

My Story with Jesus

1: Mary - Being Mum

SERIES INTRODUCTION

In this series, we're looking at the stories of various people who met Jesus. The idea is to get a picture of the whole person and see what we can learn from Jesus interacting with them, rather than look at just one episode. We'll take a similar approach for each character. We start with Mary...

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Each share: What is the most difficult thing you can imagine God asking you to do?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Read Mary's song of praise in Luke 1:46-55 (The Magnificat).

Each write your own personalised short song of praise based on Mary's as a starting point (no need to sing it unless you want to!)

WORD

As these passages are read, try and imagine yourself in Mary's shoes – what might she be thinking or feeling?

Read Luke 1:26-45; Matthew 1:18-21; Luke 2:1-7, 33-35, 39-51; John 2:1-12; Luke 8:19-21; John 19:25-30; Acts 1:10-14

Discuss your initial reactions to the passages:

- Does anything in the passages jump out at you? Why?

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- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- Based on what you've read (or on other stories in the Bible), what words would you use to describe Mary's character?
- If you were able to interview Mary...
 - * What do you think she would say were the high points and low points of her life with Jesus?
 - * How do you think she would talk about them?
 - * What other questions would you want to ask her?
- What do we learn about Jesus from his responses to Mary?
- In what ways do you find you can relate to Mary – and in what ways is she different from you?
 - * Do you ever react to God/Jesus in a similar way to Mary?
- Why do you think God chose Mary to be the mother of his son?
- What can we learn from Mary's story about how Jesus relates to us?

WHAT NEXT?

- As a church, we are trying to spend more time praying together – particularly for our church, our local community and people we want to discover Jesus. Growth Groups are a great place to do that!
During this series, every week, please spend time praying for:
 - 1 Our church
 - 2 Our local community
 - 3 A few people you know (maybe 2-5) who you particularly want to know Jesus
- Then, spend time sharing your own needs and joys and praying for one another.
- Please also consider coming on Sundays at 6-7pm in church to pray.

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2: Andy & Phil - Telling Encounters

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Talk about people who have brought you closer to Jesus and how they have done it. What was particularly helpful... or not?!

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Say thank you prayers for the people who have brought you closer to Jesus.

WORD

Read John 1:35-46; Matthew 4:18-20;

John 6:1-13; 12:20-22; 14:5-14

Discuss your initial reactions to the passages:

- Does anything in the passages jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- From the passages you've read, how would you describe the characters and gifts of Philip and Andrew?
- We read here of two different occasions when Andrew was called by Jesus to follow him and one of Philip (we don't know the timescales)

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- * In what ways do you think Jesus' call to these two men shape their lives?
- Andrew and Philip often bring people to Jesus (Jn 1:41, 46; 6:8-9; 12:20-22)
 - * Why do you think they did this?
 - * Who do you know who is particularly gifted at this? Why?
 - * How do you feel about inviting others to find out more about Jesus?
 - * How could you get better?
- In John 14:11 Jesus asks Philip to believe that he is who he claims – or at least to believe on the evidence of his miracles.
 - * Do you think it was easier to believe based on what Jesus said about himself or based on the evidence of his miracles?
 - * What helps you to believe in Jesus most: who he is or what he does?
 - * What things about Jesus do you think are most helpful in telling others about him today? What is most difficult?
- Andrew's brother, Simon Peter, is described as one of Jesus' three closest friends along with the brothers James and John.
 - * How do you think Andrew felt about this?
 - * Was Jesus being fair?

WHAT NEXT?

- Talk in 2s/3s about: Who could you talk to (& listen to) about Jesus?
- All together: Repeat the prayer activity for Session 1.

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3: Jim & John - Sons of Thunder

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Share: If you could choose a nickname for yourself, what would it be?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Read 1 John 1:5-10. In quiet, each reflect on the last few days and say sorry to God for things you've done wrong. Re-read verse 9 and thank God for his forgiveness.

WORD

There are a lot of readings this week! To help get a better overview by seeing them all together, I've pasted them into these notes after the questions. It will work best if everyone has a copy and you read all the readings before doing the questions. (Although you'll probably want to share the reading round!)

**Read Mark 1:14-20; 3:13-19; 5:35-42; 9:2-10; 10:35-40; 14:32-37
John 19:25-27; 20:1-9; 21:20-24; Acts 12:1-2**

Note: There is strong evidence that John is both 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' and the writer of John's gospel.

Discuss your initial reactions to the passages:

- Does anything in the passages jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

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Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- Looking across all the readings, what words would you use to describe the characters of James and John?
- If you interviewed each of them before they died, how do you think they would have described the story of their lives with Jesus?
 - * What would their feelings have been?
 - * What would the high and low points?
 - * What did they learn?
- If you were in their shoes, when do you think you would have responded like they did – or differently?
- In your life, have you ever felt like James and John did during these events? When and why?
- Do you think you would have got on well with them... or not? Why?
- On your own: Try and write one sentence describing James – as if it were an entry in a dictionary or a newspaper. Do the same for John. Then share what you've done with the group.
- What do we learn about Jesus from his interactions with James and John?
- James and John make a lot of mistakes, but Jesus chooses them as two of his closest friends. How do you feel about that?

WHAT NEXT?

- Talk in 2s/3s about: Who do you find it particularly hard to share your faith with? Pray for those people together.
- All together: Repeat the prayer activity for Session 1.

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Readings for Session 3

Mark 1:16-20;

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Mark 3:13-19

¹³ Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴ He appointed twelve^(a) that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons. ¹⁶ These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means ‘sons of thunder’), ¹⁸ Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Mark 5:35-43

³⁵ While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. ‘Your daughter is dead,’ they said. ‘Why bother the teacher anymore?’

³⁶ Overhearing^(a) what they said, Jesus told him, ‘Don’t be afraid; just believe.’

³⁷ He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, ‘Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.’ ⁴⁰ But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, ‘*Talitha koum!*’ (which means ‘Little girl, I say to you, get up!’). ⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. ⁴³ He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Mark 9:2-10

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² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!'

⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what 'rising from the dead' meant.

Mark 10:35-41

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. 'Teacher,'

they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.'

³⁶ 'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked.

³⁷ They replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.'

³⁸ 'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said. 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?'

³⁹ 'We can,' they answered.

Jesus said to them, 'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.'

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

Mark 14:32-38

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' ³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ³⁴ 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,' he said to them. 'Stay here and keep watch.'

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³⁵ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ *'Abba,⁽¹⁾ Father,'* he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'

³⁷ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Simon,' he said to Peter, 'are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour?' ³⁸ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

John 19:25-27

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, 'Woman,⁽¹⁾ here is your son,' ²⁷ and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

John 20:1-10

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the

one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

John 21:20-25

²⁰ Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is going to betray you?') ²¹ When Peter saw him, he asked, 'Lord, what about him?'

²² Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.' ²³ Because of this, the rumour spread among the believers that

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this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?'

²⁴This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

²⁵Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

Acts 12:1-3

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. ²He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. ³When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

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4: Tom - Doubter or Realist?

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Play a game where you have to fool someone or guess what happened next – like wink murder or find some ‘what happened next?’ pictures/ videos online.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Sing a song (or listen to one and join in) about believing in Jesus. If someone plays an instrument, maybe they could prepare something.

WORD

Read John 11:7-8, 14-16; John 14:1-7; 20:24-29; 21:1-6; Acts 1:9-14

Discuss your initial reactions to the passages:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you’ve been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven’t noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Having read all the passages, this time, go back to each one in turn...

- In John 11:16, Thomas seems to express both pessimism and courage. How do you feel about his comment to the other disciples? What would you have said?
- In John 14:5, Thomas asks a practical and honest question.

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- * Share times when, like Thomas, you've struggled to understand the Christian faith?
- * Jesus gives a famous answer to Thomas (v6). How do you feel about Jesus' claims to be the only way to God? How easy do you find it to communicate this message today?
- In John 20:25, Thomas famously demands proof of the resurrection before he will believe. When he gets it, he believes (v28), but Jesus adds a comment for those who haven't (v29).
 - * Who do you know (maybe you) who always wants proof of things?
 - * When do you think doubt about faith is healthy and when is it destructive?
 - * Thomas reaches a point where he believes. Are there people you know who never reach this point because they always want more evidence?
- Whilst Thomas had logical doubts, he also experienced miraculous events (eg John 21:6)
 - * To what extent is faith about logic or about experience?
 - * How does this help or hinder sharing your faith?
- Despite his questions and doubts, Thomas continued to courageously follow Jesus. At the end, he is there praying with the others (Acts 1:13-14).
 - * Have you ever had experiences like this?
- What do you like or dislike about Thomas?

WHAT NEXT?

- In 2s/3s: Pray for people you know who Thomas reminds you of.
- All together: Repeat the prayer activity for Session 1.

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5: Martha - Busy & Believing

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...
Each share: What is your favourite way to relax?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Put an egg timer, a clock or a burning candle in the middle of the room to represent time.

Take 5 minutes of silence. Each think back over the day. Picture the scenes – where were you? what were you doing? who was there? Imagine Jesus being alongside you. Imagine what he would say to you – and what would you say back? Express your thoughts to him – maybe saying thank you, sorry or please.

Finish by all saying 'Amen' together.

WORD

Read Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-7, 17-44; John 12:1-3

Discuss your initial reactions to the passages:

- Does anything in the passages jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Re-read Luke 10:39-40 and John 11:20.

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- Martha: conscientious or overly-fussy? Mary: Worshipful or lazy? Say what you think about their characters.
- Who do you think you would get on with best? Why?
- Give examples of how busy-ness can affect our relationship with God
- Give examples of how we can be lazy in our relationship with God.
- In 2s/3s, share: If Jesus came to visit you, what do you think he would tell you to do more of and what would he tell you to do less of?
- How can we be more welcoming to Jesus in our lives?

Re-read John 11:21-27 & 39-40

- In these verses, Martha expresses a very strong belief and confidence in Jesus. However, she still struggles to grasp what this could mean in practice in her current circumstances. Have you ever felt like Martha? When? Why?
- Despite her belief, Martha's practical concerns (in this case regarding smell!) again take over, but Jesus is prepared to get 'messy'. When can our concerns for things to be done 'properly' get in the way of God working in our lives, our church and our community today?

WHAT NEXT?

- In 2s/3s: Talk about times when laziness or busy-ness get in the way of your relationship with God. Pray for one another, asking for God's help.
- All together: Repeat the prayer activity for Session 1.

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6: Judas - Mixed Motives

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Find some stories or internet videos of people making funny mistakes.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Say these words together from the Lord's Prayer: 'Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.'

Now have a few moments of quiet to say sorry to God for things you have done wrong. Then, also picture anyone who you need to forgive and try to say 'I forgive you' in your mind – if you're struggling, ask for God's help.

Finish by repeating the same words from the Lord's Prayer again.

WORD

Read Matthew 10:1-4; John 12:1-6;

Matthew 26:14-16, 20-29, 36, 45-50; 27:1-5

Discuss your initial reactions to the passages:

- Does anything in the passages jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- Judas has a bad reputation. Is it justified? Split into two groups. One group talk about reasons in favour of Judas and one group talk about reasons against him. Then present them to one another.

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- Jesus chooses Judas to be one of his disciples. As Jesus became aware that Judas would betray him, why didn't Jesus confront Judas and send him away? Why did he still share the Passover meal with Judas and even wash his feet (John 13:1-5)?
- In John 12:4-6, we learn that Judas gave into the temptation of stealing money. He then objected to Mary's extravagant worship by saying the money could have been given to the poor. He then goes further and betrays Jesus. What could Judas have done to prevent this sequence of events?
- Judas ends up admitting that he has sinned and tries to put things right (27:4-5), but he doesn't turn to Jesus and ask for forgiveness.
 - * When you do things wrong, which do you find easiest/hardest: Admitting it, turning to Jesus or putting things right?
 - * Even if you know that God forgives you, are there times when you find it hard to forgive yourself?
 - * Even if Jesus would forgive Judas, the other disciples must have found it hard to. When is it hardest to forgive others?
- Meanwhile, Peter repeatedly denied knowing Jesus and was distraught, but then returned to Jesus, who forgave him and commissioned him as a church leader.
 - * What hope does this give you – for yourself and for people you know?
 - * Is 'forgive and forget' possible or desirable? What should our approach to forgiveness be?

WHAT NEXT?

- Looking back over the last few weeks, which characters have you particularly related to? Have a chat together. As always, any feedback on the notes is appreciated.
- All together: Repeat the prayer activity for Session 1.