

What Others Saying about Mary, Chosen of God

“This portrayal of Mary, mother of the Messiah, takes you inside her head and heart, allowing you to breathe the air of Hebrew family, food, and worship. Her much-repeated prayer, *O God who sees me*, may well become your own. True to the scriptural account, this story puts flesh on the bones of history. *Yeshua lives!*”

—Eleanor Gustafson
Author, *The Stones*

“Diana Wallis Taylor takes the reader into the everyday life of Mary, the mother of Jesus. We experience the wonder, the hardships, and the heartache right along with her. I love how close to Scripture this narrative is! As well as historically accurate. I've done a lot of research of the Roman era, and this novel's depiction of the society, the settings, and the interactions are true to reality, as best we can recreate it. This is truly a book readers will have a hard time putting down.”

—Lena Nelson Dooley
ECPA and CBA bestselling and multi-award-winning author,
The Gold Digger and *A Heart's Gift*

DIANA WALLIS TAYLOR

Mary
A NOVEL
CHOSEN OF GOD



WHITAKER
HOUSE

Publisher's Note:

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MARY, CHOSEN OF GOD

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She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future. When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with kindness.... “There are many virtuous and capable women in the world, but you surpass them all!”

Proverbs 31: 25–26, 29 NLT

ONE

*W*ith a sigh, Mary paused to sit on a nearby rock and tie the leather strap again. Her sandals had been new a year ago, but the rough roads and hillsides of Nazareth had taken their toll. For a moment, she sat quietly looking around her, listening to the song of the birds calling to each other from the fig trees. A gentle breeze brushed a lock of hair protruding from under her mantle, and she smiled. It was when she was alone, with the hills of Nazareth around her, that she felt Adonai closest to her. She prayed as she walked, and his presence was like a warm cloak around her shoulders.

Remembering that she was on an errand for her father, she chided herself for stopping so long. She adjusted her mantle to protect her face from the unrelenting heat of the month of Av. The vintage had begun and workers were in the vineyards stripping the ripe fruit from the vines. She watched them for a moment and then, with a sense of anticipation, started for the shop of the local carpenter.

Jacob skillfully moved the bow drill back and forth with his hands, intent on boring a hole in a cartwheel. She stood quietly until he became aware of her presence and looked up. He smiled and put the tool down.

“Ah, Mary. What can I do for you today?”

“The donkey got loose again and when my father tried to catch him he kicked up his heels at our wooden bench and broke it. He is not a very good donkey.”

"And your father wants the bench repaired?"

She nodded.

"Tell him I will come and look at it this afternoon." His eyes twinkled as he suppressed a smile. "When I see how much damage that beast has done, I'll know how long it will take to repair it. Have your parents ever considered replacing that donkey with one a little more mild-tempered?"

She laughed then. "No, we have had the donkey since it was a colt. Abba says the animal works well with the plow, but when he gets loose, he kicks his feet up and trots around the yard, making a great deal of noise."

Jacob stroked his beard and shrugged. "Ah well, it is your donkey."

Mary looked around the shop. Jacob was alone. There was no sign of Joseph and her heart sank.

Seeing her disappointment, Jacob answered the unspoken question. "Joseph has gone to Sepphoris where there is much building going on, and he can earn good wages. He is making frames for the brick makers." Then he added kindly, "He promised to be back in time for Hanukkah."

Four months? It would seem forever. She would miss the wonderful stories he always took time to share with her. When she was curious about the tools he and his father used in the shop, Joseph explained their various uses to her.

It seemed so natural to spend time in the carpenter's shop, for she and Joseph had known each other since they were children. Mary looked up to him as the brother she'd never had.

She thanked Jacob for telling her, and as she made her way back home, she thought back to the day when Joseph was called upon to recite in their small synagogue. He had turned twelve, and in the eyes of the law, he was now a man. Standing confidently with his *tallit*, the prayer shawl, covering his head, he'd begun to recite the *Shema*: "*Hear, Isra'el! ADONAI our God, ADONAI is one;*

and you are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart, all your being and all your resources....”

His voice was already beginning to deepen. Half the girls in the village who watched through the lattice separating the women in the synagogue murmured among themselves. He was very handsome. Mary had heard the other young girls talking about how they hoped their fathers would choose him for their husband in the years to come, yet he seemed oblivious to their devotion.

Mary and her parents, Heli and Anna, had been invited along with most of the village to the home of Jacob and Rachel for his special birthday celebration. He had smiled directly at her as she entered with her parents and something touched her heart that day. Joseph was still like a big brother, but what was different? As she watched him laughing and talking with the other young men of the village, she wondered at the strange new emotion that filled her. Why did she suddenly feel shy near him? He was only Joseph, her friend, wasn’t he?

One day Mary teased him and asked whom he would choose to marry from the girls in their village. He had winked at her and replied solemnly, “Why, I’m waiting for you, Mary.”

The Joseph she knew now was tall and strong, his arms muscular from the work in his father’s shop. His dark eyes held a light when he smiled, and Joseph smiled often. He seemed so content with the life God had chosen for him. Now as she walked and recalled his words, she blushed, as she had that day two years before.

Joseph helped his father in the shop and was polite to the young women who paraded by, as they found one excuse after another to talk to him. Mary, busy with more household tasks now that she was fourteen, only stopped by occasionally, still wondering at the butterflies fluttering in her chest when she saw him. He would turn and nod to her, put his tools down and, over a cup of water, take time to talk. Sometimes they discussed the Torah and she listened intently. He seemed so wise to her.

Now, as she walked slowly along the road, Joseph's face came to mind as it seemed to so many times lately; those laughing eyes of his seemed to see into her heart. Why, when she thought of Joseph, did the day seem brighter? Suddenly she paused in the middle of the road. *Joseph!* Like the bud of a flower gently opening to the sun, something awakened in her soul. She looked up at the heavens, her heart filled with joy. Wrapping her arms around herself, she cried out, "Oh God Who Sees Me, may your name be praised." Why had she not seen it before? It was not Joseph the big brother she wanted. It was Joseph the man. She spread her arms and whirled around, drawing the curious stare of a farmer in the nearby field. She stopped quickly, and feeling the heat of embarrassment in her face, hurried home.

When she entered the small courtyard, her parents paused in their conversation.

Heli smiled, making little crinkles by his eyes. "Ah, daughter, it is good you have returned. Your mother and I were just, ah, talking."

She looked from one to another, questions forming in her mind.

"You are now fourteen and it is time to consider seeking a husband for you."

Anna nodded. "There are several eligible young men in the village. I have seen them turn to watch you walk by. Any day now we should have offers for your hand."

Her father nodded sagely. "Of course as our only daughter, and the most beautiful girl in the village, we will need to choose wisely." A slight smile played around his lips.

Mary, savoring the knowledge that had filled her only moments before, wanted to cry out to them, *Please, let it be Joseph.*

She hesitated, then, "Do you have someone in mind, Abba?"

He stroked his beard. "Perhaps, daughter, perhaps. Now tell me what the carpenter had to say."

She related Jacob's words, then, with her thoughts tumbling about, helped her mother with their evening meal. Her mother had made a stew of brown lentils, onions, barley, leeks, and mustard greens in olive oil, cooked until the barley turned golden. The aroma made Mary realize how hungry she was. She cut a large cucumber into cubes and added olives from the crock in the storage room, then mixed in some sprigs of finely chopped dill and sprinkled it with small chunks of goat cheese. Then bread and a few dates were placed on the table and the family gathered around it while Heli blessed the Most High for providing their food.

After the remnants of the meal had been gathered up and their wooden platters cleaned, her father made sure the night candle was burning. Mary bid her parents good night and went up the narrow stairs to the roof of their small house. During the warmer months her parents let her spread her pallet there and it was pleasant having the space to herself. Mary was glad their home was more secluded, separated from the neighbors on either side by enclosures for livestock. Due to the rocky terrain, most of the houses including her own were constructed of fieldstone with smaller rocks placed in the cracks and then smeared with clay for insulation.

The sun was slipping down behind the hills as she knelt in the gathering dusk and looked up at the first star of the evening. Waiting quietly, she felt the presence of Ha'Shem and she began to recite her evening prayers: "Praised are you, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the universe, who closes my eyes in sleep, my eyelids in slumber. May it be your will, Adonai, my God and the God of my ancestors, to lie me down in peace and then to raise me up in peace. Let no disturbing thoughts upset me, no evil dreams nor troubling fantasies. May my bed be complete and whole in your sight. Grant me light so that I do not sleep the sleep of death, for it is you who illumines and enlightens. Praised are you, Adonai, whose majesty gives light to the universe."

Then, as she prepared for sleep, she looked up at the heavens and another prayer rose from her soul. "Oh God Who Sees, hear my heart. Joseph can have his pick of the young women of Nazareth. Perhaps he has already chosen one." At the thought, her heart began to beat faster. "Oh, Ha'Shem, may your will be done." She bowed her head and gave her wishes into the keeping of her God. She had been brought up to be obedient to her parents and would abide by their wishes, but her heart sang, *Joseph, Joseph.*