

MARY'S STORY IS OUR STORY: STORY SHARING EVENT LEADER GUIDE

By Rev. Breen Marie Sipes, Family God Time

STEP ONE: Introducing the Group to the Event

I find that, when we are attempting to provide our participants with an experience that might be new for them, it is important to lay the groundwork with the what, the why and the how. You may use these words, or offer similar ones on your own.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

- Discovering the Biblical Story of Mary, Mother of Jesus
- Connecting Our Life Story to Mary's Story
- Sharing our Stories with Women of Another Generation
- Receiving the Stories of Women of Another Generation

WHY ARE WE DOING IT?

Discovering the Biblical Story of Mary, Mother of Jesus

--Mary is an especially interesting person to study in Cross+Generational female pairs (like a Mother/Daughter Banquet) because her story spans an entire lifetime. It begins with her at 12-14 years old, and the last time we hear from her, her son is an adult who has made arrangements for her care as an elder, and she has become a mothering figure to the early church. We have so many stories to share of this faithful woman, as well as points of connection between her story and our own lives.

Connecting Our Life Story to Mary's Story

--Because Mary's story spans her lifetime, each of us, no matter our age or stage, are able to discover a place where our life story and Mary's story intersect. The ELCA's *Book of Faith* Initiative teaches us to seek connections between the Biblical story and our own life story, which makes Mary an ideal place to begin. When we see our stories connecting to Biblical stories, we find our place in God's story. We discover mentors in the faith, who can lead and guide us from across the generations and into our here and now.

Sharing our Stories with Women of Another Generation

--There are not many places in this world where people of many generations gather in the same room. Often, the two main places left is at sporting events and in the church. When we naturally have people of different generations in the same room it is a great opportunity to intentionally make connections between them. The Cross+Gen spirit of invitation teaches us that we each have something to contribute; and by sharing our stories in an intentional way through great story sharing, we make deeper connections that might not otherwise occur.

Receiving the Stories of Women of Another Generation

--This event is called a story sharing event rather than a story telling event because we will each take on two roles, one of story teller and one of story receiver. The Cross+Gen spirit of curiosity teaches us that we each, no matter our age or stage in life, have something to learn. We can learn much from the

wisdom of our elders. We can also learn much from the enthusiasm of our young people. When we receive the stories of someone from a different generation than our own, we again foster deeper connections and relationships, this time through deep and gracious listening.

HOW WILL IT WORK?

Listen to a Portion of Mary's Story

--The leader will share a part of Mary's story from the Bible, told as an engaging story.

Make Connections between Mary's Story and Our Own through Story Sharing Prompts

--The leader will provide story prompts to help to connect our story to Mary's story.

Take Turns Sharing and Receiving our Life Stories in Cross+Generational Pairs

--After a few moments to consider these prompts, we will share and receive one another's stories. After each prompt, only one member of the pair will share. This is so that we are truly present when receiving someone else's story, and not preoccupied with what we will share when it is our turn. If we don't have a story to respond to the particular prompt of the leader, we are free to tell a story about a previous prompt or to interpret the prompt in our own way.

--Instruct the group to get into these pairs/trios at this time. Encourage, but don't insist, that they be Cross+Generational, and perhaps even with someone they don't already know well. Some will take you up on your invitation, and some will stick with their friends. As they see the impact of these types of events over time, many more will be willing to get out of their comfort zones and connect with different generations. One of the keys to building Cross+Generational ministry is its invitational nature, as well as its persistence over time. No matter what, this event is designed to help people to make new connections, which will occur even if it is among a group of old friends.

HOW TO TELL A GREAT STORY

--Have you ever had a friend who wanted to tell you about a TV show you watched, and, instead of giving you a few descriptive sentences which make you want to know more, they instead report every single detail, every line of dialog, every single moment? That is not a compelling, memorable story, it's an extremely boring one! Mark Yaconelli, in his Personal Storytelling Workshop, teaches participants to worry less about accurately reporting every single moment of a story that you want to tell, and instead to take a moment to close your eyes and imagine the Polaroid picture of it. Once the picture of the most important moment of the story is clear in your mind, the story you tell will focus on describing that picture. It might include sights, sounds, smells, things to touch, and feelings, beyond just a reporting of the facts. It will be a more compelling, memorable, relatable story.

STEP TWO: Sharing and Receiving Mary's Story and Our Stories

What follows are the steps of the story sharing piece from the leader's perspective. You can use all of the stories, or just a few, depending on the time you have. If you are going to skip a few, you might choose to skip "Mary is Encouraged by a Friend," "Mary is Surprised by Jesus," or "Mary Believes in Jesus." You could also split up this event into two parts to include all of the stories over the course of time.

MARY ACCEPTS A CHALLENGE (Luke 1:26-38 & Spark Story Bible page 196)

Bible Story Telling

Tell the story to the group. You might use the Spark Story Bible, another story Bible, a fresh/unusual telling of the Bible story (such as the Message version), or your own brief take on the story. If you choose to tell it on your own, remember to apply the same Polaroid picture concept to your storytelling, to model it for the group.

Story Prompts (also available in the PowerPoint, Take-Home Booklet, or both)

Tell about a time when you took on an “impossible” challenge -or-

Tell about a time you were asked to do something you didn’t feel qualified to do.

How does your story connect to Mary’s story?

Story Sharing & Receiving

Remind the pairs that only one needs to share each time. Invite them to interpret the prompts in whichever way helps them to make a connection between their life story and the story of Mary that we just heard. Remind them to get a Polaroid picture into their head *before* they begin telling the story. (*Give them 30 seconds of quiet to do so now*). Decide in advance how much time you are going to give them to share their stories, and also decide how you will get their attention again when it’s time to move on (I often use a singing bowl or bell).

MARY IS ENCOURAGED BY A FRIEND (Luke 1:39-45 & Spark Story Bible page 202)

Bible Story Telling

Tell the story to the group. You might use the Spark Story Bible, another story Bible, a fresh/unusual telling of the Bible story (such as the Message version), or your own brief take on the story. If you choose to tell it on your own, remember to apply the same Polaroid picture concept to your storytelling, to model it for the group.

Story Prompts (also available in the PowerPoint, Take-Home Booklet, or both)

Tell about a time when a friend or relative encouraged you -or-

Tell about a time when you encouraged a friend.

How does your story connect to Mary’s story?

Story Sharing & Receiving

Remind the pairs to switch roles from story sharer to story receiver and vice versa this time. Invite them to interpret the prompts in whichever way helps them to make a connection between their life story and the story of Mary that we just heard, or to return to the previous prompt, if that connects with them more deeply. Remind them to get a Polaroid picture into their head *before* they begin telling the story (*give them 30 sec. now*). Remind them how much time they have, and keep your attention-getter handy for gathering the group again.

MARY BECOMES A MOM (Luke 2:1-7 & Spark Story Bible page 212)

Bible Story Telling

Tell the story to the group. You might use the Spark Story Bible, another story Bible, a fresh/unusual telling of the Bible story (such as the Message version), or your own brief take on the story. If you choose to tell it on your own, remember to apply the same Polaroid picture concept to your storytelling, to model it for the group.

Story Prompts (also available in the PowerPoint, Take-Home Booklet, or both)

What is the story of your birth? -or-

What is a story you have of giving birth?

How does your story connect to Mary's story?

Story Sharing & Receiving

Remind the pairs to switch roles from story sharer to story receiver and vice versa. Invite anyone who has not yet shared a story to make sure that they get a turn. Invite them to interpret the prompts in whichever way helps them to make a connection between their life story and the story of Mary that we just heard, or to return to any previous prompt, if that connects with them more deeply. Remind them to get a Polaroid picture into their head *before* they begin telling the story (*give them 30 sec. now*). Remind them how much time they have, and keep your attention-getter handy for gathering the group again.

MARY IS SURPRISED BY JESUS (Luke 2:41-52 & Spark Story Bible page 230)

Bible Story Telling

Tell the story to the group. You might use the Spark Story Bible, another story Bible, a fresh/unusual telling of the Bible story (such as the Message version), or your own brief take on the story. If you choose to tell it on your own, remember to apply the same Polaroid picture concept to your storytelling, to model it for the group.

Story Prompts (also available in the PowerPoint, Take-Home Booklet, or both)

Tell about a time when your abilities surprised your mom -or-

Tell about a time when you were surprised by the gifts and talents of your child(ren).

How does your story connect to Mary's story?

Story Sharing & Receiving

Remind the pairs to switch roles from story sharer to story receiver and vice versa. Invite them to interpret the prompts in whichever way helps them to make a connection between their life story and the story of Mary that we just heard, or to return to any previous prompt, if that connects with them more deeply. Remind them to get a Polaroid picture into their head *before* they begin telling the story (*give them 30 sec. now*). Remind them how much time they have, and keep your attention-getter handy for gathering the group again.

MARY BELIEVES IN JESUS (John 2:1-11 & Spark Story Bible page 410)

Bible Story Telling

Tell the story to the group. You might use the Spark Story Bible, another story Bible, a fresh/unusual telling of the Bible story (such as the Message version), or your own brief take on the story. If you choose to tell it on your own, remember to apply the same Polaroid picture concept to your storytelling, to model it for the group.

Story Prompts (also available in the PowerPoint, Take-Home Booklet, or both)

Tell about a time when you were encouraged to be brave by your mom -or-

Tell about a time when you encouraged your child(ren) to do something outside their comfort zone.

How does your story connect to Mary's story?

Story Sharing & Receiving

Remind the pairs to switch roles from story sharer to story receiver and vice versa. Invite them to interpret the prompts in whichever way helps them to make a connection between their life story and the story of Mary that we just heard, or to return to any previous prompt, if that connects with them more deeply. Remind them to get a Polaroid picture into their head *before* they begin telling the story (*give them 30 sec. now*). Remind them how much time they have, and keep your attention-getter handy for gathering the group again.

JESUS CARES FOR MARY (John 19:25b-27 & Spark Story Bible page 477 (in the illustration))

Bible Story Telling

Tell the story to the group. You might use the Spark Story Bible, another story Bible, a fresh/unusual telling of the Bible story (such as the Message version), or your own brief take on the story. If you choose to tell it on your own, remember to apply the same Polaroid picture concept to your storytelling, to model it for the group.

Story Prompts (also available in the PowerPoint, Take-Home Booklet, or both)

Tell about a time when you were encouraged to be brave by your mom -or-

Tell about a time when you encouraged your child(ren) to do something outside their comfort zone.

How does your story connect to Mary's story?

Story Sharing & Receiving

Remind the pairs to switch roles from story sharer to story receiver and vice versa. Invite those who have not yet had a chance to tell two stories to share this time. Invite them to interpret the prompts in whichever way helps them to make a connection between their life story and the story of Mary that we just heard, or to return to any previous prompt, if that connects with them more deeply. Remind them to get a Polaroid picture into their head *before* they begin telling the story (*give them 30 sec. now*). Remind them how much time they have, and keep your attention-getter handy for gathering the group again. (*This story is kind of tough. Expect them to take a few more moments of quiet than usual before they begin telling their stories.*)

MARY LEADS THE CHURCH IN PRAYER (Acts 1:12-14)

Bible Story Telling: *This story might not be available in the version of the Bible that you are using, or it may seem too short to be enough. I offer the following script, which you can feel free to use or adapt, as makes sense for your group.*

Just like Jesus, Mary's story doesn't end at the cross. She might have been one of the first witnesses to the resurrection (there were, after all, an awful lot of Marys at the empty tomb), but the next time that we definitely see her in the Bible is in between Jesus' Ascension back to heaven, forty days after Easter, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It says in Acts that the disciples went back to the Upper Room to await the coming of the Holy Spirit, and that "All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers." Mary was there, praying with the disciples. She was a prayer leader, a prayer warrior, a mothering presence for this brand-new, still developing, Christian church on Earth. We, as Christians, as women, are also called to be in prayer:

Story Prompts (also available in the PowerPoint, Take-Home Booklet, or both)

When you pray for your mother, what do you pray for?

When you pray for your child(ren), what do you pray for?

Story Sharing & Receiving

Ask each person to share their prayers in response to these prompts. Depending on the group, you might ask them to write them down so that the leader can gather everything up in prayer, or pray for one another, or to join in groups of 3-4 pairs and pray all together. Whichever format you choose, plan to conclude the event with a prayer of your own, and perhaps a prayer that everyone can join in on (the Lord's Prayer, a table prayer, a common blessing, etc.).