

## A Portrait of Mary - A Monologue

A monologue for either male or female actor of any age. Although useful at the Christmas season, it is equally adaptable for any other time of year as well.

### Costumes

There needs to be no special costuming, regular clothing is all that is required. The actor would likely be dressed in leisure clothing.

### Set

The set is a blank white wall with a very large empty picture frame mounted in the middle. No other props should be used in order to force the viewer's eye to the picture frame. A palette with a large artists brush is needed.

### Sound

The actor should have a wireless mike in order that there will be free movement throughout the stage area.

### Lighting

Lighting should concentrate on the picture frame with just enough light spilling into the adjoining acting space that the actor be seen. Actor must take care not to walk out of range of lighting.

### Stage Movements

Actor should act from the sides of the picture frame, making brushstroke actions as moving through the monologue. Should look with pride at the "picture" as it progresses in the mind.

### Script

*Lights off, actor comes on stage. Actor walks about for a few seconds, looking at the picture frame from several vantage points. Looks around, surprised, suddenly "sees" the audience.*

Oh, you startled me, I didn't know anyone was here tonight. Seeing this empty picture frame made me think about painting a picture. *(Pauses, looks out into audience, chuckles).* Oh no, don't get me wrong! I'm no artist! But I often do paint pictures in my mind. Don't you do that sometimes?

I was just thinking about something that happened to me recently. Sometimes, when I'm doing my devotions I like to key in on characters in the Bible. But often I find it frustrating that so little information is available from which to draw. And I think, now if this was one of the major characters in Scripture it would be so much easier to document the life and the characteristics of that person. I have to struggle against getting lazy, leaving the "bit players" in the Bible and going to a major character, for instance a familiar one such as Peter. I like studying about Peter. I think that I have a pretty good idea about Peter's makeup and what makes him tick. The same is true of Mary, the mother of Jesus. I feel as though I am somehow, how would I describe it, somehow familiar with Mary.

Recently I was at a kind of loss as to the next devotions project which I wanted to take on. So I got lazy. I decided I would study about one of the major characters in the Bible. Who better, I thought, than Mary, the mother of Jesus? The Bible is full of references to

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Mary, surely I can have an excellent study without a lot of extra work. *(Laughs to self)*. Or at least so I thought!

Probably like most people, I seemed to think I knew quite a lot about Mary. My mind seemed to hold a vivid impression of Mary, a kind of mental portrait of her. In my mind it seemed that the New Testament is full of references to Mary. But let me share with you the path I took and how a new portrait developed. A portrait of a Mary which I really had never known before developed as I researched her life. I just had a thought! Maybe we could go through this process together. We could try to paint a portrait, in word and in thought, of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

So that we start with a fresh canvas, let's try to remove from our minds the traditional pictures of Mary which we have seen over the years. That way we can paint our own portrait, right here, from scratch.

Just what would Mary's portrait look like if hung right here, on this wall?

*(Picks up palette and brush and goes over to where the picture frame hangs. With each new thought actor makes a few imaginary brush strokes in the frame.)*

I start by thinking, just exactly what do I really know about Mary? Who was she? What was unique about her? What were her strengths? Why was she chosen of God? And, maybe most importantly, what can I learn from her character which can help me be a better Christian?

I always thought that the Bible was full of references to Mary, but I was in for a shock. I found to my surprise that Mary's name is mentioned only 19 times in scripture. Now to put that into context, I noticed that Mary Magdalene is mentioned 13 times and Mary the sister of Martha 11 times. That seems very strange, when in comparison to Mary, the other "Marys" seemed very much "bit players".

It strikes me as I go through my Bible how so often the meaning of the name of a Biblical character "fits" the conduct and the makeup of the character. Example, Simeon means "harkening" or to "listen". Now that I can accept. Surely Simeon harkened, listened, waited for the coming of the Messiah. But in the case of Mary the name seems to me to be very totally wrong! The word Mary, in the original translation, means "rebellion". Rebellion? How inappropriate for what I believe, and what I have always understood about Mary!

The few scripture references which we do find paint a portrait of Mary drawn with few strokes but revealing a woman of deep faith, a faith which matures from an obedient adolescent into a dutiful wife and mother, and from there into a widow of incredible strength. Paint Mary faithful, with just a dash of moldable nature.

The portrait continues by showing that Mary, while entirely exceptional in her life and experiences, had a life not unlike others of her time, indeed not entirely unlike many women of today. She married at a young age and had a child. Her husband was a

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working man, a carpenter who earned a living for his family by the sweat of his brow. According to the standards of their society they were neither wealthy nor powerful. Paint Mary common, with just a hint of special nature.

In her portrait, Mary's image is that of the wife and mother who was always there, when needed. In this day of severed and dysfunctional families we need a model of a someone who is always there. And Mary is always there. There even at the cross. Paint Mary dependable.

Mary's portrait shows an open and attentive person. Each one of us comes into the world with the opportunity to serve God. Some may choose to disregard the call. Mary shows the way of one who was receptive and a good listener, open to the call of God. And Mary shows us the fruits of being open to the call of God. She found favor, she found the grace which affords joy, pleasure, delight. The spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace. (*Hesitates, frowns*). This portion of Mary's portrait causes me to examine my own image. How many times has God called me only to be put off by my response of false humility: I can't possibly do it, I'm not holy enough, or old enough, or wise enough, or pure enough. And how many times have I used an even better gimmick: playing deaf when God calls. Mary didn't play deaf, and she didn't try to float a story of how young and uneducated and unprepared she was. Let me remember, what was her response? "Let it be according to your word". Someone can't picture me with that response. But, paint Mary receptive to God's call.

I have some problems with those who see Mary's portrait showing somehow a kind of "mini-god", one who could do no wrong. In the portrait of Mary I see a human person. I see someone who was "troubled", or "agitated", by the words of the angel. I see her and her husband who, in the second chapter of Luke "understood not". In spite of visits by angels and messages from shepherds, Wise Men, Simeon, Anna and others, she "understood not". I see a concerned and sometimes angry mother, one who scolded Jesus for staying behind at the temple. And I see a proud mother, human enough to urge her son to use His powers to turn the water into wine. In my mind the "humanness" of Mary, does nothing to limit her relevance, in fact it enhances her portrait. Paint Mary human.

Her portrait shows that Mary accepted the will of God without knowing all the minor details. Where most of us would want to know "the rest of the story", Mary was told the big picture. She simply accepted that God's will was such that He would color in the details in due course. She had great belief, she placed confidence in the words of the angel. This was not a blind faith but rather an intellectual faith. If it were my portrait being painted, would my faith be one which would even approach this level of response? Paint Mary confident in the faithfulness of God.

Mary's portrait shows that she considered herself unworthy. She talks about "her low estate", she lamented her moral littleness and her guilt. But in spite of her awareness of her unworthiness, this did not become a cop out in her service of God's will nor did it overrule her ability to be of service to God. Paint Mary humble.

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In this portrait Mary displays the magnificent works which God can accomplish through very ordinary people. I must constantly remind myself who this person, Mary, was. She was a very young child, uneducated, and unworldly. Yet when we read Mary's Carol, the Magnificat, it is obvious that this is not the words of an uneducated child. The beauty and the symbolism of the Magnificat would be attained only through great wisdom and understanding. Many theologians feel that the Magnificat had to be written by someone else, that it could not be an utterance of an uneducated child. This I find, inconsistent. Remember, we are considering the miracle of a virgin birth, the life of One who would perform numerous miracles, the One who would in fact even rise from the dead. And we get hung up over the belief that an utterance is out of place? (*Shakes head in disbelief, smiles knowingly*). Paint Mary as a servant through whom God worked more than just one miracle.

The portrait indicates that she was human to the core, but at the same time it displays that she represented purity, she was a virgin. I can see, and am thankful, that God can use sinners, but for his will to be accomplished He also requires those whose walk is blameless. Mary reserved herself for the task for which God had planned. Paint Mary pure.

In the portrait I see Mary, the mother, loved by her son, Jesus. Even while His life was slipping away on the cross, Jesus showed the concern of a loving son. He asked John to look after Mary, to be her son. This has to be one of the most touching, yet most overlooked relational happenings in all of Scripture. And it gives me a very clear picture of all that a family relationship can, and should be. Paint Mary a loving, and loved, parent.

And in the final brush strokes of the portrait of Mary I see one who continued to serve. In Acts Chapter 1 I see where Mary "served with one accord" with the disciples. In spite of all that she had gone through, Mary was still there serving. Mary obviously saw no reason to hold herself above the others, or to demand special privileges. I find the original meaning of the phrase, "of one accord", so interesting. I think that it offers so much for us in the Christian church today. The phrase, "in one accord", or, "with one passion", comes from two separate words, meaning "rush along" and "in unison". And in my portrait I see the Holy Spirit moving through, and blending together, the divergent lives of the members of Christ's church. Paint Mary a servant of God and of those around her.

This portrait is a study in contrasts. It reveals an image of one who is, on one hand, faithful, dependable, receptive, confident, pure and a servant of God and man. On the other hand we have one who is common, human and humble. But our portrait is still not quite complete since, in order to be relevant, it needs our own personal brush strokes. We need to complete our own private portion of the portrait, a part seen only by ourself and by God.

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What does this portrait do for you, what does it do for me, as we attempt to live for Mary's Son? As I gaze at the completed portrait I find that Mary provides a perfect example of a model from which to fashion my own most unworthy, personal image.

*Actor steps back, sets down palette and brush, looks at portrait from all angles, nods head and smiles. Lights out.*

SAMPLE  
NOT FOR PERFORMANCE