

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 12/15/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Several of my clergy friends were recently disparaging the Christmas song, “Mary, Did You Know?” In several discussion online, a number of them said, “Of course she knew.” Some even went so far as to say that they did not like the song because of what they felt was a misrepresentation of Mary’s understanding of her role in the salvation story.

For those who perhaps aren’t familiar with the song, the singer asks a series of questions to Mary about the baby she would bear. Included among those questions are “Did you know that your baby boy...would save our sons and daughters? Will soon save you? Has walked where angels tread?” In Luke’s Gospel, the angel, Gabriel, comes to Mary to tell her that she will give birth to baby she was to call JESUS. The name “JESUS” itself means “GOD saves,” though it was not an uncommon name at that time. Gabriel goes on to explain that this child would be great and be called “the SON of the MOST HIGH.” HE would be given the “throne of HIS father David” and would “reign over Jacob’s descendants.” After Mary asks how this could happen to her, Gabriel explains that JESUS would be conceived through the power of the HOLY SPIRIT, and thus would be called “the SON OF GOD.” Clearly, Mary had been informed of some very important things about the child she would bear, so, yes, she knew. At least, that’s the position of some of my colleagues.

Pastors, at times, can so hung up on the theological that they miss the simple message. I’ve been guilty of that a time or two myself. But though the song asks the question, “Mary, did you know?” and clearly Mary knew—at least some of it—I don’t think the song is necessarily written to Mary (who obviously isn’t around anymore), but to us.

I like the song. I like the music. And what I really like is how it tells us the story of JESUS. It tells of power, that HE would walk on water, that HE would give sight to the blind, and calm a storm. More than this, it tells who JESUS is. It tells again of HIM saving humankind (which Mary had been told). It tells of HIS relationship with GOD as both heaven’s “little Lamb” and the LORD of all creation. And in the final verse, the sweeping rise of the music leads to the announcement that Mary’s baby boy is “the great I AM.” I AM is the literal name for GOD in Hebrew, so the song proclaims that JESUS is GOD. So, to those who listen to this song, they hear the of the things JESUS will do:

The blind will see
The deaf will hear
The dead will live again
The lame will leap
The dumb will speak the praises of the Lamb
and they also hear the good news that JESUS is “the great I AM”—GOD.

I don’t think it matters if Mary knew or not. What matters is that we know. And I like how this song tells the story so that we and all who really listen to the words know that GOD became human and lived and died and rose again for us.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey