

IHM CHARISM

Our Charism Statement refers to Mary, our IHM patroness, as the first disciple. She has much to teach us about discipleship. Favored by God and mother of our Savior, we will ponder and share aspects of her life from many perspectives. Her words in the Gospels are few, but her life experiences teach us much about her life, which was rooted in God. As the first disciple, Mary leads us on our IHM journey in relationship with her Son. Let us pray, contemplate, and share her story and ours.



***The Charism
of the
Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, Pa.
In the passionate spirit of Saint Alphonsus Liguori,
We joyfully participate in the
redeeming love of Jesus
which impels us to proclaim the Good News
of God's unconditional love for all.
We embrace Mary, the first disciple
as our model of a life rooted in God.***



We embrace Mary, the first disciple, as our model of a life rooted in God.

Mary, the First Disciple

- An accepting woman facing a life decision at her home in Nazareth.
- A caring woman traveling to the hill country of Judah to share good news.
- A pregnant woman traveling to Bethlehem and giving birth in a stable.
- A faithful mother going to Jerusalem to fulfill her duties.
- A fearful mother fleeing to safety with her family to Egypt.
- A holy mother caring for her family in Nazareth.
- A worried mother searching for her Son in Jerusalem.
- A trusting mother attending a wedding in Cana and believing in her Son.
- A suffering mother meeting her Son carrying his cross to Calvary.
- An agonizing mother watching her Son die for our sins on Golgotha.
- A joyful mother beholding her Son at his Resurrection.
- A fulfilled mother saying farewell to her departing Son on Mt. Olivet.
- A prayerful mother waiting for the coming of the Spirit in Jerusalem.
- A supporting mother sustaining the disciples in Ephesus.
- A beloved mother assumed into the heavenly embrace of her Son.

1. **Mary, an Accepting Woman in Nazareth** Luke 1: 28-31; 34-35,38

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.

But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"

And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *When have you received an unexpected message that changed your life? Who was your messenger?*
- *When were you able to accept God's Will as Mary did?*
- *How were you able to overcome your fear and realize you were "favored" by God?*
- *In what ways does Mary enable you to be more rooted in God?*

2. **Mary, a Caring Woman, Going to the Hill Country of Judah**

- Luke 1: 39-45; 46-47

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior."

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *When have you traveled somewhere to share unbelievable mutual news with someone you trusted and cared about?*
- *What kind of "God language" did you share with each other?*
- *Mary and Elizabeth exchanged prayerful words praising God. With whom do you pray with words that relate to your life?*
- *Suggestion: Try writing your own Magnificat!*

3. **Mary, a Pregnant Woman, Traveling to Bethlehem** Luke 2: 3-7

So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Visit of the Shepherds - Luke 2: 19

And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *No words of Mary are recorded in this passage. What do you think she might have said . . . to herself . . . to Joseph . . . to God*
- *Mary embraced her Son in loving acceptance, despite the unplanned surroundings. Can you recall a time in your life when you can relate to Mary in a similar way?*
- *As a disciple, Mary “reflected” on what her relationship with Jesus might be like. When do you do this?*

4. **Mary, a Faithful Woman, Going to Jerusalem** Luke 2: 22-28; 33-35

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,” and to offer the sacrifice of “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,” in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God.

The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *Mary and Joseph were faithfully practicing Jews. What do you think she and Joseph were thinking, especially when Simeon gave his prophecy?*
- *What lesson does Mary offer us about our faith life in this passage?*

5. **Mary, a Fearful Woman Fleeing to Egypt** Matthew 2: 13-15

When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, so that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *When have you received fearful news that caused you to change your plans? How do you think Mary felt about this trip?*
- *How do you adapt to new surroundings in your life?*

6. **Mary, a Holy Woman, in Nazareth** Luke 2: 39-40

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *After the Presentation they returned to their home. We are led to imagine what life in this Holy Family was like, especially in relation to their faith practices. In what ways was . . . and is . . . faith integral to your family life?*
- *In what ways can you imitate Mary’s holiness in your family?*

7. **Mary, a Worried Woman in Jerusalem** Luke 2: 41-52

Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.

Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers.

When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *What do parents today experience in terms of their child getting lost in some way? What kind of anxiety do you share with Mary?*
- *What do you hope children today will experience while in Church?*
- *How do children "grow in wisdom, age and favor before God" in our world today?*

8. **Mary, a Trusting Woman, at Cana** John 2: 1-5

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." [And] Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you."

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *A joyful gathering becomes a cause for concern. Mary knew Jesus could help and overrides his reluctance with her trust. Have you ever had a similar experience by reassuring others that "all will be well"?*
- *When have you faced a dilemma with someone saying "don't bother me with your concern"? What did you do?*

9. Mary, a Suffering Mother, Meeting Her Son Carrying His Cross to Calvary

Although the Gospels don't specifically mention Mary meeting Jesus on the Way of the Cross, the Fourth Station depicts this meeting, which undoubtedly must have happened. We can certainly envision this suffering mother, beholding this agonizing image of her Son. Even though Mary was rooted in God and kept accepting His plans for her, this was a painful, unbelievable encounter.

- *What must Mary have been thinking and questioning in this situation?*
- *When have you witnessed the suffering image of someone you love?*
- *How did your faith sustain you in a suffering situation?*

10. Mary, an Agonizing Mother, Watching Her Son Die on Golgotha.

John 19-25-27

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *Mary was supported by John and the women.*
Who supported you when you watched a loved one die?
- *Interesting that the word "disciple" is used three times in this passage. He entrusted his mother, "the first disciple" to the care of John, known as the beloved disciple. What can we learn from this message?*

11. Mary, a Joyful Mother, Beholding Her Son at His Resurrection

Matthew 28: 1-9

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow. The guards were shaken with fear of him and became like dead men. Then the angel said to the women in reply, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.' Behold, I have told you."

Then they went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce this to his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage.

There is no actual Gospel reference to Jesus meeting his mother after the Resurrection.

However, we can certainly assume this happened. This passage from Matthew mentions the other Mary and can presume it may be his mother. In any case, Mary's life of being a disciple and being rooted in God bears fruit!

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *We can only assume the "other" Mary was his mother. What must it have been like for her to hear the angel's words "Do not be afraid" (that she heard at the Annunciation)?*
- *How must Mary have felt when she heard her resurrected Son call her name and to behold Him? What do you think that unrecorded conversation was like?*
- *When have you heard joyful news from someone you love or seen a loved one free from suffering and pain?*

12. Mary, a Fulfilled Mother, Saying Farewell to Her Son on Mt. Olivet

Mark 15: 1:19-20

So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.

We can only assume that Mary was included in "them". As Jesus leaves this earth, after completing the mission he was given, Mary must have felt fulfilled in her role of accepting and loving him as the first disciple.

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *Imagine yourself being in this scene with Mary beside you. What did you hear or observe?*
- *What will be different about Mary's life as a disciple after the Ascension?*

13. Mary, a Prayerful Mother, Waiting for the Coming of the Spirit in Jerusalem.

Acts 1: 13-14

When they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *Emptiness and hope - fear and passion. This is possibly how this group felt during these days of waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit.
Can you relate to this time of prayerful waiting in your life? How?*
- *What role do you think Mary played for this group during this time?*
- *What message can she offer to the role women play in the Church today?*

14. Mary, a Supporting Mother, Sustaining the Disciples in Ephesus.

There is no gospel account about the life of Mary after Jesus' death and Resurrection. Tradition speaks of her life with John, who cared for her for a period of time in Ephesus. The DVD *Full of Grace* depicts her final days on earth. Before she is assumed into heaven, Peter comes to spend some time with her in order to regain his Christ-centered focus. He needed her continual reminders about "remembering" those key moments of his encounters with Jesus. Whatever the undocumented accounts about Mary after Pentecost, we can be assured that she remains a wonderful model for us IHM's, as someone who rooted her life in God and wants us to do the same.

- *What must Mary have witnessed, felt or heard during the years after Pentecost?*
- *In what ways can you relate to Mary and her discipleship during this time?*
- *What message would Mary give us, her IHM disciples, as we age?*

15. Mary, a beloved Mother, Assumed into the Heavenly Embrace of Her Son.

Again, we have no Scripture account of the Assumption. However, it is a Dogma of Belief in our Catholic faith. We will refer to Mary's Magnificat in Luke's gospel for our reflection. Let us ponder how she fulfilled this prayer during her life-long relationship with her Son. As the first disciple, what is her message to us as IHM disciples in today's world?

The Canticle of Mary (Magnificat) Luke 1: 45-55

And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

- *What word, phrase, or insight struck you in this passage?*
- *In what ways have all ages called Mary "blessed"?*
- *Mary predicts the many things the Mighty One has done for her. How could you join Mary in this prayer about your life?*
- *How do you envision this heavenly encounter between Mary and Jesus?*

Charism Summary & Challenge

As we go forth embracing Mary, the first disciple, as our model of our life rooted in God, we are also aware that we do so with the passionate spirit of St. Alphonsus. We ask his intercession to help us be passionate as we joyfully participate in the redeeming love of Jesus. May we seek and participate in ways that impel us to proclaim the Good News of God's unconditional love for all. May this IHM Charism inspire and guide us on our mission.