

We've all heard the very popular Christmas song *Mary, Did You Know*. The text was written back in 1984 by Mark Lowry, Christian comedian, songwriter and singer. He was asked by a pastor that year to write a script for a church Christmas play. He wrote a series of questions that he would like to ask Mary, the mother of Jesus. These questions were used in between the scenes of the play. Over the next 10 years, he tried to find the right music that would complete the song. It wasn't until a couple years later that Buddy Greene wrote the music to the song. Since then, the song has been performed by more than 30 artists, including Clay Aiken, Kenny Rogers, Wynonna Judd, Michael English, Daniel Childs, Natalie Cole and Michael Crawford.

The song is a series of questions an outside observer, paying a visit to the scene of the manger, might put to Mary, as she lovingly gazes on the child in her arms – questions like:

Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?
. will save our sons and daughters?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
. will calm a storm with his hand?
Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
. will one day rule the nations?

It's a song that pushes us to think beyond the warmth and tenderness of the present moment, to the reality of the child's *future* life – a life of service, and challenge, and suffering. Who of us has not done the same: gazed upon a newborn infant, and wondered what lay in the future for this child? What plan was in the mind of God at his creation?

The idea of envisioning the future of this child born in a manger is not a new one. There is a rather unusual Christmas carol, composed by the very popular 17th century Italian composer, Alessandro Grandi. I can't sing it, but I'd like to read the text. Imagine, if you will, kneeling at the stable of Jesus' birth, reflecting upon his future destiny:

O fair art Thou
O fair art Thou Lovely Child of Mary
O fair art Thou.

Grievous wounds shall pierce thee;
On thy brow so fair
a crown of thorns shall rest;
Grievous wounds shall pierce thee;
Thou shalt be hung upon the shameful cross
Lovely, lovely child of Mary.

In the midst of all the glory and praise, the sweetness and loveliness surrounding his birth, this song reminds him (and us) of the real reason for his coming: our redemption, which will be accomplished only by his death on the cross. Christmas is connected to Calvary. And it's important not to forget that. If we look upon the infant in the crib, and fail, at the same time, to see the Christ on the cross, we miss the point of Christmas! The cross is what gives meaning to the crib.

If we understand *that*, then Christmas for us is not something that happened once upon a long time ago in a far away place; it's something that continues to happen today, here and now. This Emmanuel, this God-with-us, knows the turmoil and struggles within us and within our world, and continues to be present walking on water – showing up where we least expect. This Emmanuel, this God-with-us, knows our disappointments when we see ourselves, our friends, and our children fail; and continues saving our sons and daughters, and us, – gifting each new generation with faith and love. This Emmanuel, this God-

with-us, knows how blind we can sometimes be to what's going on around us; and continues giving sight to the blind – enabling us to see things we never could before.

This Emmanuel, this God-with-us, knows how shaky and fragile our lives can be; and He continues to calm the storm with his hand – giving peace and quiet and stillness.

Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?
This sleeping child you're holding is the great I AM!