



“A Mother Remembers”

by Kristi Meyer

Introduction and Opening Prayer

Webster’s Dictionary defines memories as “the things learned and kept in the mind.” *Dictionary.com* gives a similar definition: “a mental impression retained; a recollection.” These definitions aren’t bad, but they don’t capture the true nature of memories. Memories are intensely personal. Each memory created is unique to its creator.

Perhaps the most personal and unique memories of all are those a mother forms of her child. These memories begin even before the child’s birth and continue throughout the child’s life. Even if you’ve never met a child, hearing a mother’s memories can still give you a special glimpse into that child’s life.

Because of the close connection between Advent and Christmas, Advent by Candlelight programs often contemplates the events surrounding Jesus’ birth. Our program today takes a slightly different path. Instead of focusing solely on Jesus’ birth, we will look back at his life through the eyes of his mother and will hear Mary’s reflections on her memories of a very special child.

Although these memories have been fictionalized, the events they portray are based on the Scriptures. By sharing in Mary’s memories of these miraculous events, I pray that you will gain a new perspective during this Advent season of preparation. May God bless our time together today as we hear a new perspective on an old story. Let’s open with prayer:

Dearest Lord, be with us as we focus our hearts and minds during this time of preparation. Grant us a new perspective as we hear of your plan of salvation through your son Jesus. As we hear of a mother’s love for her son, remind us also of your incredible love for us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Suggested Musical Selection: Savior of the Nations, Come

Scene 1 – Memories of a Birth

I told Joseph I didn't think I could make it. **You** try being nine months pregnant and making that trip, I said. Of course, we had no choice. The government had decreed that a census should be taken. Since Joseph and I were from the line of David, we went to Bethlehem. It was not an easy journey. There were times when I thought my son might be born right along the side of the road.

When we finally made it to Bethlehem, all I wanted was a place to lie down for the night. But even that wasn't a simple matter. With all the people in town for the census, there was no room anywhere. Joseph went from house to house, asking for a place to stay. It didn't have to be fancy. We just wanted a roof over our heads. Someone finally took pity on us and said that we could stay in his stable with the animals. I was too tired and in too much pain to care.

Even though this was my first pregnancy, my experiences growing up and watching the animals told me that my time was close. It was not the way I would have chosen for my son to be born. From the beginning, I knew that I was carrying a special child. Despite the fact that I was a virgin, I was pregnant. How could this have happened? The angel who visited me to announce his birth said that the Holy Spirit would come upon me, and the power of the Most High would overshadow me.

That wasn't exactly the answer my parents were looking for when they asked how I could have gotten pregnant without being married, how I could have ruined everything with Joseph. But Joseph also visited in a dream by an angel, accepted the unusual explanation and still agreed to marry me. I had been commanded by the angel to give my son the name "Jesus." I was told that he would be given the throne of his father David and that he would reign over the house of Jacob forever. Being just a simple country girl, I didn't understand everything I was told. But I knew my son was a special child, and he should have a special birth.

His birth was certainly special, but not in the way I was imagining. My mother wasn't there to help and offer comfort. Instead, I had to make do with the animals looking on. There were no lovingly crafted blankets to wrap him in, no cradle made by Joseph to lay him in. Instead, there were rags and a manger filled with hay.

There were visitors, though. They came later, coming in from the fields where they had been tending their sheep. I never imagined that my son's first visitors would be shepherds I had never met. They came bringing a story of angels appearing to them, of the sky lighting up as bright as day, of the most beautiful music they had ever heard. They stayed long enough to see my son, and then they left the stable, telling the rest of Bethlehem what they had seen and

worshiping and praising God. I'm sure most people thought they were crazy. I would have doubted their tale myself if not for everything I had experienced in the past nine months.

I still didn't know what it all meant—what would happen—what would become of my son. All I knew was that the unusual events surrounding his birth would surely lead to events even more miraculous and spectacular surrounding his life. So I looked forward with anticipation, and I waited and watched and prayed.

Lighting of the first Advent candle/reading from Luke 2:17-19

When [the shepherds] had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Suggested Musical Selections: "Rocking Carol" by Michael Burkhardt, "Gentle Mary, Tender Mary" by Jay Althouse, or "The Birthday of a King" by W.H. Neidlinger

Scene 2 – Memories of a Miracle

I didn't mean to be an overbearing mother. I tried not to be one of those women who interfered in their children's lives, who had their children's entire futures mapped out. It wouldn't have worked with my son anyway. Jesus always knew what life had in store for him, what path he would follow. I knew this from the time he was born.

The incident that really sealed it for me, however, was when he was 12 years old and our family went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. On our way back to Nazareth, Joseph and I discovered that Jesus was missing. After an anxious day of traveling back to Jerusalem and another anxious day of searching, we finally found him in the temple. I was upset, but Jesus simply said that we should have known he needed to be in his Father's house.

Ever since then, my son always followed a unique path. He went to see his cousin John in the wilderness and was baptized. He began to recruit men to work with him. They weren't trained scribes or rabbis as you would expect, but ordinary men: fishermen, a tax collector, and even a religious zealot. I didn't get involved in any of this. It wasn't my place. But I felt I had to get involved at the wedding.

You have to understand that a wedding was an event. People came from miles away to celebrate with the bride and groom. They expected the best. There was nothing more

humiliating for the host than to run out of wine—and that’s exactly what happened. I didn’t know what to do, but I knew that my son did. He always knew what to do. So I went and told Jesus that there was no more wine.

I wasn’t sure what kind of response to expect. All I knew was there was a problem and Jesus could fix it. I had absolute faith in my son. I even told the host to do whatever Jesus said. The answer I got from my son wasn’t exactly encouraging. He didn’t say he would help, didn’t tell me I was right to have come to him. Instead, he wanted to know why I was telling him that there was no more wine. He said something odd, too—that his time had not yet come. I didn’t know what he meant. It was simply another statement to be stored away, one that I would think on later in my life.

But back to the wedding. Of course, as I had expected, Jesus was able to help. It was amazing. He had some of the servants fill up large stone jars with water. Then he told them to draw some out and take it to the wedding host. By the time it made it to the host, it wasn’t water anymore but wine. And not just any wine either. It might have been the best wine that man had ever tasted. The wedding feast was saved, and all because of my son.

Looking back, that wedding was the ending of a time of innocence for me. Even before his birth, I knew my son was a special child. But until that wedding, I didn’t know just how special he was and how unique a road he would walk. At the time, I had no way of knowing just where that road would lead. All I could do was wait and watch and pray.

Lighting of the second Advent candle/reading from John 20:30-31

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Suggested Musical Selections: “Mary Did You Know” or “O Sing a Song of Bethlehem”

Scene 3 – Memories of a Death

“My son is dead.” Those awful words wouldn’t stop running through every fiber of my being, no matter how much I tried to wish them away. A mother should never outlive her children, but here I was in that very situation. Perhaps it would have been easier to accept if it was an accident or an illness. But it wasn’t. My son had been crucified like an ordinary criminal, in the

same way hundreds of other crucifixions had been carried out by the Romans. And yet there was nothing ordinary about the series of events leading up to his execution.

Jesus had been on the wrong side of the Jewish leaders for several years. They were upset that he was challenging their authority and stirring up the people. Whether or not that was his goal, it was the way things worked out. To be honest, I don't think I fully understood exactly what his purpose was. He taught the people, instructed his disciples, and helped those in need, often in miraculous ways. But it always seemed like he was here for something more, for something deeper than just teaching and healing. Maybe the Jewish leaders sensed that too. Maybe that was why they felt so strongly about getting rid of my son.

In any case, things happened fast. On Thursday night, Jesus was arrested as he was with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. I wasn't there to witness those events, but I didn't need to be. There were plenty of people eager to tell me the story. About how Judas, one of Jesus' supposedly loyal followers, betrayed him and handed him over to the chief priests. About how there was a trial which was really no trial at all. About how the Jews were so intent on putting my son to death that they enlisted the help of the hated Roman government to hand down a crucifixion sentence.

And so, I came to that hill outside Jerusalem, to that dreadful place of death. I didn't know if I could stand to see my son this way, but I also knew I couldn't stay away. Extraordinary events unfolded on that Friday afternoon, and I needed to be there. Many of the onlookers were hateful. They scoffed at Jesus and yelled for him to save himself if he really was the king of the Jews. But Jesus was loving and kind to the end, asking God for forgiveness on their behalf. My son even ensured that I would be taken care of, asking his dear friend John to watch over me.

It was an afternoon I would never forget. Miraculous things happened that day. The sun was darkened, the earth shook, and the temple curtain was torn in two. As strange and unexpected as these events were, there was more that happened, more than I can put into words. Something happened between Jesus and his Father that day, something I still didn't fully understand. When Jesus said, "It is finished," I knew he was referring to more than just his earthly life. There was some greater work, some greater mission that had been accomplished that day.

But still, my son was dead. Although I had heard stories of how Jesus had raised others from the dead, a similar resurrection for him seemed impossible. Was there any hope left? There was nothing more I could do except to wait and watch and pray.

Lighting of the third Advent candle/reading from Matthew 27:50-51,54

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split . . . When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”

Suggested Musical Selections: “I Will Arise and Go to Jesus” or “What Wondrous Love Is This”

Scene 4 – Memories of a Resurrection

It was news too good to be true. It was like something you hope for but never expect to happen. I didn't believe it at first, but then the stories kept coming and I knew it had to be true. My son was alive!

I heard the story from the women first. Early in the morning on the day after the Sabbath, they had gone to Jesus' tomb to anoint his body with spices. I wanted to help, but I just couldn't bring myself to go to my son's tomb. So I waited for the women to return, to tell me that Jesus had been given a proper Jewish burial.

Instead, I heard a miraculous story about an empty tomb and an angel. The women told everyone they could find what the angel had said: that Jesus had risen, that he was not in the tomb, that he would be going ahead of them into Galilee. Mary Magdalene even said that Jesus himself had appeared to her in the garden.

Then the news came from Peter and John. Once they heard the women's stories, they too went to the tomb and found it empty. Just like the women, they didn't understand then what had happened. But seeing the empty tomb and the strips of linen, John believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. Peter, though, grappled with his guilt over denying that he even knew Jesus.

The stories kept pouring in. Two disciples on their way to Emmaus reported that Jesus had appeared to them on the road and had walked with them for a time, but they did not recognize him. The disciples told a story of twice being in a locked room and still being visited by Jesus. Peter recounted a breakfast with Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and how the Lord lovingly comforted him. The Jewish leaders tried to deny Jesus' resurrection, but I believed in my heart that it was true.

There are no words that can describe the emotions I felt. My son was brutally executed by crucifixion. Although he had done nothing wrong, he was still put to death alongside common criminals. And now he was alive again! Looking back, I shouldn't have been surprised. I should have known from Jesus' words that he would indeed rise again. I still chide myself for my lack of faith, for my lack of trust in my son. But there is faith in my heart now, and that is enough.

I knew he couldn't stay with me on earth forever. As much as I selfishly hoped he would, his work here was done. It was time to return to his Father, to his home in heaven. His disciples would proclaim his words and teachings here. And in my own quiet way, I could do the same. True, I was like any proud mother telling stories about her firstborn son. But it was more than that. I knew that these stories needed to be told, that people needed to believe my son's teachings and his story. So I helped to spread the news about Jesus, all while continuing to watch and pray.

Lighting of the fourth Advent candle/reading from 1 Corinthians 15:3-5

For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

Suggested Musical Selection: "In Christ Alone"

Scene 5 – Memories of a Life

I've had a long and fulfilling life. I've seen things that few other people have seen. I've experienced things that no one else has experienced. Who else can say that they gave birth to a son like mine? When my son was growing up, I knew he was special, but I didn't know just how special. Through the lens of time and with God's help, I've been able to see what my son came here to do. And if you'll permit me just a few more minutes, I'd like to share what I've learned with you.

Although I keep referring to Jesus as "my son," he isn't really only my son. He is also the Son of God. I was privileged to give birth to him and raise him, but he came from heaven and God is his Father. He is uniquely God and uniquely human.

I now know what my son's purpose was. He was willing to be born so that he could perfectly satisfy the laws and commands of God. Every good Jewish mother hoped that her son would be the Messiah, the Savior, the one who would fulfill God's plan of salvation as foretold by Moses

and the prophets. My hope was fulfilled because my son actually was that Messiah. He lived a perfect life and died an innocent death so that you and I will not be held accountable for our sins. He triumphantly rose to life again to proclaim his victory over death and hell and Satan.

There are so many more things I could share about my son, but there's nothing more important than what I've just told you. That's what I remember most when I think back on my son's short life. Not the miracles—although those were remarkable. Not the interactions with the “undesirable” people of society—although those were compassionate. Instead, I remember my son's absolute perfection and adherence to God's law. I remember his innocent death and his glorious resurrection. I remember the love my son had for me and for all people of all time.

It's almost time for Jesus' birthday. I still celebrate it every year even though he's no longer here on earth with me. I celebrate it in the same way I always have: by looking back on his life and what he did for me. I pray that you will celebrate my son's birthday with me. Ponder what he was willing to sacrifice so that you can meet him in heaven someday. And until that glorious day comes, I simply ask that you wait and watch and pray—and share his story with others.

Lighting of the Christ candle/reading from John 1:1-5,9-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. . . . The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Suggested Musical Selection: “I Love to Tell the Story”

Closing prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for allowing us to gather together today to grow in hope and faith as we move toward Christmas. Remind us that Christmas is not only a time to celebrate the birth of your Son but also a time to reflect on our great need for a Savior. Fill our hearts with the desire to share that profound gift of a Savior with a fallen world around us. Amen.