

# SPIRITUAL BOOK NEWS

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## FEATURED SELECTION

May 2009

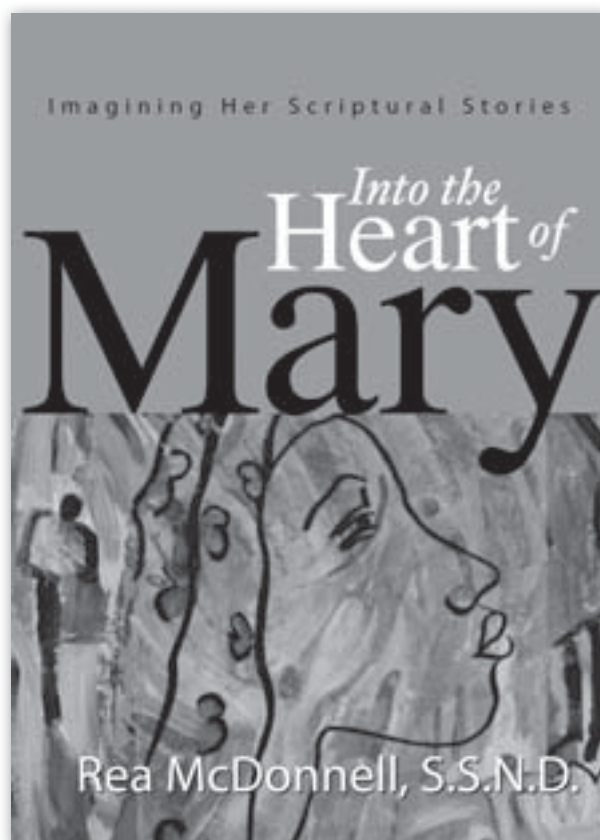
### INTO THE HEART OF MARY

*Imagining Her Scriptural Stories*

Rea McDonnell, S.S.N.D.

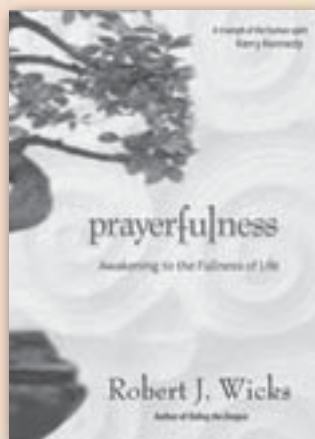
Drawing on a lifetime of biblical study and her work as a retreat director, Rea McDonnell re-introduces us to Mary by teaching us to appreciate anew the spiritual truths found in her scriptural stories. Using Ignatian meditation, McDonnell invites us to prayerfully ponder Marian passages from scripture and ancient tradition, helping us to use our imaginations to meet Mary again for the first time. This mature and challenging vision of Mary will help cultivate love for her and nudge us toward authentic spiritual growth.

ISBN: 9781594712074 / 160 pages / \$12.95

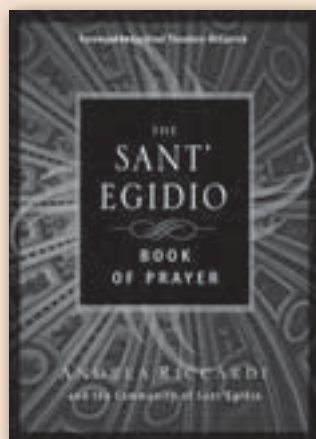


## FALL 2009 SBA SELECTIONS

Reminder: your next SBA Newsletter and book selection will arrive in September.



September



October



November



December

## LUKE: A WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

*When he sat down to write his account of the life of Jesus, the evangelist Luke had before him the same tools as any other writer. He had some facts. He had access to other people's ideas and opinions about those facts. He had stories and teachings that had been passed down through the several decades since the day his subject had last walked the Earth. He also had his own knowledge, imagination, and memories, and a powerful desire to tell the story of Jesus with such authority and artfulness that Jesus might influence future generations for as long as there would be future generations.*

*If the story flowed from Luke's pen smoothly and swiftly, if he went from chapter 1, verse 1 to chapter 24, verse 53 with nary a cross-out or crumpled sheet of parchment, well, more power to him. Most writers, however, never experience that sort of luxury as they compose. They endure false starts and they hit brick walls, and sometimes spend more time staring into space than putting ink to paper. Luke's final product is a beautiful and enduring piece of work. Its language, events, and images have burned themselves into human consciousness for two thousand years. What follows, though, are excerpts from an imagined notebook kept by Luke the writer as he performed the work—hard work, which is the best kind—of telling the story of the man who had changed his life.*

The blank parchment. Beside it the quill and the vessel of ink. I have heard it said that these are ingredients of joy and expectation, and of fear and frustration. But I must face both possibilities if I am to undertake the task to which I am called: to tell the story of my Lord.

\* \* \*

The words and stories of Jesus as they have been passed down to me have always felt to me like a poem. Not a discourse or recitation, but a poem, a poem in which words dance together and create images and rhythms that fully engage me—heart, mind, soul, even inspiring my limbs to get up and walk and my tongue and lips to speak, shout, sing, whisper, the story of my Lord.

It is in this way that I must tell the story of Jesus, and so especially must I tell the story of his mother and his birth.

\* \* \*

Every life emerges from the pain of childbirth, and who is it that endures that pain? Woman.

So, what of the woman who endured the birthing that brought forth our Lord? Who was she? What were the marks of her character?

I know so little of her. The stories are scant and sparse, the facts even more so. The stories passed down are both mundane and fantastical. A young Jewish woman, a girl, even, from a small town. Mary. I have heard that her name was Mary. I have heard it said, too, that she was a virgin—that she conceived, but remained a virgin—an unusual state of affairs. I have heard that angels attended the birth, as well as shepherds, and that kings felt threatened by the presence of this child.

I must somehow make sense of these things.

\* \* \*

Small town. Young. Poor, more than likely. A nobody. But one of God's nobodies, like the Hebrew people crossing the desert and the Red Sea generations ago.

A poor, young, Jewish woman whose heart, whose very soul, stood out among the multitudes of God's people. And

God favored her. God saw that she was the right vessel to carry his son into the world.

And though she would carry him into the world just as every other child has been carried, the stories say that she did so as a virgin. I have heard some people laugh and scoff at the idea. But think of it: God's son would be born among the poor, to a virgin so highly favored by God that she remained pure and conceived by the Spirit of God. High-born kings have claimed the same about their nativity so that they could persuade their nations that earthly power had been conferred on them by heaven.

But God's son was not born to claim an earthly kingdom. He was born to proclaim the kingdom of his Father.

Why, then, should his birth not be marked, in truth, by the very thing—the purity of the virgin birth—so falsely claimed by earthly kings who oppress and plunder their people?

\* \* \*

God thus brings the powerful down from their thrones, and lifts up the lowly.

\* \* \*

And besides, with God all things are possible.

\* \* \*

When I was a boy I stood by a clear fresh stream with my father. In the pool at our feet we saw a large healthy perch, its scales glistening in the light of the early morning sun. My father, a skilled fisherman, set out to catch it, and in a few moments the fish was out of the water and in my hands. "It is not so large now as it was in the water," I said, somewhat distressed. My father laughed and told me that the water magnifies the fish, that it always looks larger when it is in its native home.

That is what my account of the life of my Lord must do: It must magnify God the Father, and through him his Son; it must make them doubly visible to my countrymen and women and to the generations that are to follow us.

\* \* \*

# READER'S GROUP GUIDE

And so I will set the scene: This young Jewish woman, this Mary so favored by God, was visited by God's angelic messenger. Where? Should I name the place? Mary's bedchamber? The garden beside her house? An empty field in the rolling hills where she is wont to wander and dream a young woman's dreams? Should it be darkest night or bright day? No, I won't name the place or time. Let any who read this picture the place in the way that makes it the most meaningful for them. This messenger will visit and tell her of God's need for her. And she will say "Yes." She will affirm God's will. She will become the mother of our Lord.

\* \* \*

As Mary's belly swells and the life within her kicks and stretches, how will others see her? I have from time to time walked into the room of a friend who has just, unbeknownst to me, received good news. And before a word could be spoken I perceived, through some sixth sense, the joy and happiness that inhabited my friend.

Do others understand just who it is that Mary carries? Or, if not understand, do they sense it? When Mary enters the room I am sure they say, "Ah, Mary, you are filled with grace!" How can they not recognize that? If we can know without being told that our friend has received good fortune, surely the presence of God's Son in our midst, even in the womb of a woman

who enters our house and greets us, will be known to us. The heart within us will leap for joy.

\* \* \*

The stories say that he was born in poverty, without even the comfort of a pallet on the floor. I must meditate and ponder in my heart why this would have been so; why Mary and her husband would leave the comforts, small though they might be, of their little village just as the time of birth was drawing nigh.

\* \* \*

To be the mother of our Lord: I must in some way convey the heartache that must have accompanied her joy in her son—joy that every mother deserves to have in her children, and the heartache that is cannot be avoided.

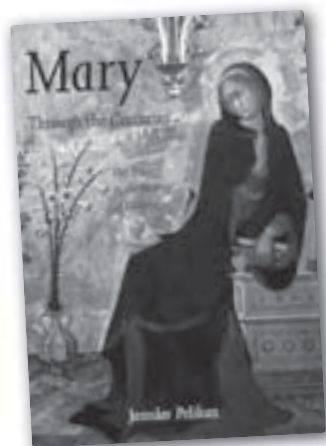
\* \* \*

I have meditated and reflected. I have studied the work of others who have undertaken this daunting task of creating an account of our Lord. I have investigated everything that I could, and now I must write a most truthful story. I will begin in the days of King Herod of Judea, and a priest named Zechariah, who lived blamelessly with his wife, whose name was Elizabeth. And one day an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing beside the incense, and gave him some good news. . . .

## AN ACTIVITY FOR GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL ENRICHMENT

From the earliest days of Christianity to the present day, images of Mary have graced churches, homes, and books. The mother of Jesus has been portrayed by artists ranging from Giotto to Picasso and beyond. Find a resource, whether in print or on the Internet, that provides multiple images of Mary. (The illustrated edition of Jaroslav Pelikan's *Mary Through the Centuries* is a good place to start, as is the on-line gallery at Dave Nation's World, <http://davenation.com/madonnas/>). Look for images that portray various aspects of Mary's persona. Mary as:

- daughter
- betrothed young woman
- wife
- mother of an infant
- mother of an adult
- grieving mother



Choose an image and focus your attention on it, in silence, for five minutes. Then, begin to say the words that came to mind as you meditated on the image (if you are alone, write them down). For example: strong; luminous; vulnerable; heartbroken; and so on. Then, say (or write) sentences that describe Mary as you see her in the work of art. For example: Mary's strength will be a gift to her son. Finally, have an open discussion—or, if alone, write a page-long reflection—about the image of Mary and what it says to a follower of Jesus in the twenty-first century.

If you are reading *Into the Heart of Mary* with a book group, begin each meeting with this exercise, using a very different image each time. If you are reading the book alone, do this exercise as it seems to best fit—before, during, or after reading a chapter.



## A CLOSING PRAYER FOR GROUP MEETINGS

As your group meets and studies *Into the Heart of Mary*, the members will no doubt begin to feel closer and closer to Jesus' mother and will appreciate more clearly than ever the subtle and distinct facets of her character as she is portrayed in the four Gospels.

Ask each member to bring a set of Rosary beads to each meeting. The traditional manner of praying the Rosary is richly meditative; however, instruct the group to use the beads a little differently to close your meetings. Say: "Silently hold the beads in your hand. Grasp one bead between your thumb and forefinger and reflect on the day or week that has just passed. Think of a person you know who is troubled or hurt, or whom you may have wronged, or who

needs rest—anyone who could especially benefit by the attention of Mary. As you grasp that bead, pray that person into the heart of Mary. Then move on to another bead, and another person." After a few minutes, end the session by inviting the entire group to pray together:

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.*

*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb: Jesus.*

*Holy Mary, Mother of God,*

*Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

## WEBSITES OF INTEREST



### MARY: HER STORY

[www.cptryon.org/compassion/mary/index.html](http://www.cptryon.org/compassion/mary/index.html)

Passionist Father Victor Hoagland tells the story of Mary and offers prayers and links related to her life and faith.



### ABOUT JOSEPH: A NEW TESTAMENT SAINT, AN EXAMPLE FOR TODAY

[www.cptryon.org/holylives/nt/joseph/index.html](http://www.cptryon.org/holylives/nt/joseph/index.html)

This site provides information about the husband of Mary, casting him as a saint who still teaches us today about work, prayer, devotion, marriage, fatherhood, and much else.



### THE SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME

[www.ssnd.org](http://www.ssnd.org)

This is the website of the religious order to which Rea McDonnell, the author of *Into the Heart of Mary*, belongs. The site describes many aspects of the sisters' mission to proclaim the good news.

# MORE MARIAN RESOURCES



## THE SEVEN SORROWS OF MARY

*A Meditative Guide*  
Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.

In *The Seven Sorrows of Mary*, Br. Joel Giallanza, C.S.C., offers a work to be both read and prayed with as it meditates on seven moments of suffering in the life of Mary, from Christ's presentation in the temple to his death on the cross.

ISBN: 9781594711763 / 128 pages / \$10.95

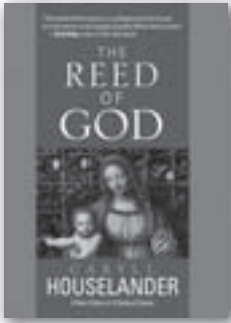


## HAIL MARY

*A Marian Book of Hours*  
William G. Storey

This helpful prayer book offers brief, simply structured contemporary Marian devotionals for nine feast days and the five liturgical seasons. Each morning and evening service includes a hymn, psalms, short readings, a canticle, and prayers of intercession.

ISBN: 9781594711046 / 320 pages / \$15.95

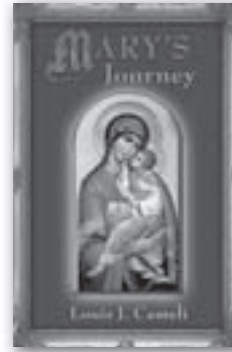


## THE REED OF GOD

Caryll Houselander

Through beautiful prose and meditations, Caryll Houselander depicts the intimately human side of Mary, Mother of God, as an empty reed waiting for God's music to be played through her. With profound theological teachings and appealing imagery, *The Reed of God* is a spiritual classic.

ISBN: 9780870612404 / 192 pages / \$11.95

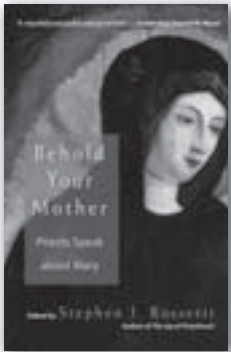


## MARY'S JOURNEY

Louis Cameli

*Mary's Journey* is a meditation on Mary in the life of the Bible, in the teachings of the Church, and in our life of worship and devotion. *Mary's Journey* outlines the journey of faith by the most beloved female figure in the Catholic faith tradition. It reflects the best of contemporary scholarship and theological insight.

ISBN: 9780870612282 / 176 pages / \$12.95



## BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER

*Priests Speak about Mary*  
Edited by Stephen J. Rossetti

Nine esteemed priests, including Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R., and Gerald O'Collins, S.J., share how their devotion to the Blessed Mother has supported their life and ministry. *Behold Your Mother* seeks to renew this devotional practice for younger clergy, those with years of priestly life, and the laity.

ISBN: 9781594710285 / 160 pages / \$14.95



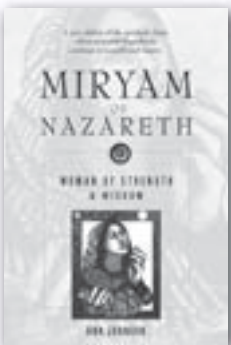
## MARY'S SONG\*

*Living Her Timeless Prayer*  
Mary Catherine Nolan

Offering fresh and compelling insights into the Magnificat—Mary's biblical greeting to her cousin Elizabeth at the time of her pregnancy—the book firmly roots the canticle in contemporary experience. Author Mary Catherine Nolan looks at the Magnificat verse by verse and explores timeless themes such as joy, mercy, regard for the poor, and prayer.

ISBN: 9780877937012 / 128 pages / \$12.95

\*This title is non-returnable



## MIRYAM OF NAZARETH

*Woman of Strength  
and Wisdom*  
Ann Johnson

Be enriched by the understanding of Mary as a Jewish woman and nourished by the Magnificat in this classic of feminine spirituality.

ISBN: 9780870612336 / 128 pages / \$12.95



