

JAN. 1: MARY, MOTHER OF GOD (B-3) Destiny calls.

Experts who study the effect of having a sense of destiny in life tell us that those who have a sense of where they are going get more done than those who don't. Now you know why I often ask you if you're living your lives in the way you want to be remembered, because a yes answer tells me you are living with a sense of destiny, and you are living within the plan God implanted in your heart and soul before you were born.

Having a sense of destiny will get us through the tough times life brings to us all. How we interpret when a setback happens to us tells me volumes about whether you are a positive or a negative person. Some people give up when things go bad. Others become more determined to move forward. Which are you?

Mary kept all these things in her heart. What things? Joseph's desire to divorce her quietly when she told him she was pregnant; the trip getting to Bethlehem; the people who slammed the doors of their inns in her and Joseph's faces; the manger; the visit of the shepherds and magi; and the angel's message that Herod sought to kill the baby Jesus, all were kept in her heart.

What condition do you find your own hearts in? Are you an "up" person, who has learned to roll with the punches life brings? Are you a "down" person, who tends to find the dark side of everything in life? Mary and Joseph had to be "up" people. How do we know? Sometimes we forget that Mary and Joseph did the forming and only later did Jesus learn how to pray and to connect with the God who sent him.

We learn to be an up-beat or a down-beat person. Jesus learned to be an up-beat person. He learned how not to let the worst of the worst bring him so down that he could no longer function. We must never underestimate the power of love to make a difference in the life of someone like our children. If you don't believe me, listen to this:

Rabbi Marc Gafni, a therapist, related he once asked a group of children when the last time someone had told them they were beautiful. Fully expecting to hear “yesterday” or “last week” he was shocked to hear the responses of words of condemnation and shame.

One child shared how her mother had said to her that she’d never met anyone uglier. Another child, the son of a Holocaust survivor, said his mother told him she would have let herself die, if she knew then that she would end up with a son like him.

(Paraphrased from “Presented to the Lord,” *Dynamic Preaching*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, pg. 8)

Do you think that Jesus or you would have turned out the way you did if he or you had parents that did that to you? Of course, not! We are all thankful that we had parents that taught us to be “up” people. We are thankful Jesus learned his lesson well, that we are here to give testimony to the *domino effect* of a faith transmitted for over 2000 years.

“Those who lived in darkness have seen a great light.” We heard these words from Isaiah last week. Thank God Mary learned to live in the light. Thank God Rabbi Gafni never gave up on kids who had heard dark messages, and shined his and God’s own light in their lives.

Mary, Joseph and Jesus are saying we are beautifully made. Do not let the world tell us otherwise. It’s the same message Mary and Josepy gave Jesus. They taught him how to love. They taught him about God. And they presented him to God in the temple.

Let’s learn from Mary how to nurture the soul of another. For one day, the soul we save might just be our own. We must show our children how much they’re loved. We must show them about God, and how they were presented to God in our temple.

Our call for 2012 is to live our Mission Statement to its fullest, and to let our Good Works be those that show an Up-Beat message to a Down-beat World. Are we part of the solution or part of the problem? We must answer this question if we are to be true disciples of an Up-beat God-with-us.