



Mary,
BRIGHT AS THE SUN

Mary,
BLESSED
AMONG WOMEN

Mary,
ARK OF THE
COVENANT

Mary,
TOWER OF DAVID

Mary,
THE NEW EVE



MARY AS *Bride*

A SONG OF SONGS ROSARY COMPANION





a lily among thorns, so is my love among maidens

FIRST MYSTERY: THE NEW EVE

5:2 "Listen! My beloved is knocking. 'Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one...' 'I have put off my garment, am I to put it on again? I have bathed my feet, how could I soil them?'

At the Annunciation in Luke's first chapter, Mary received a proposal. God got down on one knee. A proposal. A knock on the door. A request for access. Ephphetha, Mary. Open to me. The bride hears the same thing in the fifth chapter of the Song: "Listen! My beloved is knocking!" He speaks to her. He says, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one." Ephphetha. The central cry of the Bridegroom God throughout all history, scripture, and through our lives as well - will you open to me, and let me in? The bride refused. 5:2-7 is a picture of sin, of refusal to open, of justification, of excuses. She won't do it. In contrast, Mary flings wide the door to Christ. "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord." She doesn't worry what it will cost her, how 'soiled her feet might become'. The Bride thinks of herself. Mary thinks of her Beloved. Revelation tells us again, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.' He is here, asking for access into your heart and a seat at your table. He has humbled himself to wait for your permission, and he's down on one knee, looking through the lattice, bending down to the lowly door of your heart.

Virgin Mary, young and bold, please grant me grace from your Son to open the door of my heart. Whatever mess I fear he see or smell like Martha, whatever sinfulness I bear like Zaccheus, whatever cost it will be to me like the Bride - I want to give it all. Put your hand at the latch of the door of my heart. Open with me. Show me how. Ephphatha, my heart. Open to him.

SECOND MYSTERY: THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

2:3 "With great delight I sit in his shadow..."

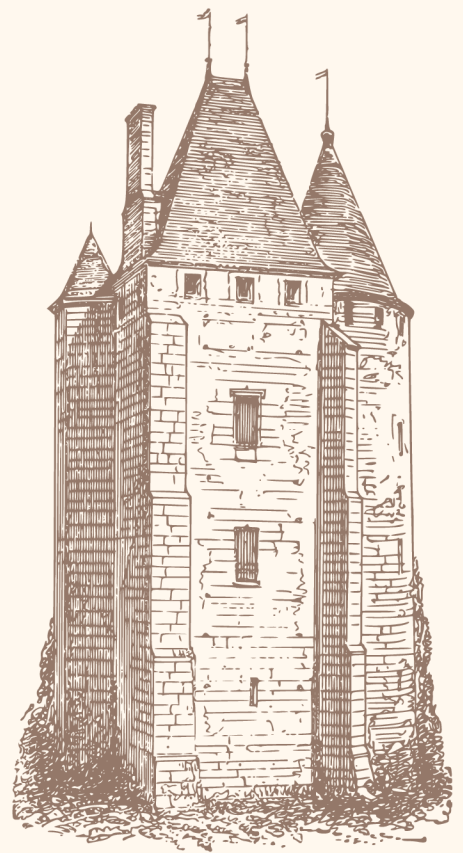
The shadow of the Lord is, throughout Scripture, a place of refuge and safety. David often cites it as the place he seeks God's protection. And here, the Bride loves to sit in his shadow, and eat the fruit of his tree. We can note here the beauty of Jesus, the new Tree of Life, the new fruit hanging from the cross that gives eternal life to those who 'take and eat'. She eats fruit from her Lord in his protection - we cannot help but see in it the Eucharist. But if you turn your eyes back to Our Lady, she is told by the Angel that she too will be in God's shadow. 'How will this be?' she asks. How will she, a virgin already consecrated to God, bear a child? And Gabriel's response? "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." This same word is used to describe the Glory Cloud overshadowing the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament. When Mary is overshadowed, Jesus literally is conceived within her. When the Glory Cloud overshadows the Ark, it becomes powerful and carries God's presence to defeat the enemies of Israel. When the Bride sits in the shadow, she rejoices. Oh - to be in the shadow of the Most High! The Bride sits there. She rests. She receives. Notice that shadows are dark. Perhaps the dark places of our lives have access to God's shadow more than the light.

Mother Mary, Virgin Overshadowed, please grant me the grace from your Son to receive the darkness of the cover of his shadow, and therein, to be changed. Let your Son find in me a place to house His Presence, and let me, like the Ark and like you, bear his presence to the world. Draw me by the hand, Mother, and show me how to receive from my Beloved.

THIRD MYSTERY: TOWER OF DAVID

4:4 "Your neck is like the Tower of David..."

The Bridegroom's descriptions of the Bride include dozens of metaphors, but this one has been pulled into the gorgeous Litany of Loreto, the litany of Marian titles. Unlike the more demure ones - refuge of sinners, virgin most merciful, or help of Christians - this title is among the more impersonal and brazen ones. But hear the Bridegroom rightly: he does not insult the Bride, nor does he carelessly pile on meaningless compliments. He chooses his words carefully, and he means it when he compares his love to the Tower of David. The Tower is a defense of David. A hiding spot, a protection. Mary is a defense of the Lord. The bride is mentioned as a resting place for him (1:13) where he can lay his head on her chest, or take refuge in her heart. She is already his Bethany. But this takes it one step further - she is his defense. A moment ago, he was hers: in the shadow of her King, she was safe. Now, in a strange and maternal turn of events, she defends him. Mary's very body became the defense for Her Lord. To think - she harbored Her Beloved, and Her Son at once - within her. She was his strong tower, the savior's savior with Joseph in flight to Egypt. Alongside this title, others that feel equally 'impersonal' are equally deep: Tower of Ivory, Ark of the Covenant, House of Gold, Seat of Wisdom. Tower of Ivory is drawn from the Song (7:4) as well, and the Ark, House, and Seat each reveal different faces of the same mystery: that she housed him, protected him, and bore him. Like the Ark in the desert, she bore the presence of God. Like the house of gold, the temple, the holy of holies, she held him in her inmost place. Like the wisdom seat in the tabernacle, she was the place he dwelt. These are not barren titles; they are in fact, words of honor in reference to the astonishingly humble reality: Jesus allowed a Bride to defend him and bear him. And he does so for you and for me.



Oh Mary, Tower of David, grant me the grace of your Son to draw under the protection of your mantle. Before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful - to you I do I fly, you who never let down a sinner in need of God's mercy, begging you for help. Defend me, as you defended the unborn Lord. Defend me, as you defended the infant Savior. Defend me, in my mind and heart where the battles wage. Be my Tower, Mother, that I may rest in your womb with my Bridegroom and lay down in peace.

FOURTH MYSTERY: BLESSED AMONG WOMEN

6:9 "There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the darling of the mother flawless to her that bore her. The maidens saw her and called her happy."

This line from the Song reminds us of Elizabeth's words of praise to Mary and Mary's Magnificat declaration: *Blessed are you among women! All generations shall call me blessed.* The bridegroom speaks to the bride in the presence of all the nations - and he singles her out. She alone, is blessed among women. She alone is his. She alone returns his unrequited love. He loves them all, but only she loves him back perfectly. Only she never betrays him through sin. So she is the perfect one, the lily among thorns, the only one for him. St. Francis de Sales writes of the harem of King Solomon - 700 wives, 300 concubines, and maidens. He says that the wives are close to the King: esteemed and honored and chosen as bride. The concubines were brought into intimacy in the marriage bed. And the maidens - they have perceived the goodness of the King and his love, but they haven't yet parted ways with their own amusements, distractions, and ornaments. These 'young and novice souls do truly love the Sacred Bridegroom, but with a multitude of distractions and voluntary diversions', so that they do not love him above all other things, and they do not stop entertaining themselves with things outside of him. These words describe Solomon's harem, not the maidens mentioned here in the song, but it draws a connection that might stir our hearts: are we the little maidens with one foot in and one foot out? Do we love things more than our Bridegroom?

Oh Mary, Highest Among All Women, closest Beloved of God, grant me grace from your Son to love him more than the world. The Bride declares that his love is better than wine. Better than luxury. Better than material goods. Better than this world. To the parts of my heart that are still distracted by other goods, speak invitation, Mother Mary. Coax and draw them further into the court of the King, closer to the Bridegroom, closer to his and your hearts. Oh Immaculate Heart of Mary, sinless and perfect at loving the King, grant me grace to love Jesus more than anything else.

FIFTH MYSTERY: BRIGHT AS THE SUN

6:10 "Who is this that comes forth like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in battle array?"

This line is echoed in the *Cantena Legionis*, the daily prayer of the Legion of Mary. At first glance, our hearts may reject it as a description of our beautiful and tender Mother. But we must look further to see her, the Bride, arising to the King - think of the Coronation of Mary, think of her assumption into Heaven, her rising to the stars. Just before this line in the song, the Bridegroom described the Bride by marks of strength: *beautiful as Tirzah, Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.* She's no longer just a beauty to him. She's strong as a city. She just endured the Dark Night of the Soul, the departure of Love. In her suffering, she chose to praise Him, the Absent Beloved. All said and done, she comes forth stronger than ever. Her love is ready. It's mature. It's fortified. He goes down (6:11) to the nut tree to ensure it, to check that the hardened exterior of his bride has really cracked off and she is ready to receive his love. And a ready, strengthened, certain, tested love of God - *that* is terrible as an army set in battle array only to one: the Evil One. The Gates of Hell tremble at the sight of Mary. She cannot be defeated by sin, as they've seen. She cannot be defeated by suffering, as witnessed by her pierced heart. Her love for God cannot be bought, captured, weakened, diminished, or stopped. She is the Tower of David. She is a woman in love. Would that all our hearts make the Enemy tremble!

Oh Mary, Queen of the Universe, my queen and my mother, grant me grace from your Son to be strong in my love. Neither life nor death nor angels nor principalities nor height nor depth - nothing can separate me from his love, and in God's grace and Jesus' name and your intercession, Queen Mother, nothing can separate him from mine either.