



Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; John 10:22-30

Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (May 11, 2025)

Ancient Joppa (modern day Tel Aviv has incorporated it) has Biblical relevance.¹ It was an important center of commerce and international Mediterranean port with a flourishing and active Christian community. But tradition also associated Joppa with Jonah the prophet who flew there to board a vessel heading West, away from the mission the Lord had given him to go East and preach in Nineveh, the ancient and corrupt Assyrian city.

Tabitha (Dorcas in Greek, Gazelle in English) was a creative stylist and skilled seamstress. She was also a believer who practiced her faith through “good works and acts of charity” (Acts 9:36). Her generous hospitality extended to the widows in town who now gather to mourn her death. They praised her kindness to them. She probably dressed them up in style to restore their dignity and encourage self-confidence after having experienced the grief of widowhood and losing their social status and legal protection.

She was well known and loved. A life well lived now lost.

Just as he ran to the tomb of Jesus, Peter, solicited by her grieving friends, now runs to the death site of this pillar of the community. He is now an instrument of resurrection.

Luke, speaking on behalf of the local community of believers, tells us that Dorkas was a “disciple.” But what does it take to be acknowledged as a disciple?

¹ [What is the significance of Joppa in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](#); see also [Bible Gem 1532 - Where are Lydda, Joppa and Sharon? \(Acts 9:32-43\) - Berean Insights](#)

In ancient times, a student of a rabbi was a disciple. In our times, anyone can self-identify as a Christian. But is that the same as being a disciple? Does it automatically translate? Does the local community have any saying in acknowledging one as a disciple?

Almost fifty years ago I had an argument with a woman in town. She was very vocal in her anger towards immigrants. When I asked her if she were a Christian, she affirmed very strongly that “Yes, from the top of my head to my toes!”

Converts to the faith, Luke tells us, “*devoted themselves*” to learning from the apostles, to spending time together in mutual aid and generous service, to public worship, and to a life of prayer.² That’s how they became disciples and were recognized as such. Love transforms people. Community life was sacred. They showed hospitality towards one another and encouraged each other in the faith.³

Jesus had strong words for those who wanted to follow him. He said that not everyone who calls him “Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven but those who do the will of the Father in heaven.⁴ And Paul would also remind Christians that they were called to build each other up and not tear each other down. He equaled the community of believers to a human body whose organs are designed to help the whole body.⁵

The resurrection of Jesus was evident in the amazing deeds of the apostles and the refreshing witness of the Church. Luke tells us “many believed in the Lord.” With Jesus as the Shepherd, faith produces faith.

From the very beginning, the Church has *mothered* new disciples, producing children to the faith. The question is not “Will our children have faith?” but “Will our faith have children?”

On this Mother’s Day, we can’t but remember Mary, Jesus’ mother. From the very beginning, she showed her availability to God. Mary was shocked when

² Acts 2:42

³ 1 Thessalonians 5:11

⁴ Luke 6:46-49; Matthew 7:21

⁵ 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

the angel Gabriel greeted her full of the grace of the Lord and revealed to her God's plan for her to conceive and give birth to the king of Israel.

We can almost hear Mary's surprise: "Who, me? A mother, and not just of a beautiful and healthy boy but of the Messiah and son of God? How can that be possible?" and Gabriel's answer: "Leave it to God. Anything can be possible with God!" Mary surrendered: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."⁶

Can you picture Mary, bearing Jesus in her womb? Can you picture her sacrifices as she gives birth to Jesus in a very challenging and hostile environment. Not only did she face the scrutiny and gossip of her neighbors but also the challenging journey through the mountains to register for the census and then the flight to Egypt to escape a dictator's, Herod, jealousy and assassination attempt of her baby.

God was favoring her who constantly meditated on the power and plan of God to side with those who love and honor God and have the back of the poor, the helpless, the downtrodden. She knew that God was in the habit of raising the lowly and crashing down the arrogant, the powerful and the connected.⁷

Can you imagine Mary hearing Jesus' first cry, teaching him to walk, reciting Psalms, feeding and nursing him to health, watching him walk away to an unknown life of itinerant preaching, hearing rumors of amazements but also mounting conflict and danger, and then watching him suffer and die? And it was there by her son on the cross that Jesus entrusted to her the Church: "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple (us), "Here is your mother."⁸

Can you see her, sometimes later, out of her skin as she hears rumors of his resurrection, abundant joy and new life?

From then on, the Church's faith gives Jesus to the world. As Meister Eckhart explained, Mary has shown all of us how to be mothers of God. She knew how to let go and let be and thereby give birth to the divine.

⁶ Lk 1:26-38

⁷ Lk 1:46-55

⁸ John 19:26

It does us no good that Mary gave us Jesus if we are not able to produce Jesus for the world.⁹ Our faith must produce the divine fruit. We also need to “mother” Jesus.¹⁰

We say that in our Mission Statement: With the birth of Jesus in our heart, we carry light and love to the world. The faith of the Church gives birth to Jesus whom we offer to the world.

Our constant challenge is to learn how to be true to our Christian vocation; how to witness to the love of God in integrity and authenticity; how to be facilitators of new births, instruments of new hopes, children of faith.

Those who hear and recognize the Shepherd’s voice, follow him. They have no doubt that what he says is good for them and gives them life. They are willing to listen, to obey and to commit to him.

May we be found among the sheep that belong to him. May we receive from him life that generates and faith that transforms. Amen.

⁹ Matthew Fox , Daily Meditations, [December 20, 2020](#)

¹⁰ Matthew 12:50; Ephesians 3:17; Romans 8:38-39; 2 Peter 1:4