

Mary had a hard life. She really did! We get all gushy about Mary, how wonderful she is, how wonderful it must have been to live as part of the Holy Family with Jesus and Joseph. We think her life was idyllic, and in some aspects, particularly in the family and spiritual aspects it was.

But we forget that she grew up during a time that was not favorable to human life. Many if not most children died before their first birthday. Women dying in labor was a common occurrence. Women ground their own flour, did the shopping, and cooked over an open flame. Laundry was washed in the river, by hand. Water was carried home in a jug, human waste went into a pot to be thrown out in the morning, or if you were poor, you just stepped into the alley and did your business. Sanitation outside ritual washing was virtually nonexistent.

She was found to be pregnant out of wedlock, something that by law in that day carried the penalty of death by stoning. She gave birth in a stable, and when her child was only about a month old, her husband Joseph woke her in the middle of the night so they could flee to Egypt, to escape Herod and save her son's life.

She lived several years as a refugee until they could return to Israel, to their home town of Nazareth. The place where she was known to have been pregnant out of wedlock, a place where the people were considered simple-minded or ignorant, a place that was so small, between 150 and 200 people, that it would be difficult for Joseph to earn a living. But the location and reputation kept Jesus safe from the authorities in Jerusalem.

Then she became a widow at a relatively early age. Her friend, confidant, partner in raising Jesus was gone. The shift from her being responsible for her Son, to her son being responsible for her, as difficult of a transition them as it is today.

Her son then enters into his public life and she is alone now for much of the time. We are sure she kept herself busy helping people. We saw that in her at the Visitation when she left her parents home after saying yes to Gabriel, pregnant herself, as she hurried to take care of her cousin who needed her support.

She stood at the foot of the Cross, gazing upon her little boy as he died in agony after being tortured. She held his broken and bloody body after they took it down from the cross, and because of Jewish tradition, she had to

give him up even then so he could be laid in the tomb before the sun set on that terrible day.

She joined the Apostles and some of the other disciples in sorrow in the upper room, keeping company with her new sons. Was she there that Easter when they found the empty tomb? When did Jesus tell her the Good News? The mystics tell us that Jesus visited her first, and our good sense agrees because out of all of humanity, he loves his mother the most.

Mary, the Mother of God, one tough lady, who believed in him, bore him at the risk of her life, protected him, comforted him as her child, remained a virgin throughout her life for him, suffered with him, particularly at the foot of the Cross and never gave up, never stopped believing, never despaired. Always there, always supporting, always Mom. Not only for her First Born Son, but for each and every one of us as well.