

Who wants to be Mary/

By [Christian Coon](#)

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"Who wants to be Mary?"

Our music director asked a group of seven-, eight- and nine-year-old girls this question a couple weeks ago, as children from the church gathered for their first Christmas pageant rehearsal. A handful of would-be Marys eagerly raised their hands, each wanting the chance to stand up front with a (probably uncomfortable) young Joseph and hold the baby-doll Jesus.

After a bit of deliberation, the director chose a second-grader named Sophie. Sophie's eyes opened wide behind her glasses, and she whispered in joyful disbelief, "Me?"

Sophie's a bright young girl, the child who always has just the right thing to say during the children's sermon. I delighted in hearing about this scene. But some of the girls were disappointed. Elizabeth, also a second-grader, was told that she could be a lamb. She was silent for a moment as her brow furrowed; then she looked at one of the pageant coordinators. "Well," she asked suspiciously, "what does the lamb do?"

Everybody wants to be Mary.

But did *Mary* want to be Mary? I think this is a key question in this text from Luke. I have tended to focus on verse 29 and say that probably she did not. After the visit from Gabriel, Mary was, depending on your translation, "[much perplexed](#)" (NRSV), "[greatly troubled](#)" (NIV), "[thoroughly shaken](#)" (*The Message*) or "[confused and disturbed](#)" (NLT). I have told and retold the [folk tale](#) from Tobit about the jealous angel who appears on a bride's wedding night and kills her bridegroom each time she gets married. With all this as context, how could Mary want to be Mary?

Of course, there's a reason that I, like many others, like to emphasize those individuals in the Bible who struggle or flee or doubt (Jonah, many of the prophets,

Peter). These stories comfort us, reminding us that we are not alone in our desire to escape or question.

But Mary's story doesn't end at verse 29. Yes, she wonders, and she asks a question or two. But eventually she claims—fiercely claims—this calling as her own. It's Mary's tenacity that I sometimes overlook, and I'm not sure why that is, because she goes on to sing a [song of praise](#) of such power and poetry that it still sends chills down my spine as I read it.

My daughter was one of the little girls who wanted to be Mary, and I'm glad for that. I'll do my best to talk to her about what it means to be Mary...to be a bit overwhelmed, yes, but also courageous and willing to cling to what God has set before her.

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I came across a quote that might fit well with this story, if your congregation isn't too tired of hearing about President-elect Obama. It's from [one](#) of the many pieces about Obama's victory that ran in the Nov. 17 issue of the *New Yorker*. David Axelrod, one of the campaign architects, "told friends that, while 'usually the politician chooses the moment, sometimes the moment chooses the politician.'"