



# One day retreat

Many Bible study groups love to gather monthly with *Lutheran Woman Today's* three-session summer Bible study, but for others, vacations and travel plans make it hard to get together. What to do?

Gather for a one-day retreat with the *LWT* summer Bible study, "Mary: A Woman for All Seasons."

**WHO:** Invite the women in your congregation and other congregations, especially college-aged women and high-school girls. This study considers Mary at different ages—wouldn't it be wonderful to look at how her example sheds light on our own spiritual lives in the company of women of different ages?

**WHERE:** Choose a scenic spot—perhaps the back yard of a first-class gardener. Or maybe someone's condo has a nice clubhouse with a patio. Think of a place that'll let you all enjoy not only the riches of Scripture but also the beauty of summer.

**WHEN:** Any time after the July/August issue arrives in about the middle of June. Remind everyone to bring their copies of both the June and July/August issues to the retreat, or you can download all three sessions for free from the *LWT* Web site ([www.lutheranwoman.today.org](http://www.lutheranwoman.today.org)) and make copies for everyone—plus a few extras. The leader guide is included, so people don't need to bring anything else but their Bibles.

**HOW:** Share the work! Ask someone different to lead each of the three sessions (it's easy; the leader guide appears in the magazine with each session). Ask someone else to lead the suggested hymns, and ask some

others to lead the opening and closing prayers. Ask a few other people to arrange healthful refreshments, and ask some others to decorate the area with fresh summer greenery and flowers.

**DIRECTIONS:** Start the morning with a light breakfast: coffee, bagels or croissants, and fresh fruit. About 9:30, gather the group for the first session, "The Annunciation," in the June issue. That'll take about an hour.

Stretch your legs, go look at the garden, stroll around the patio, have another strawberry or two. Then call the group back together for the second session, "Kinships, Friendships, and Holy Encounters," in the July/August issue. Then it's time for lunch.

After lunch, call the group back together to enjoy the third session, "Mary Among the Disciples." When the group has completed that, it's time for a closing devotion of your choosing.

Welcome people to linger for a little more conversation before picking up and heading for home.

Be sure to tell the group about the *LWT* Bible study that starts in the September issue—"To God's Beloved: Paul's Letter to the Romans." Author Sarah Henrich shows us what it is about this letter that made Martin Luther call it the most important piece in the New Testament. He even said it would be worth memorizing!

And as you wave goodbye until the next time, bask in the joy of sharing friendship, hospitality, and God's word together in the beauty of a summer day.

## MARY: A WOMAN FOR ALL SEASONS

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. Ecclesiastes 3:1*

How do you picture Mary, the mother of Jesus?

- *As a teenager, startled at an angel's sudden intrusion?*
- *As a new mother, cuddling her son?*
- *As the mother of a pre-teen, shocked at her child's emerging independence?*
- *As a loyal and lively friend, the kind who today would drive across the country to be with her older cousin, Elizabeth, who was facing a high-risk pregnancy; the kind of woman who today would text-message her son's friend John?*
- *As a woman bereft, the Pietá?*
- *As an older woman with graying hair, a mature leader in her local congregation?*

Would you be surprised to learn that all of these images of Mary have roots in Scripture?

### Mary for Lutherans

Maybe some of us are a little wary of a Bible study about Mary because we associate her with such non-biblical practices as praying *to* Mary. You might be interested to know that Martin Luther calls Mary “the highest woman and the noblest gem in Christianity after Christ” (Christmas sermon, 1531), and that in the

Apology of the Augsburg Confession (one of the foundational documents of the Lutheran Church) we read that “blessed Mary prays for the church,” that she is “worthy of the highest honors” (*Book of Concord*; Tappert p. 232).

### Mary for All Seasons

Mary is one of the few female characters of the Bible whom we see not just once or twice, but over decades. Whether you plan to do this summer Bible study as a personal devotion, as a one-day retreat, or with a circle of other women during the summer, we hope you will find Mary to be a friend to cherish, a spiritual guide who points you forward to a fuller life in Christ as you experience your own seasons as a woman of faith.

In this summer Bible study we will take a closer look at these three seasons in the life of Mary:

### Session 1: The Annunciation

What is it like to be on the brink of womanhood and visited by a messenger of God Almighty? We will reflect on youthful spirituality—that season of surprises, hopefulness,

and perhaps naïve courage to take on great big God-sized projects.

### Session 2: Kinships, Friendships, and Holy Encounters

We will look at two instances of intergenerational friendships and blessings: when the teen-aged Mary goes to visit her middle-aged cousin Elizabeth, and later when Mary and her family are blessed by elders in the temple after the birth of Jesus.

### Session 3: Mary among the Disciples

Mary may well have been a widow when she was called to a new role as a mature leader in the early church. We will consider the poignant moment when Jesus entrusts his beloved disciple into Mary's care and a final glimpse of Mary joining the disciples in prayer.

**The Rev. Christa von Zychlin** just celebrated her half-century birthday by running a marathon and then moving to Asia with her husband and youngest son, serving with ELCA Global Mission in Hong Kong, China. Now serving the church on a fourth continent (having previously served in Ohio, Africa, Iowa, Germany, France, and Wisconsin), Pastor Christa invites you to share in her current adventures at <http://marathonangel.blogspot.com>.