

Mary, Mother of Jesus

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we will be looking at Luke 1:26-38. It is the account where the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and announces that she will be the mother of the Son of God, Jesus. It's a remarkable portion of Scripture. It's also one of parts of the Bible where Mary is central to the story and the a main player in the Script. For that reason, I want use this as an opportunity answer some important questions about Mary, so that we can then put our attention where it truly needs to be. I think you know there are some Christian who give a great deal of attention to Mary, who offer prayers to Mary, who seek grace from Mary. What does God say?

Open your Bibles to Luke 1:26-38:

26 In the sixth month, [of Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy with John the Baptist] **God sent the angel Gabriel** [announcement to Daniel about human history in Daniel 9. He is a messenger of God, and the message he brought was God's message. And he announces the most amazing birth in history. This is divine intervention in human history! The fulfillment of prophecies from of old.] **to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,** [it was a very small town in the middle of nowhere. Well, in Galilee, a region north of Jerusalem. Galilee was not the seat of Jewish culture. It was not the center of their religion. It was sometimes called Galilee of the Gentiles because many non-Jewish people had settled there over the centuries. Galilee itself was not a respected location to the Jews and it would have been meaningless to the Romans. And in this backwater region was a tiny little village called Nazareth that wasn't the seat of anything. It wasn't on any major roads. About 70 miles north of Jerusalem. Just this little, unremarkable village. Historians guess it only had about 500 people at the time. It's small enough that Luke's readers would have never heard of it, so he says, "in Galilee."

Why am I bothering to stress all of these points? It's because we're going to see it's part of God's plan and it's part of God's pattern. God typically and intentionally picks the insignificant things of this world for special honor. We'll talk about that more, but I just want to plant that seed and let it start germinating.

27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

The angel comes down to this little village and appears to one person: Mary. He came "to a virgin." There is no doubt about the Greek word here. It is the word used for an unmarried girl who has never had sexual relations. An interesting question to consider is how old Mary would have been when the angel appears. Younger than you think. All of the pictures we see today make Mary look like a young woman in her 20's. Although the Bible does not tell us her age, we do know the typical age for marriage in Palestine in those days. For girls, that age was usually 12 - 14 years old. The marriage was almost always arranged by the parents. So we can presume that Mary's parents and Joseph's parents were the ones behind this betrothal. The two had already made their promises to each other, but had not yet had the wedding ceremony. So it was to this girl that the angel Gabriel appeared.

Before we look at what Gabriel said, would you note one more thing: Joseph was a descendent of David. The prophets had said that the Messiah would be a descendent of David. You might object, “But Joseph was not Jesus’ biological father!” And you would be correct. However, to the Jews that didn’t matter. The genealogy was always traced through the father. And so Matthew’s Gospel traces Joseph’s line for us so we can see that he was indeed of the line of David. Luke also gives a genealogy and it differs from Matthew’s. It appears he traces Mary’s line back to David as well. Traced through either parent, Jesus was a descendant of David.

One more important thing to note before we move on. How is Mary described by Luke? Well, it’s very simple, isn’t it? She’s a virgin pledged to be married to Joseph. Her name is Mary. That’s it. She is not described as blameless and righteous. There is no elaboration on her whatsoever. It doesn’t talk about how she volunteered in the Nazareth soup kitchen. It doesn’t talk about her family or her upbringing. In fact, Mary’s parents are never mentioned in the Bible at all. The parents of John the Baptist are spoken of in Scripture. We know their names (Zachariah and Elizabeth). Yet no mention of Mary’s parents. The reason I highlight this is because what is *not written* here is of great importance. Mary is not described in detail. Mary’s works are not mentioned. Mary’s character is not described. John the Baptist’s parents are described: They are described: **“Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly.”** But we hear no such words of commendation about Mary.

Now I’m not suggesting Mary was an unbelieving, wicked heathen. But it is notable that Mary and her character are simply not a part of this story. It’s because this story is not ultimately about Mary. It’s about God’s divine choice to send his Son, true God, in human flesh. It’s about God’s divine intervention in human history.

Now this is the incredible part:

28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings [the word here simply the common greeting of the day. The angel Gabriel sent from God almighty to a young virgin to announce that she will be the mother of the Savior, begins with a simple and common, “Hello.” The simplicity! **you who are highly favored (“you who have been shown kindness”)! **The Lord is with you.**”**

This phrase is important. Perhaps you’ve heard the Roman Catholic translation of this verse: “Hail, Mary, full of grace.” This is important and worth considering further. “Hail” sounds like the greeting you would give to royalty. “Full of grace” implies that Mary herself already inherently was full of grace. She herself had grace and was full of grace, and therefore she can give and dispense grace. She is the source of grace. In other words, they understand this phrase to be speaking to the character of Mary and the position she holds and the honor and prayers that are due her. This is the dominant theme in Catholic theology, that Mary is the bestower of grace.

But that is not what it says! Mary was not the bestower of grace, but the recipient of grace! Hail is just “hello.” She does not give grace, but rather she was the recipient of grace. The verb is passive. She receives it. By God’s choice he decided to give her special favor in that she would be the mother of our Savior. That’s not a small thing. She was certainly richly blessed by God to be chosen for this. But the reason she was chosen was not in her. The reason was in God. God chose to give her grace / favor.

Mary cannot hear the prayers of anybody, and she has not grace to give. Why do I say this confidently? Because that’s what the Bible says.

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. This supports what we’re saying. If she was already grace-filled, she would have understood

this greeting. She would have known it to be true already. She would have received the greeting as appropriate and understandable. But instead the words troubled her. She didn't get it. She knew she was no one special. She knew her own sinfulness.

"Well, it doesn't say that!" True enough, but just a few verses later, Mary sings a song of praise to God in which she says, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God *my Savior*." Mary knew she needed saving as much as anyone else. She had the privilege of giving birth to the one who would be her Savior.

30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.

Note that Mary was afraid. This was the same reaction of all sinful human being in the presence of holy God. Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, was afraid when he saw an angel. The shepherd in the field were afraid when an angel of the Lord appeared to them. The angel at Jesus' empty tomb frightened those who saw it. And Mary behaved exactly the way every other person behaved in the presence of God or a holy angel. In fact, the only one not to be afraid in the face of the glory of God, was Jesus Christ, because only Jesus was in fact holy and therefore had no reason to be afraid in the presence of a holy angel.

And the reason she need not be afraid was that she had found favor with God. Again, this favor came from God and was because of God. This favor or grace did not come from Mary, nor was it because of Mary. Nothing about Mary is spoken here.

Now, the amazing promise follows. The pinnacle!

31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

Wow, this is the focus of the story! It's not Mary at all... it's the baby that would be born of Mary. She would have a son and she should name him "Jesus" because Jesus means "he saves" and that's exactly what he would do. And he would be the Son of the Most High. He would be true God and true man. God entering into human history in human flesh... THIS is the point of this story! He will be a great, mighty, eternal King. He is coming to fight the battle that Mary and every one of us has lost. We have gone up against *Satan*, and caved to his will rather than God's will. We have tried to live a holy life, but ended up living in *rebellion* against the Creator. Every ounce of us resists the concept of *death*, and yet sooner or later we all succumb to it. But this Son of the Most High who would be conceived in Mary would be the great King to conquer them all! He would face off against Satan and crush his head, resisting every temptation that came his way. He would go to the cross and take full responsibility for the sins of the world... for your sins, my sins, Mary's sins. And he would pay their awful penalty through his death on the cross. Jesus would conquer that enemy we dread the most: death. His resurrection proved it! And we will rise too. This is the focus of the story. It's not Mary, it's Jesus!

Then Mary asks an honest and understandable question.

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

This was not a question born out of unbelief. It was simply a "how" question. In other words, Mary understood the "that." She believed "that" it would happen. But she could not come up with a single possible way that would answer the "how." She was young, but she wasn't naïve. She knew enough about the birds and the bees to know that it wasn't possible for her to be pregnant. She had never known a man.

Didn't she believe in miracles? Miracles were happening all the time back in Bible times, right? Wrong! In fact a miracle had not happened among God's people in over 400 years. I think

we get it in our minds that miracles happened almost daily back then and now they are gone. But they didn't happen regularly back then either. Mary had never seen a miracle, so she was interested in the "how" part of this promise. How would God do this if she had never known a man?

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

So the angel answers that this indeed will be a miracle. Overshadowed and enveloped by God's power, she will conceive by the creative power of the Holy Spirit of God. There was no human father, no human male of any sort involved in the conception of this child.

So the angel makes it clear that this child was unique and different from every other child born of woman. He would be the holy one. The only child born without sin. And he would be called the Son of God. This baby would be God in human flesh. A mystery! Don't fail to be filled with the awe this inspires. God in human flesh. God humiliating himself to take on human flesh and live among us to ultimately rescue us! This is the story of amazing love.

And then he gives a little help for her faith:

36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. 37 For nothing is impossible with God."

This was probably the first time Mary heard that Elizabeth was going to have a baby. Elizabeth was called "barren." Mary knew this. Yet she was going to have a baby. This miracle of conception would help Mary's faith and the different kind of miracle of conception that happened in her. It was a sign so she would know that God can do what is humanly impossible.

Nothing is impossible with God. God has all power. God can accomplish all things. We cannot apply our human limits to God! The God who can create our universe can create an embryo in the womb of Mary.

And then Mary's response of faith:

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. Her acceptance of God's Word is remarkable. God has described the impossible. And think of what this would mean for her: Joseph. Stigma. But she submitted to the will of God. She yielded to the will of God. "I am your servant." I do whatever God says because he is the master and I am the slave. "May it be to me as you have said." I don't really understand the how, but God, you have said it, so I yield to you.

So what about Mary, mother of Jesus? Who is she? How should we regard her? What should we make of her? Mary is a humble, lowly girl. The text does not indicate there is anything humble, special or different about her. God simply chose to grace her to be the mother of Jesus.

Yet there are those who have totally twisted what the Bible says about Mary. They call her the Queen of Heaven. They call her the co-redemptrix... the one who suffered along with Christ and redeemed us along with Jesus. The Bible knows nothing of this. They essentially turn God from the Holy Trinity to the Holy Quartet. They invite and encourage you to pray to her and she will give you her grace. They teach the Father is unapproachable, and his Son really is too. But you can talk to his Mom... she'll listen and will pass along your requests to the Father and the Son. Mary's union with Christ means your prayers to her get your prayers to Christ. Friends, the Bible knows nothing of this. Ancient Christianity also knows nothing of this. The Bible says, "There is one mediator between God and man, the man, Christ Jesus." Don't pray to Mary when God invites you to pray directly to him through the Son, and he promises to hear all of your prayers.

Mary was a servant of God exactly as we are. There are no passages that even hint that she invites your prayers, hears your prayers or intercedes for you. If Mary could somehow speak to us today, here is what she would say:

It's not about me. It's all about Jesus, the holy one, the Son of God who takes away the sin of the world. She would tell us that she was most surprised at God's choice to make her the mother of Jesus. She would tell you little she deserved that grace.

She would tell you about the strange choices God makes... how he picked a backwater town in Galilee for his son to be raised. How he picked a stable for his son to be born in. How he picked a carpenter for a father. How he picked a lowly servant like herself to be his mother.

She would tell you to celebrate the very same grace of God that God pours out on you. You have been chosen by God. You are highly favored by God. No, you were not chosen to be the mother or father of Jesus. But you were chosen to be his brother... his sister. What? Why *you* of all people? I don't know. You have been favored by God. We don't understand his choices.

If Mary were here today, the only reference to herself she might make would be to humbly trust God the way she did. She understood the "that" clearly, and the "how" poorly. Isn't that true of us today as well? God has promised you *that* all your guilt is taken away. The *how* is harder for us to understand. He promised *that* he will work all things out for your good. The *how* is harder for us to understand. He has promised *that* you will live even though you die. The *how* is harder to understand. He has promised *that* your body will rise on the last day. The *how* is harder to understand. Mary would encourage you to yield to God and trust the "*that*," and simply understand that you often won't always be able to understand the "*how*."

This week we celebrate our Savior birth. If Mary were here today, she would remind us that this week is not about her. It's about the child she bore, who was holy, who died for our sins, who saved us made us right with God, who rose on the third day and who will come again to take us to be with him. We honor Mary by giving all glory, attention, worship and praise to the Son she bore... just as she did. Amen.