

Encountering Jesus: Mary, Luke 1:26-38, 12/17/17

Story of Mom's surprise, that was nothing compared to how surprised Mary must have been.

So today we want to get to know the biblical portrait of Mary a little better from this text. The reason I say it that way is because religious people tend to go to the extremes with Mary. On one extreme are some of our Roman Catholic friends that tend to elevate Mary to a position that is either extra-biblical or sometimes contradictory to the witness of Scripture. How many of you grew up Catholic. This isn't an anti-Catholic message. This is a pro-Mary message and some of what the Catholics have done to honor Mary is good and helpful and needed. Because on the other extreme, many protestant churches and pastors don't even talk about Mary unless it's at the end of a football game, or downplay the significance and character of Mary as an over-correction. We can disagree and still have love.

Portrait of Mary

1) Not a Perfect Person but God's Perfect Selection

Over time in the development of the teaching on Mary, the Roman Catholic church finally adopted officially what they had been teaching for centuries which is the Immaculate Conception. Now most people think the Immaculate Conception is the same thing as the virgin birth, which Scripture teaches. It is not. **The Immaculate Conception** is actually a statement about Mary's birth not Jesus' birth. **Pope Pius IX in 1854 issued this decree, "The blessed Virgin Mary to have been, from the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Christ Jesus the Savior of Mankind, preserved free from all stain of original sin."** Did you get that? In other words she was born sinless, just like Jesus. Not only do they teach that she was born sinless but that by a special grace of God she remained sinless, like Jesus and she too never died but was assumed into heaven, like Jesus.

Mary was an incredibly godly woman from all accounts in Scripture, we don't have much about her but from what we can see she appears to be a woman of exceptional great character. But sinless? No. She was a sinner like you and me. How do we know? In **Mary's song- the Magnificat, in v.46 she says, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."** Why would she need a savior if she didn't have sin? We see her making sacrifices at the temple which you only do if you have sin. And doesn't **Romans 3:23** say that **All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God?** Isn't Jesus the only one?

So Mary wasn't a perfect person, but she was the perfect selection for God. Why? What stands out most was **her humility that made her the perfect selection for God.**

Humble Hometown- The place Angel Gabriel chose to come would have drawn amazement from the first-century world Jewish readers. He bypassed Judea and Jerusalem and instead went to the galilee region, and even more mind-blowing, the

village of Nazareth. Nazareth was a nowhere place. When Nathaniel mentioned Nazareth, he said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" implying that this was miserably corrupt place (John 1:46). It was a truck stop in a one stop sign kind of town that people would have been embarrassed to tell people about. That was my town of Orwigsburg, in Schuylkill County.

Humble Upbringing:

Most scholars believe when Gabriel came to her she was somewhere between 12-15 years old. She was a teenager. Poor, Highly like that she was illiterate.

But it wasn't just Mary's humble hometown and upbringing that made her a perfect selection, it was her **humble heart**. We see this in how she refers to herself:

Luke 1:38

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."

Luke 1:46-48

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

Doule- Maid-servant- Saw herself as someone that was completely submitted to her master, the Lord. We cannot miss this inescapable fact in the coming of Jesus that the greatest news ever proclaimed came to the humblest of its people.

The Lord comes to needy people- those who realize that without him they cannot make it- those who acknowledge their weakness and spiritual lack. The incarnation, salvation, resurrection, and Christmas are not for the proud and self-sufficient.

We talk about getting into the Christmas spirit- What does that mean? Getting excited about getting or giving gifts, or decorating or getting days off of school? I submit to you that what we see in Mary is the Christmas spirit: Humility. May we put on that Christmas spirit, seeing ourselves like Mary.

2) Not an Object of Faith but an Example of Faith

There are many people who have elevated Mary to an object of faith. Some even in a superstitious way, Most extreme versions of that are the "sightings of Mary" in everything from her apparition in tiny African village to her countenance in a grilled cheese sandwich that sold on Ebay for 28k.

While Mary should not become an object of faith she is certainly an example of faith. We see her example clearly in contrast to Zechariah in Chapter 1. Just 6 months earlier a relative of Mary, Zechariah, too receives a visit from the Angel Gabriel, he too is terrified, He too is told the good news of an unexpected pregnancy. But their response to this news contrasts faith and unbelief. Zechariah asks for a sign, he wants assurance that this is going to happen. Apparently there was something in the way he asks that revealed a lack of faith. May like "oh yeah? Prove it", like Thomas. Show me and then I will believe.

Luke 1:20

And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

And so almost ironically he's saying, "You want a sign? I'll give you the sign of silence." Mary also asks a question at the news Gabriel gives her.

Luke 1:34

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

Mary's question was not asked in unbelief, but rather it was asked in belief. Faith that was seeking more information. "I believe, but I'm confused on how this will happen" ...she knew the birds and bees, she was young but not THAT young... and being a virgin and pregnant just don't go together.

Luke 1:35-37

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on 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."

That cleared it up huh? The angel was like, I'm not going to draw a diagram, just trust me because **v. 37 God's Word doesn't fail!**

And her response evidences her faith, even with a lack of understanding-

Luke 1:38

I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."

"I don't understand it but I trust it is true." We have much to learn from Mary. Christianity has a lot of questions. Some people think that if you have some questions, some doubts about how things fit together that it means you don't have faith. Not true. While my faith isn't in danger, and I'm more committed and sure now than I was at first- I have some questions that I'm still seeking answers to...about the relationship between science and creation, I have some questions about the relationship of suffering and the goodness of God...about God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Does that freak you out that your pastor doesn't have easy answers to these questions? And God may provide me more clarity over the years as I study or get more evidence...but he may not until heaven. We do such a disservice to people when we act like it's not OK to ask questions or to raise concerns or to have some different opinions about secondary issues. We do a disservice to our students and young people when we make room for questions. Parents- these are wonderful opportunities when your kids ask questions to model faith that seeks understanding.

3) Not a Dispenser of Grace but Worthy of Honor

Within Catholicism, Mary becomes a dispenser, that is, a giver of grace, comfort, compassion, on behalf of Jesus. Idea- Just like at the wedding at Cana, Mary will talk her son into getting something for you. She is an additional mediator... But this is

foreign to the Scriptures. Never are we instructed to pray to Mary, or through Mary. Always we are called to pray to the Father through Jesus Christ. Jesus is our mediator and we have direct access. He is better than all that came before him. This is the constant message of Hebrews- Jesus not Angels. Jesus not Moses. Jesus not the Law. Jesus not the Prophets. Jesus is our comforter, sympathetic High priest that we can go to in our time of need confidently, with direct access. Mary is not the dispenser of grace and the source of comfort, Jesus is!

While Mary may not be our liaison to Jesus, she is certainly worthy of the highest honor we can give to humans. Give you a few reasons:

-God and Gabriel honored her. Remember what Gabriel says to her? You are highly favored with the Lord.

-Her total and joyful submission in spite of shame.

Ancient Hebrew custom was that a man and a woman would make a vow to one another that was legally binding. After this the bridegroom would go away for a year to prepare his house. Then there would be a marriage ceremony followed by a 7 day feast...you think your reception was long? After all this they would consummate their marriage.

And so Mary getting pregnant during this yearlong betrothal period makes it all the more difficult and awkward. Can you imagine that conversation originally between Mary and Joseph. "Mary you are looking beautiful today. Really seem like you have a glow about you." "Excuse me?, What?", "Oh, don't worry it's from the Holy Spirit." Even he was going to divorce her because of this shame...until the angel appeared to him in a dream and convinced him too.

But everyone in town would have known, and been talking, and gossiping, and shaming her. This likely alienated her and excluded her and Joseph from much of society, especially in an honor/shame culture of that day.

But Mary embraces it joyfully- trusting that while in the years to come she would experience shame, that

Luke 1:48b-49a

...all generations will call me blessed for the Mighty One has done great things for me.

-Her lifelong devotion to her Savior, Jesus

Mary was the only person to be by the side of Jesus both at his birth and at his death. She was one of the first at the tomb and in the upper room for the birth of the Church.

So we should honor Mary and look to her as an example of how humility, faith, surrender and devotion to Christ. Let Mary be an example to you students as an example of someone who doesn't wait until they make all their mistakes and get drunk, premarital sex, and do a bunch of other stupid stuff to come back to faith. You can have holiness and walk with God from a young age. Parents, call your children to

holiness, students- don't settle for destructive decisions don't be a crowd follower, you blaze your own trail like Mary of a life of devotion to Christ and you too will be called blessed.

Christmas Song- Mary Did You Know?

Mary did you know this child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you?

Best way to honor her is to worship the Savior and deliverer she worshipped. Best way to honor her is believe in Jesus her savior.