

Mary – The Mother of God

Luke 1:26-38

Trinity Lutheran Church

December 16, 2015 – Advent III



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. This year in our Wednesday evening preparations for the feast of the Nativity, we've been looking at three major characters – John the Baptizer, Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus, and tonight, Mary, the mother of our Lord. Each, of course, played a major role in Christ's Incarnation. John was His forerunner – the prophetic voice calling from the wilderness. Joseph was the quiet carpenter asked to believe the Word of the angel that the Child his fiancé was carrying in her womb was of the Holy Spirit. And tonight Mary – the only person other than Pontius Pilate who's mentioned in the great Creeds of Christendom. In the Eastern Church Mary is called the "God-bearer" – and in the Western Church she's called "Mother of God." Both titles we agree with, because we hold to the same doctrine concerning Christ that's been held by faithful, orthodox Christians throughout the ages.

Now that position might surprise some, especially if they've fallen into the mistaken notion that Lutheranism is, by nature, anti-Catholic. But the fact is that many have also forgotten – or never knew – the high, unique place Mary occupied with our Lutheran forefathers – that the official Latin translation of the Smalcald Articles of our Church call Mary "pure, holy, and ever {the} Virgin" – or that Mary's perpetual virginity was a belief held by almost all the orthodox teachers of our Church, including many in the Missouri Synod – and most notably the arch-theologian Francis Pieper, whose books on Christian doctrine are still used in our Seminaries to this day.

Scripture teaches that Mary is "blessed among women" – God's chosen instrument to bring about the Incarnation of His eternal Son – the one who "believed that there would be a ful-

fillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." We Lutherans – who regard Holy Scripture as thoroughly inspired by God and without error – can therefore rightly join our voices with the angel Gabriel and with Elizabeth, the mother of John, in singing the first part of the Ave Maria: "Hail Mary, full of grace. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

Indeed, without a proper understanding of Mary's role, we might, in fact, lose much of the Christian faith – and most especially a correct understanding of the two natures of Christ – how, at the same time, He can be both true God and true man. Without Mary, we'd soon find ourselves standing with those who heretically hold that Christ *only appeared* to be human. We'll lose the dignity and honor of women in general, for it's through *this* woman – *this* virgin daughter of Eve – that our Lord entered into the world. Eve heard the word of the devil and was deceived, but when Mary heard the Word of God she conceived. Eve's first-born was the murderer of his brother, while Mary's Firstborn was the Savior of the world – the Fulfillment of God's Promise first spoken in Paradise – that through the Seed of the woman would come a Deliverer.

Without Mary, we'd also lose a Godly example of purity and chastity in our sexually cynical age when such virtues are considered "old fashioned" and "out of step" – even by many who profess to be Christian. We would do well to take note of the pure innocence of this young girl – probably no older than eighteen or twenty – who, when told by the angel of God's plan, asked: "How can this be, since I have not known a man?" And when she prayed the Magnificat – which we'll be singing in just a few moments – she prayed a beautiful Psalm over-

flowing with Old Testament Scriptures. What a role model for youth today – this chaste, pious girl, filled with the grace of God, who trusted His Word, and willingly took on the impossible task of being a virgin mother!

Just think about the rich meaning of the word which the angel spoke to Mary. Imagine, The infinite God deigning to dwell in the finite confines of a Virgin's womb. Consider how the Child Mary would soon bear would also be her Savior. The One she would carry in her womb would be the very same One who years earlier had knit her together in her own mother's womb – how Mary's Son is actually God's Son, the promised Son of David, the eternal King who would reign on His throne forever. We would all do well to ponder these truths in our own preparations for Christmas, for here is the literal Fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that "the Virgin will conceive and bear a Son" whose name would be Emmanuel, God with us. Here is the proof that "with God, nothing, nothing is impossible" – not the Incarnation of His Son, nor the salvation of sinners. Here we see the lengths God was willing to go in order to save us from sin, death and the devil.

And there's one more thing we dare not neglect – that's Mary's willingness to yield to the desires of God for her as she responded to the angel, saying: "Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." Until Mary said "Yes!" the angel couldn't depart. But, in fact, Mary could really have given no other response, for God had already seen to it that she was full of grace by the time of the angel's visitation. She had beforehand been prepared for this moment by the grace of God when some time earlier He bestowed faith in her heart through the working of His Holy Spirit through the Word. And so – out of this gift of faith freely given by God – Mary said "Yes!" to the angel's words – placing herself entirely at the Lord's disposal – making herself His willing servant – and trusting completely in His gracious Word and promise.

Do you suppose Mary fully understood what she was saying "Yes!" to? Could she have known Joseph wouldn't believe her – and would even consider divorce? Could she have anticipated the stares and whispers that would come to her during her pregnancy? Could she have known the challenges of caring for and nurturing the Son of God as He increased in stature and wisdom? Did she have any idea of the pain that would pierce her own soul 33 years later when she saw her Son nailed to the cross and pierced for our salvation?

How could she have known all these things? She couldn't have, and yet she still trusted God's Word enough to say "Yes!" Mary, you see, is a picture of the Church – "the Mother of all who believe." That's why the Church sings her pregnancy song, the Magnificat, as part of the office of Evening Prayer – for the Church Herself is also full of God's grace, pregnant with the Promise of God, bearing the eternal Word in the world, giving birth in Baptism to virgin-born children of God – children born "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Mary is also a picture of every Baptized believer. God comes to us with His Word and calls us to faith through the Gospel. He enlightens us in Baptism – and sanctifies and keeps us within the Communion of His Holy Church. As members of His Body, we too are "full of God's grace" – His undeserved kindness toward sinners for Jesus' sake. The Spirit of God has come upon us, and we've been overshadowed by the power of the Most High. We might not fully understand all God has in store for us. We might have many questions and doubts. We might not completely realize or anticipate all God's plan of salvation entails. But in all this we remember the words of the angel, "that with God nothing is impossible." And it's in that confidence, with Mary, that we put ourselves at God's disposal, saying the very same words she spoke that night so long ago: "Let it be to me according to your Word." In the name of Jesus, Amen.