

Series Title: Christmas: Beloved Myth or Life Changing Truth?

Sermon Title: Week 2: Much ado about Mary

Date: 12-15-19

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- **Last week- tradition of the Nativity Scene...**
- **Christianity, if viewed as a religion, is saturated with tradition, and many of our most precious traditions are centered on CHRISTMAS- birth of Christ.**
- **REALITY- many of these traditions, while precious, are not rooted in scripture, and if we are not purposeful, can obscure the simpler, and yet eternally powerful story we actually DO HAVE IN SCRIPTURE about the Birth of Christ**
- **In scripture, the story of Christ's birth ultimately isn't about the circumstances of the manger, animals, shepherds, evil kings, or wise men.**
- **THE Christmas story, at its core, is all about GOD. His nature, his Glory, and his plan for humanity.**
- **AND SO, we are digging beneath these traditions of Christmas, to see what scripture ACTUALLY SAYS.**
- **TODAY we're looking at the single most mythologized figure in all of Christian history, MARY.**

✠ A little more myth-busting- will the real Mary please stand up?

- **Over centuries personality of Mary has become a historic, religious, and cultural phenomenon.**
- **If you aren't (or weren't) Catholic, you might not be familiar with these teachings about Mary, but even today, Mary remains the most dominant figure in Christian religion around the world. SO, let's look at a three of the biggest of these ideas about Mary...**

• **Mary, the 'ever-virgin'**

- **Catholic dogma that Mary remained a virgin her entire life. Honest look at Matthew refutes this...**

**Matthew 1:24-25** When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

**Matthew 12:46-47 ... Matthew 13:54-56** Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. <sup>55</sup> "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? <sup>56</sup> Aren't all his sisters with us?"

- **What is purpose of teaching she remained a virgin? This separates, elevates Mary above the rest of humanity. Surely someone who God chose to be the earthly mother of Jesus wouldn't be a normal human being, just as we are. Would they?**

• **Mary and the immaculate conception**

- **Not referring to virgin birth of Christ. This is teaching that Mary herself was conceived apart from original sin, and remained sinless her entire life.**
- **The scripture pointed to for this is in Luke 1/ Gabriel**

**Luke 1:26-28** In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

- **This is where the term "Hail Mary, Full of Grace" comes from, one of the prayers in the Rosary. The teaching is that Mary being 'highly favored' or 'full of grace' means that Mary already possessed the fullness of the grace of God before the angel came to her- that it was HER nature that caused her to be the Mother of Jesus, and that her sinless nature was imbued at the point of her conception.**

- **Problem is the greek does not say ‘Hail Mary, full of grace’.** It says, in plain English, **Greetings, you who are highly favored... with the emphasis of the word ‘favored’ meaning something that is GIVEN, not deserved.**
- **In fact, the word here for ‘favored’ or ‘graced’ is found only one other time in the NT, in Ephesians 1:6, where Paul is speaking to all believers.. “In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.**
- **God’s grace to us is a gift, nothing we deserve, and the same was true for Mary, who received the Grace and Spirit of God in a very unique way, but the emphasis is that God’s grace is something she RECEIVED, not already had. ONE MORE...**

- **The assumption of Mary**

- **This is the Catholic doctrine that Mary never physically died, but was taken up into heaven by God near the end of her life, much in the same way that Jesus ascended into heaven. No support in scripture**
- **Combined with the other traditions, Mary increasingly is separated and elevated above the human experience, and becomes a quasi-deity, RATHER THAN a very human, very vulnerable young woman whose miracle is not that she was ABOVE the human experience, but that she fully trusted God, each step, in the midst of her human experience.**

- † **So, what does scripture actually tell us about Mary?**

- **Honestly, not very much. What we know of Jewish society tells us she was likely 14-16 years old. While not divine, she was undoubtedly a remarkable young woman of great faith and trust in God. If you search the new testament, depending on how separate the narrative, Mary appears 10-11 times**
- **In the time we have, I want to look at these from a high level, and ask “WHAT DOES THIS TEACH US ABOUT MARY’, but even more, what does this teach us about GOD.**

- † **And so it begins...**

- **This is Matthew’s summation of the birth of Jesus. (Luke has the longer narrative).**

**Matthew 1:18-25** *This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.*

<sup>19</sup> *Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

- **Quick background. In 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish culture, when a couple was engaged, they were functionally married. 1 year ‘waiting period’ before moving in and consummation. “Make sure she is pure”... it was during this time that the nightmare scenario happened- Mary turned up pregnant. EVERYTHING about the culture demanded that she not only be divorced, but humiliated. The law allowed her to be presented publically and put to death.**
- **MARY KNEW HUMILIATION. FEAR.**

<sup>20</sup> *But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

- **Mary and Joseph went against their culture by not divorcing, HERE, Mary would have been completely dependent upon Joseph, not just for provision, but for her life. Place of extreme vulnerability.**

– **THEN WE HAVE LUKES NARRATIVE.**

**Luke 1:26-38** *In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy (Mary’s relative), God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”*

<sup>29</sup> *Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; (why say this? She was afraid!) you have found favor with God.*

<sup>31</sup> *You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> 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, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”*

– **Mary would have known who Gabriel spoke of. Messiah. Hard to comprehend how overwhelming...**

<sup>34</sup> *“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” **Humanity of Mary!! God came to her with calling, her instinct was to recognize her weakness, why she could not do it.***

<sup>35</sup> *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. <sup>36</sup> Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail.” <sup>38</sup> “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.*

– **AND THERE WE SEE THE MIRACLE OF MARY... SHE BELIEVED GOD. She took a step of faith into the unknown, and it made all the difference.**

✠ **The trip to Judah**

**Luke 1:39-40** *At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth.*

– **Having been told by Gabriel that Elizabeth was pregnant, Mary immediately went to see her. We don’t know exact town, but generally from Nazareth (region of Galilee) to Judea-10-11 day journey.**

– **This journey itself is a remarkable step of faith. Another picture of Mary trusting God**

– **Luke gives us the story of Mary and Elizabeth’s conversation, after which we find Mary’s great confession of faith- known as “Song of Mary”, or the “Magnificat” in older tradition.**

– **CONTEXT- This is all still very new to Mary. Her life ahead has no security, no known path, NOTHING except the choice to TRUST GOD.**

**46-56** *And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, <sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.*

– **What great things? She is poor. A pregnant teenager. Social outcast. For her and Joseph, future is a pure step of faith. GOD’S GREAT GIFT TO MARY is that He has called her into his purpose. In response, Mary worships God... she confesses who HE IS.**

<sup>50</sup> *His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. <sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. <sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”*

<sup>56</sup> *Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.*

– **Core of Mary’s confession: GOD IS SOVERIEGN. HE IS TRUSTWORTHY. HE IS PROVIDER. HE IS GOOD.**

✠ **Jesus’ birth** **Luke 2:4-7** *So Joseph also went up from the town*

of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

- **This is the story romanticized in the nativity scenes. But this is not pretty. It was almost certainly not a silent night, either from Mary or the baby. The picture here is of poverty, struggle, life bursting into darkness, literally.**
- **Pure speculation on my part, but I wonder if, on this night, Mary wondered... “God, what is this again?”**
- **BUT THEN, in the midst of a desperate situation, God answers, when the shepherds arrive. Imagine Mary there, exhausted, wondering what was next, when...**

**16-19** So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

- **GOD NEVER promises that our journey will be easy. If there is refutation of prosperity gospel, it's the story of the woman “all generations will call blessed”. AND YET, God never leaves us alone. In the most difficult hour of her life at that point, Mary experienced God's reminder that he was still at work.**
- **MARY- treasured these things in her heart. In midst of incredible difficulty, Mary chose to remember, to ponder, to find her treasure, in God's presence to her. In what God was doing, the incredible reality that her story was part of God's story.**

#### ✠ Trips to the Temple Luke 2:22-39

- **Mary and Joseph take Jesus to be dedicated at the Temple... meet two people, Simeon and Anna, who both prophesied that Jesus was messiah V33...**

<sup>33</sup> The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, <sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

- **Think of what this was like! M&J ‘marveled’... blown away! In over their heads! “People will be against your son, your soul will be pierced with a sword”...**
- **ONLY ONE RESPONSE... take the next step of faith**

- **Matthew 2, Magi arrive. All we are told is that Mary was there with Jesus, and the gifts the Magi gave.**

- **When Jesus is 12 , family takes annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover. Parents lose track... find him at temple...**

**Luke 2:48,51** When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

- **Terrifying moment for parent is when they think they have lost their child. I think Mary probably had a little more emotion that Luke portrays.... Jesus's famous answer... “I had to be in fathers house...”**

<sup>51</sup> Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

- **John 2- CANA, water into wine...**
- **Last part of Mary's story... the cross.**

#### ✠ The Cross and what happened next **NOW IN JOHN**

- **Unimaginable experience of watching your son be crucified. Mary's soul is pierced... even then, Mary experiences God's presence, provision...**

**John 19:25-27** *Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," <sup>27</sup> and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

- **Last we hear of Mary is in Acts 1... the disciples have gathered in Jerusalem, as Jesus instructed them, waiting for what would happen next. They are gathered in prayer, and Mary is with them...**

**Acts 1:14** *They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*

- **Remarkable how similar to beginning of Mary's story. Circumstances uncertain, future unknown, only thing they have is God's word to them, and an expectation that God was at work. WAITING. TRUSTING to see what God would do next.**
- **The miracle of Mary has little to do with Mary herself. There is nothing about her circumstances, education, social status, resources, that would have in any way qualified her for this role.**
- **Through it all, the great miracle of Mary is that she trusted God. Through blessing, difficulty, joy's, and trauma's, one day at a time, she trusted God.**
- **MARY OF TRADITION is a giver of mercy. MARY OF SCRIPTURE is a RECEIVER OF MERCY- like us.**
- **In LUKE 1:38, confession that defined Mary's life...**

✠ **Mary's confession, our invitation**

**Luke 1:38** *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.*

- **In Phil 3.. Paul echoes Mary's confession**

**Philippians 3:12** *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

- **Mary's confession is our invitation. To not rely on our own circumstances, but to fully yield ourselves to God. To say, I AM THE LORD'S SERVANT. MAY your word- your presence, purpose, to me, in me, through me, be fulfilled**