

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

- I. Blessed by God
- II. Acknowledged by Others
- III. Giving Glory to God

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

46 And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

*49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.*

*50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.*

*51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.*

*52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.*

*53 He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.*

*54 He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful*

*55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors."*

It's a scene that we are all familiar with. It's been depicted in many ways down through the centuries, in paintings, carvings, and little nativity sets in countless shapes and sizes. Maybe you have one or more of them on display in your house this Christmas season. And of course, the most important person in that nativity set, the only real reason to create a nativity scene is the Christ child. It's his birth that we celebrate on Christmas Eve. But as you know, Jesus was not the only person there on that first Christmas night. Even though we might say that Jesus was the star of the show, the fact is, there were other people who played supporting roles, people like Mary and Joseph and the shepherds.

Well, the section of scripture that we have before us today moves one of those minor

characters into the spotlight a bit. Today we turn our attention to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Now I realize that sometimes talking about Mary can leave Lutherans feeling a little uncomfortable. We all know that there is another very large church body that puts a lot of emphasis on Mary. They name churches after her, put up statues of her, direct rosaries to her. Is that wrong? When the seminary student that I was working with in the Philippines told me that he wanted to start a new mission congregation in Metro Manila and he was going to name it St. Mary's Lutheran Church, what was I supposed to say? What would you have said? I mean, we have churches called Saint Paul and Saint Matthew and Saint Peter. Why not Saint Mary's Lutheran Church? What is to be our attitude about Mary? Should we put a right up there with Jesus, as the holy mother of God, interceding for us as we come to her in prayer? Or should we see her as nobody special at all? She's just a Jewish girl who got pregnant and had a child just like thousands of girls before her and thousands of girls after her? Should we say, with a lot of people today, "There was nothing supernatural about the child conceived in Mary's womb?"

These are some of the questions we want to answer today as we take a little closer look at what the Bible says about:

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

We'll see that Mary was a woman:

- I. Blessed by God
- II. Acknowledged by others
- III. Who gave glory to her savior

First, Mary was a woman blessed by God. I mean, who can deny that? To think that, of all the women of the world, God chose Mary to give birth to truly sinless child. Moms, can you imagine raising a child who never threw a temper tantrum, never mischievously dumped his carrots all over the floor—on purpose, never picked on his little brother? Jesus was the first and only child who was perfectly kind, perfectly loving, perfectly obedient. In that sense, Mary and Joseph were blessed by God with the perfect child.

In yet, the real blessing was not that this child was so well behaved. It's that this child was divine. This child was not only the son of Mary; he was the Son of God. God had simply used Mary as his chosen instrument to bring his only begotten son into the world, to live and die as a substitute for sinners. What the prophets had been foretelling for hundreds of years was about to come to life in the womb of this poor little Jewish girl from some backwater town called Nazareth.

The question is, Why? I mean, why Mary? Why did God choose Mary for this truly historic role? Was it because Mary was more beautiful, more humble, or more holy, or more deserving of this honor? Absolutely not. Mary didn't deserve this honor any more than you or I would. How do I know that? Well, remember the words that the Angel Gabriel first spoke to Mary? The angel said, "*Greetings, you who are highly favored.*" Now a person could misunderstand those words "highly favored." For example, if I say, that the Packers are highly favored to go to the Super Bowl this year, it would mean that there is something about the Packers that makes them a really good team. They're bigger or faster or more talented than everyone else. That's why they're "favored."

Sometimes people want to apply that same concept to Mary. They say that if Mary is highly favored, it must be because she's better than everyone else. There's something inside of Mary that made her God's favorite. In fact, you get a little flavor of that in the prayer known as the Hail Mary. (No, I'm not talking about the 60 yard "prayer" that the quarterback throws at the end of the football game. I'm talking about the prayer associated with one of the beads on a

Roman Catholic Rosary. The “Hail Mary” is actually an adaptation of what Gabriel said to Mary. But instead of saying, “Greetings, you who are highly favored,” our Catholic friends pray, “Hail Mary, full of grace.” Those words imply that grace is something inside of Mary, or that Mary is filled with undeserved love, and that’s why God chose her. But that is not at all what the angel is saying. Gabriel is not saying that grace is in Mary, but rather, that grace has been shown to Mary. Mary is the unworthy recipient of God’s undeserved love. Or to put it another way, God gave her the gift of the Christ child, not because of the good in her heart, but because of the good in God’s heart.

My friends, do you realize that the exact thing is true for you and me? Why, out of all the people in the world, did Jesus choose you to die for you? Why did God choose to warm your cold heart with a message of his love? Why did God choose to give you spiritual life to the washing of water and the word? Why? For the same reason God chose Mary to be the mother of his son. And that’s grace. It’s all God’s undeserved love for a poor, miserable sinner like you and me, and Mary too.

But now even though Mary had done nothing to earn her role as the mother of Jesus, that doesn’t mean that God couldn’t give it to her, nevertheless. In fact, he did. He blessed her with the role of being Jesus’ mother. And that fact was: II. Acknowledged by two other people in our text, namely, Elizabeth and her yet unborn son, John. That’s where our text for today picks up. Luke tells us, *At that time* (namely, after Gabriel told Mary she was going to give birth to a son) *Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zachariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth.* (Luke 1:39) As soon as Elizabeth hears that greeting, what happens? The baby leaps in Elizabeth’s womb. Elizabeth explains to Mary, *“As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.”* (Luke 1:44)

Now, how do you explain that? An unborn child recognizes Mary’s voice. Well, remember, this was no ordinary child in Elizabeth. Six months earlier, the angel Gabriel announced that Elizabeth would conceive a child who, in the words of Gabriel, would be *“filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born.”* That child would grow up to be the forerunner of the Savior, pointing people to Jesus as the promised Messiah. Well, you might say that little Johnny Baptist, even before he was born, was already doing his job. He was announcing that the Messiah had arrived on the scene, even though the Messiah was still in Mary’s womb. By his actions, Little John was acknowledging that Mary was the mother of God’s Son.

But it wasn’t just John who acknowledged that fact. So did John’s mother, Elizabeth. When Mary enters the room what does Elizabeth say? Luke tells us, *Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so highly favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”* (Luke 1:41-43). Again, what is Elizabeth doing? She’s acknowledging Mary’s true identity. This little Jewish girl was now the mother of Elizabeth’s Lord, the mother of her savior, and because Jesus is both true God and true man, we can accurately say that Jesus is the mother of God. Theologians use the term “Theotokos,” which literally means “the bearer of God.” That unborn child in Mary’s womb was actually God almighty! That’s more than any of us can comprehend.

The question is, how did Mary react to the fact that she is going to be the mother of God? Does Mary say, “Man, I just hit the jackpot! I’m going to be rich and famous! No, rather than stepping into the spotlight, she turns the spotlight back onto God.

Yes, Mary the mother of Jesus who was (I.) Blessed by God and (II.) Acknowledged by others, now (III.) Gives glory to her Savior.

How does Mary put it? *"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."* The Latin word for glorify is actually Magnificat, which is what this song of Mary is sometimes called. The Magnificat. We sang a version of it earlier in our service today. But notice who it is that Mary is glorifying. She says, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior." By calling God for her Savior, what is Mary admitting about herself? She is admitting that she is a sinner who needs, and now has, a Savior. Isn't that right? If Mary really was immaculately conceived, that is, if she really was born without original sin, if she really lived her whole life without any sins of her own—as some people claim—she wouldn't need a Savior. She would be her own savior. She would earn her own place in heaven. But that's not what Mary is confessing here. She's confessing that she needs a savior, just as much as every other sinner in the world.

And more importantly, she's confessing that God has provided that savior, yes, her savior, in the person of this unborn child in her womb. That's what causes Mary to break out into song. She rejoices in the fact that, as she puts it, *"The Mighty One has done great things for me."* Actually, that phrase could be translated, *"The Mighty One has done great things to me."* Isn't that right? It's the Holy Spirit who had now chosen to conceive a holy child inside of Mary. But God didn't do that just for Mary's benefit, he did it for the benefit of all mankind. What does Mary say? *"His mercy extends to all who fear him, from generation to generation."*

From there, Mary goes on to describe how God has kind of flipped the power structure of our world upside down. In the eyes of the world, it's the rich and famous, the proud and powerful who are regarded as the ones on top. They are the ones that everyone is looking up to. They are the ones who think they have it made, on both sides of the grave. But Mary says that God sees things very differently. Mary speaks about how God will deal with those who are proud and self-righteous. In fact, she speaks as if God has already accomplished it. She says about her God, *"He has scattered those who are proud in their inner thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones. He has...sent the rich away empty."*

But on the other hand, Mary says, *God has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things.* Isn't that the truth? When sinners like you and me confess that we deserve nothing but God's wrath and punishment, when we admit that we are but beggars who have nothing we can give to God, but can only throw ourselves on God's mercy, that's when God does just that. He shows us his mercy. He lifts up the humble. Or as St. Peter once wrote, *God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (1 Peter 5:5)*

My friends, that's what Mary was celebrating in the Magnificat. She was magnifying the Lord for the grace that he's shown to her, and really to all people, in Christ. Grace that God had been promising since the time of Abraham. How does Mary put it? *"God has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised to our ancestors."* That's the promise that Mary was clinging to, the promise that worked faith in her heart.

So what are we to think about Mary? Is she the holy mother of God, who hears our prayers, intercedes for us before God, and is worthy of our adoration? No, certainly not. And if Mary were here today, she would be the first to tell you that. But, is Mary a sinner, who was overwhelmed by the grace that God had shown to her? Was Mary a believer who took God at his word concerning what was going to take place in her, even if she couldn't fully understand it? Was Mary a child of God who rejoiced not only in what God had done for her, but what he was going to do for all people through the birth of his son in her womb? Was Mary someone who gave glory to the God who lifts up the humble? Yes, she was. And that's why we remember Mary—not for what she can do for us. Rather, we remember Mary for what God did for her, the

grace God showed her, the Savior God gave her—all of which God has done for you and me as well. That, my friends, is good news. Believe it, just as Mary, the mother of Jesus, believed it. To her Son, be our glory and praise, forever and ever. Amen.