

Luke 1:26-38

“What a Protestant Sees in the Virgin Mary”

- 1. THE MESSAGE PROCLAIMED TO US**
 - A. How common the girl addressed in the message
 - B. How clear the grace announced in the message
- 2. THE MIRACLE PRODUCED IN US**
 - A. What this miracle involved
 - B. What this miracle indicates
- 3. THE MINISTRY PERFORMED BY US**
 - A. The willingness God desires from us
 - B. The work God does in us

1. In Roman Catholic doctrine, the Virgin Mary holds a place almost as central as Jesus himself. The Council of Ephesus in 311 A.D. dubbed her “the mother of God” in an effort to defend the deity of Christ.

2. From that step, Mariology grew to the point that Mary is now viewed by most Catholics as a co-sufferer with Christ, and a mediator for sinners. She has been given the titles, “Queen of Heaven”, “Our Lady”, and “Mother of Mercy”.

4. For most Protestants (like us), Mary is little more than an annual character in the Christmas play, or a figurine in the nativity scene.

5. Generally we all but ignore Mary, to the point that one minister used to tell a joke about a Protestant theologian being greeted by Jesus at the gates of heaven.

6. The Lord says, “Ah, professor, I know you have met my father, but I don’t believe you know my mother.”¹

7. Protestants are correct to reject the worship and elevation of Mary based upon what is clearly revealed in the Scriptures.

8. The Bible never attributes sinlessness or supernatural abilities to Mary, and she is nowhere given the role of mediator between Christ and sinful humanity.

9. She is however a key figure in the gospel narratives of both the birth and death of Jesus. To ignore her is to ignore some very key passages of the New Testament.

10. With that in mind, we must treat Mary with neither adoration nor anonymity. We must view her as she is presented in the Word of God.

11. In Luke chapter 1, we have the story of Mary receiving the news of what God was going to do in her and through her with the birth of Jesus.

12. For those of us who have believed the gospel, in this text we see in Mary a picture of our own story. Far from being elevated above us, Mary is very much like us.

13. Notice some similarities about the story of Mary, and the story of all those who come to know the saving grace of God. First of all, Mary reminds us of:

I. THE MESSAGE PROCLAIMED TO US

1. Luke's lengthy and thorough opening chapter tells us all about the events leading up to the birth of Jesus. Beginning in verse 26, we are introduced to the person of Mary.

2. Luke tells us that the Angel Gabriel was sent on a mission from God to, "...a city of Galilee, named Nazareth. To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary."

3. Up until Gabriel greeted Mary, she was completely unaware and unsuspecting of the fact that she was about to hear a message from heaven that would affect the rest of her life, and all of eternity.

4. In many ways, Mary reminds us of ourselves when we first heard the heavenly message of the gospel that would forever change our lives.

5. Notice with me a couple of things about the proclamation of this message to Mary. First of all, consider:

A. How common the girl addressed in this message

1. Look at verse 29, and notice how Mary initially reacted to what she heard from Gabriel. It says, "...she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be."

2. Literally, Mary struggled to understand why the Angel would say what he did to a girl like her. In light of *where* she was and *who* she was Mary seemed like an unlikely candidate to hear the news that she would give birth to the Messiah.

3. She was just a common, peasant girl; living in a rural, out-of-the way, mountain village. She was of the lineage of David, but she looked and lived nothing like royalty.

4. The region of Galilee, where Nazareth is located, has been compared to the piedmont region of North Carolina.ⁱⁱ Its residents were generally disrespected by the Jews to the south.

5. They had a thick accent, and were primarily agricultural people. Today, they might be called “hillbillies” or “rednecks”.
6. Mary was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter by trade, and therefore probably not a wealthy man. Simple, common, and unassuming would be the kind of words to describe Mary.
7. Nevertheless, heaven had a wonderful word for this common girl. She was to be the mother of the Messiah! Who would have thought it?
8. Might I remind you that we have no grounds upon which to boast? Nothing in us warranted and merited the good news of the gospel.
9. Nevertheless, God in mercy came to our unlikely locations, and spoke into our unworthy lives and told us about Jesus!
10. Looking at this proclamation, notice not only how common the girl addressed in the message, but notice also:

B. How clear the grace announced in the message

1. Look at the message Gabriel delivered to this unlikely girl. Verse 28 says he greeted her with the words, *“Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.”*
2. Then he says to her in verse 30, *“...thou hast found favour with God.”* The word translated “favor” is the same word that is most often translated as “grace” throughout the New Testament.
3. In fact, this word appears 156 times in the New Testament, and 130 of those it is translated as grace. The angel told Mary, you have found grace with God.
4. Is that not also what we have heard in the message of the gospel? One day, a messenger from God told you that God loved you before you ever knew Him, and that He had chosen to send His Son on your behalf.
5. Mary reminds us that we have heard a message of grace proclaimed to us! In the gospel, we have received unexpected and unmerited good news!
6. Billy Graham tells the story of how he was driving through a small town years ago, and was stopped by the police for speeding. Graham had to go before the local judge.
7. The judge asked for his plea, and the evangelist pleaded guilty. The judge informed him of his fine, but then realized the famous preacher standing before him.

8. Suddenly the judge took the money for the fine out of his own pocket, paid it, and promptly took Billy Graham out to dinner. Later Graham would say, "That is how God treats repentant sinners."

9. Mary reminds us that one day the Judge of all the earth sent word that our fine had been paid, and by His grace we were invited to fellowship with Him. She reminds us of the message proclaimed to us.

10. Notice something further that we see in the story of the Virgin Mary. She reminds not only of *the message proclaimed to us*, but notice also that we see in her a picture of:

II. THE MIRACLE PRODUCED IN US

1. As if the sight of the Angel Gabriel was not enough of a shock, what he had to say to Mary surely sent her heart and mind spinning.

2. Look in verse 31. Gabriel informs this little, peasant, Jewish girl that, "...*thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.*" He goes on in verse 32 and says, "*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest...*"

3. This was certainly a lot of information for Mary to digest, but one thing was clear: God was going to work a miracle in her life.

4. We may not immediately understand all that happens in the moment of our salvation, but one thing is clear: when we are saved, God does a miracle work in our lives.

5. Notice a couple of things about this miracle produced in Mary's life, and how it relates to the miracle of our salvation. Notice first of all:

A. What this miracle involved

1. Notice how the angel describes the process of what God was going to do with Mary. He says in verse 35, "*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*"

2. The physiological details are scant, but the spiritual details are clear. Through the Holy Spirit, God was going to implant the life of His only Son inside the body of the Virgin Mary.

3. Is that not a clear picture of the miracle involved in the salvation of a soul? Through His Spirit, the life of the resurrected Christ comes to live in the body of a person who has been saved.

4. Paul asks the question in I Corinthians 6:19, *“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you...?”*

5. By a process that can only be explained as miraculous, those of us who have been saved are literally housing in our bodies the very God of the universe!

6. In one of my favorite quotes, Augustine asked, *“...dost thou not know that thou art carrying God around with thee?”*

7. In the incarnation, we have the miracle of God taking on the body of a sinless man. In salvation, we have the miracle of God dwelling in the body of a sinful man.

8. As the songwriter said:

*“When He saved my soul,
Cleansed and made me whole,
It took a miracle of love and grace.”*

9. As we consider the miracle produced in Mary’s life, and think of the miracle of our salvation, we are reminded not only what this miracle involved, but notice also further:

B. What this miracle indicates

1. Mary asks a fairly logical question in light of all the seemingly illogical things she has just seen and heard. Look at verse 34. It says, *“Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”*

2. Mary says, “How can I be pregnant? I haven’t been with anyone?” Again, this is a logical question, and one that has troubled Bible critics and skeptics for 2,000 years.

3. The angel plainly and clearly answers the question in verse 37: *“For with God nothing shall be impossible.”*

4. Scientific laws and physical boundaries have never impeded the work of God. In fact, what we see as a dead-end, God sees as a door through which He may display the truth of His awesome power.

5. God did not flinch at the challenge of the incarnation! The Virgin Birth was simply another indication of the fact that nothing lies outside the reach of his power.
6. In much the same way, whenever God takes a mouth that was once filled with profanity and fills instead with praise, it is simply another indication of the fact that with God nothing shall be impossible.
7. When an alcoholic puts the bottle down, and picks up the Bible; when a prostitute trades a street corner for Sunday School; when a junky suddenly loves Jesus more than his dope; all these and a million more are testimonies to the fact that God can save anybody, anywhere, anytime!
8. When we see Mary, we are reminded that the virgin birth was not God's only miracle. The new birth that He has produced in us is a miracle as well!
9. *"I have never seen the thousands fed,
Or the blind made to see,
I never watched Him raise the dead,
But I know when He lifted me,

There's a wonder right before my eyes,
Close enough to see,
In my heart is where this wonder lies,
There's a miracle in me!"*
10. Notice a third thing we see as we look at the Virgin Mary. She reminds us not only of *the message proclaimed to us*, and *the miracle produced in us*, but notice also lastly, we see in a Mary a reminder of:

III. THE MINISTRY PERFORMED BY US

1. Through the miracle of the incarnation - God becoming flesh - Mary became a vessel through which God would minister to the rest of the world.
2. Warren Wiersbe says of Mary, "She experienced the grace of God and believed the Word of God, and therefore she could be used by the Spirit of God to accomplish the will of God."ⁱⁱⁱ
3. Is that not our story as well? It should be! We experience the grace of God, believing in His Word. Then the Spirit is able to use us to accomplish the ministry of Christ in this world.
4. Notice a couple of things we learn from Mary about the ministry we can perform by being a vessel for God to use. Notice first of all that she points us to:

A. The willingness God desires from us

1. Notice Mary's response to all this astonishing news she has just received. Verse 38 says, *"And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."*
2. Note that word "handmaid." It is translated from a word that literally means "bond-slave". Mary says, "I am the willing servant of the Lord. Let His will be done in my life."
3. If we are to honor Mary for anything, it is the testimony she leaves us of someone who makes themselves completely available for God's use.
4. Though Mary's pregnancy would draw the suspecting eyes and condemning glances of those around her, and even though she would have to endure the pain of watching her Son die a horrible death, she was nonetheless willing to let God work through her.
5. What if God spoke to you tomorrow and told you that He wanted to turn your whole life upside down to accomplish His sovereign will? Would you be willing?
6. What if He called you to pack up all you owned and go to a mission field? Would you go? What if He told you that you would have to suffer physically in order to help someone else spiritually? Would you say, "Thy will be done?"
7. God can use the untalented, the uneducated, the unlikely, the unassuming, and the unqualified; but He cannot and will not use the unwilling.
8. One of my more annoying habits is that of locking my keys in my truck. Usually, no less than three times a year I find myself peering in the window of my locked vehicle mumbling, "You idiot" to myself.
9. There I am, standing outside a vehicle for which I paid thousands of dollars. It could take me just about anywhere, only it is useless so long as I am locked out of it.
10. Far too many people are useless to God because they lock him out of their life by their unwillingness. Mary points us to the kind of willingness God desires from us.
11. Notice something else Mary teaches us about the ministry we can perform. We see in her not only the willingness God desires from us, but notice also further:

B. The work God does through us

1. Gabriel's message to Mary was that she was going to give birth to, "*the Son of the Highest,*" and that Jesus would, "...*reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*"
2. In other words, Mary learned from the angel that God wanted to use her to be vessel through which He gave Jesus to the world.
3. Is this not also true of us today, if we have been saved? God wants to use those of us who know Jesus to take Him to the world around us.
4. There is a sense in which the work that God did through Mary long ago is the same work He is doing through us today as we witness for Him!
5. Mary had little to offer the world on her own. Had God not chosen her and called her, she would be lost in the obscurity of history - just an anonymous first century carpenter's wife.
6. Yet by giving birth to Jesus she helped to provide the world with the greatest gift humanity has ever seen.
7. Apart from Jesus, our contribution to history and humanity will likely be very little. Yet if we take the Christ within us, and we give Him to the world around us, like Mary, we will have done something that will live on into eternity.
8. The *New York Times* recently raised a small stir when they printed along with the annual gift guide, a separate gift guide for people of color. The paper described it as a list of "gifts created for and by people of color."^{iv}
9. As we look at Mary and the gift that God gave through her to the world, we are reminded that in Christ we have a gift that is perfect for all people, regardless of their age, their sex, their color, or creed.
10. Through us that know Jesus, God wants to do the work of revealing the precious gift of His Son!

1. In 2005, *TIME* magazine featured an article entitled "Hail, Mary". The article discussed how some Protestant churches have begun to treat Mary in a way more similar to that of the Roman Catholic tradition.
2. The article tells about a Methodist church in Chicago's south side where the altar is flanked with statues of Mary, and the congregants pray to her.
3. In that article, Dr. Al Mohler, president of our own Southern Baptist Seminary had this to say about Protestants who try to worship Mary. He said, "...We have

not missed the point about her. To construct a new role for her is simply overreaching.”^v

4. While I agree with Dr. Mohler, and I feel that we have no biblical right to elevate Mary above what is revealed in Scripture, I nevertheless think that we can learn a lot from the Virgin Mary.

5. When we look at her, we should see ourselves! She reminds us of gospel message we have heard. She reminds us of the saving miracle we have experienced.

6. She also speaks deeply to us about the kind of servant of God we should be, and critical role we play in taking Christ to the world.

7. I will not go so far as to say, “Hail, Mary”, but I will say, “Thank you, Mary, for your example.”

ⁱ Van Biema, David, Hail, Mary, *TIME*, 3/13/05, accessed 12/9/09, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1037624-2,00.html>

ⁱⁱ Tenney, Merrill, The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible – Vol. 2, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976), p. 639

ⁱⁱⁱ Wiersbe, Warren W., Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13, (Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1988), p. 16

^{iv} Dykes, Brett Michael, New York Times raises eyebrows with gift guide for people of color, 12/10/09, *yahoo! News*, accessed 12/11/09, http://news.yahoo.com/s/ynews/20091210/ts_ynews/ynews_ts1028_5

^v Van Biema, David, Hail, Mary, *TIME*, 3/13/05, accessed 12/11/09, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1037624-2,00.html>