

Mary

As Christmas draws nearer, it is good for us to have an Advent series for our Bible study. ‘Advent’ means ‘to come,’ and refers to the period before Christmas when we remember the arrival of Jesus Christ and look forward to his second coming. In order to celebrate Christmas well, our Advent series will be studying the various characters involved in the Christmas story found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. I pray that through this series we will better understand and love the good news of God sending his Son to save us from our sins.

Our first biblical character in the account of Jesus’ birth is Mary, his mother. I want you to think about your mother, or a figure who has been a mother to you. You were inside of her, dependent on her for life. When she delivered you through overwhelming pain, you were still dependent on her for life. Think of all she has taught you; her care, discipline, voice, and face. Motherhood is a precious gift from God, deserving much thanksgiving. Shockingly, the Son of God himself, the maker of mothers, was nurtured by a mother in the Incarnation. A great deal of confusion has arisen throughout history concerning the nature of Mary and her role in God taking on human form. It is vital that we understand who Mary is according to the Scriptures.

Please read Luke 1:26-56. In verses 26-27 we read that **“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary.”** These verses give us basic information about Mary. She was from Nazareth, which was a small village in Galilee. Galilee was in the northern region of Israel, and was populated mostly by peasant farmers. Mary and Joseph were poor like the rest of their people. The text also says that Mary was a betrothed virgin to a man named Joseph. To be betrothed in those days was very similar to being engaged in present times. However, if the couple wished to no longer marry one another, it was even more scandalous than breaking off an engagement is today. Betrothal was legally binding and required a divorce in order to no longer be betrothed. Mary had kept herself sexually pure all of her life, and was proudly known to be a virgin amid her people.

If you have ever encountered the Catholic Church, you will recognize that there are some vast differences between Catholics and Baptists, especially as it relates to our treatment of our Lord’s mother, Mary. Catholics have believed that Mary did not sin, that she too was conceived by her mother without sin, that she remained a virgin all of her life, and that her body was taken into heaven. According to their view, she is a sinless saint who bore God himself, and should be venerated. Catholics pray to Mary and give her worship so that Mary will pray to her Son for

them—actions that are completely absent in Baptist churches. Truly, these Catholic doctrines are also absent from the New Testament. The Bible never mentions anything about Mary being without sin, or that her mother gave birth to her miraculously. Also, the Bible mentions Mary and Joseph consummating their marriage after the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:24-25); and their marriage produced many sons and daughters (Mark 3:31, Mark 6:3, Acts 1:14). As for praying to Mary, neither Jesus nor his apostles ever prayed to her or taught us to pray to her. Mary is not worshipped in the New Testament. Respected—yes, but never worshipped. That is idolatry.

When the angel told her that she would be pregnant, Mary did not fully understand how she would conceive since she was a virgin, which meant that she had not been involved in the natural process of becoming pregnant. The angel explained by saying, **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God”** (Luke 1:35). Mary became pregnant without the help of a man, she became pregnant miraculously. The Holy Spirit came and created life in her womb, a fully human baby in her belly. Yet, this child is called the Son of God, largely due to his miraculous entry into the world through being conceived by God. Diligent care and clarity is needed here. Do not think that Jesus was born because God his Father and Mary his mother came together to form a child that is mixture between divine and human. That is not what happened. The Holy Spirit did not do anything outrageous to Mary. This passage in Luke is not describing something similar to old Greek myths where Zeus finds a pretty young girl and sleeps her, producing a demigod like Perseus or Hercules. Jesus is not a demigod. Jesus is fully and completely God; and Jesus is fully and completely a man. These two natures do not mix together, but remain distinct. They are held in union in the person of Jesus Christ. As it relates to his human nature, Jesus was begotten by Mary his mother. Jesus was truly born by Mary, his human nature came into existence inside of Mary. As it relates to his divine nature, Jesus was begotten by God the Father through the Spirit. Since he is God, the Son has always existed, he never came into being. God is from everlasting to everlasting, which includes the second person of the Trinity, the Son, Jesus Christ. Mary did not contribute to his divine nature. This is the great mystery of the person of our Lord. He has always existed as it relates to his divinity, and yet he came into existence as it relates to his humanity. We cannot fully understand this: it is a mystery, but we must believe it to be true since the God who never lies has told us that it is true.

Let's continue to consider the character of Mary by putting ourselves in her shoes—or

sandals. She is a common young lady in a rural village who is pledged to get married in the future. Like most girls, she eagerly anticipates this day, dreaming of what the wonderful day will be like as the plans are made. Then, an angel shows up and wrecks her plans by saying that she is pregnant. She, an unmarried young woman, is pregnant, and Joseph is not the biological father. Think of the embarrassing false ideas that spread when people saw her stomach swell. Think of what she would have to say to her family. Think of how hurt Joseph would be. No one would believe her that she was with child from the Holy Spirit. Joseph thought that she had been promiscuous and planned to divorce her, but an angel told him the truth, that the child was from God, and so decided to still marry her.

Mary never would have imagined this happening to her—it definitely was not in her plans. Yet, God's plan for her was infinitely better than she could have ever dreamed of or designed. What God had in store for her was more good, more lovely, more peaceful, and more difficult than she had in mind. What was considered shame in the world's eyes was considered honorable in God's eyes. Mary recognized how blessed she was to be the mother of the Messiah, and praised God in her song, the Magnificat. Note was she sings in verses 49-51. She praises God for his might, mercy, and holiness. She recognizes that in his plan of saving the world through his Christ, God is showing himself to be all-powerful, inconceivably merciful, and totally holy. She sees what God is doing in her life and realizes that this God is better than anything on this earth or in heaven. So, she fully gives herself over to his plan because there is nothing better. She will endure the cold looks of the world with true grit because she knows that God has a greater treasure prepared for her. Mary exemplifies great faith in these early chapters of Luke. She did not understand all that was going on with her Son, which is seen in certain parts of the Gospels. Imagine the pain and confusion she experienced when she watched her son being tortured to death by hanging on a cross, bleeding and gasping for air. Truly, it would be hard to believe that your own son, whom you have cleaned and nursed, is God your Savior. But Mary did believe this later in life, especially after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

Let us follow Mary's example of praising God for his plan of salvation. Nothing can compare to entering the kingdom of God through the repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. No pleasure, position, or possession is as life-giving as knowing God and being included in his story of salvation. Forsake your sins, your plans, and your claims in this world and follow him. Just as it was with Mary, God's is far better for us than any of our dreams.