

WOMEN OF ADVENT: MARY

Luke 1:26-38

Humility is a funny thing because there are so many ways of understanding and defining it, that it can be difficult to really grasp the meaning of what it is, and thus live it out in a way which is honoring to God and a blessing to others.

Not thinking less of myself, for we have been created by a loving God who deeply loves His people. We have great importance to God and to His kingdom. To think less of myself is to despise the attention of God.

Not not thinking of myself at all, for there is purpose in my being and life. To not think of myself at all is to reject the thoughts and purpose that Christ has of and for me.

Humility is rightly knowing and living out who I am in Christ, for His glory and to serve others.

Who Christ is and what He is about now becomes the defining lens through which I view myself and all aspects of my life.

We will be studying our next woman of Advent, Mary the mother of Jesus.

As protestants there is a sort of outright rejection of studying Mary at times, largely due to the over emphasized and misconstrued ways in which the Roman Church has taken the person of Mary.

The Apostles never mention her in their writings and the earliest Church Fathers rarely mention her in their writings too.

The veneration of Mary started early on during the middle of the second century. She officially became the “mother of God” by the middle of the 4th century. The church’s desire was to help reinforce the humanity of Jesus, over and against the heretical teaching of Him being only divine. However, the desire to unite both the human and divine nature’s of Jesus in one person prompted the Church to ask the question: who would be the kind of person God would choose to bear His own Son? This led the church to abandon the Scriptural texts, and instead create their own categories for the woman who would come to bear the Messiah.

The official dogma of Mary was not completed until 1854, however, the worship, veneration, and teachings on Mary had taken on a life of its own for millennia.

According to the Roman Catholic Church, she was the only person other than Jesus who was born without original sin (which is what allowed her to conceive), she remained a virgin throughout her life (the perpetual virginity of Mary since it was her virginity which was the cause for her being able to bear the Son of God), she was assumed into heaven, she is to receive prayer and devotion, she is both a co-redeemer with Christ, and mediator between God and man, and she dispenses grace to those in need.

However, while I would never teach or encourage anyone to pray to Mary, or to venerate her above and beyond other saints, I do believe that there is much we can learn from her, especially as it pertains to how we ourselves ought to relate to the Lord. She does stand as an important figure in the plan of redemption, and we ought to thank God for her life, her example, and her love for Christ.

Luke 1:26-38

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. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered her, "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. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Mary's Humility

Luke, the author of this gospel, was a medical doctor and writes both this gospel as well as the book of Acts for the purpose of conveying truth as it really happened. He is a man who is well acquainted with gathering information, fact-checking it, and then putting it down in a winsome and convincing way.

It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. – Luke 1:3-4

Thus, his accounts of the life and times of Jesus are full of interesting and important details. It is important to note that Luke, in his attempts to accurately write the truth that had been handed down by the Apostles, notes the exact place that Mary was from: Nazareth. It is a very specific detail that he takes time to mention. Why does he do this?

To remind us that these are real people and real places. When we are looking at the authenticity of the Bible, details like this one are super helpful and important, because we can verify that places and people like this actually existed and still do! Called marks of Historicity.

Other details pop up, like the fact that the announcement to Mary was given during her cousin's six month of being pregnant with John the Baptist. These details give us a solid framework by which we can trust the veracity and authenticity of the Bible.

To show how Jesus fulfills the different prophecies in the OT regarding the future Messiah and Christ.

And He went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that He would be called a Nazarene. – Matthew 2:23

To show how God's kingdom and ways completely upends the common view of power and importance! Both Jewish and Gentile cultures had a high view on the rank and pedigree of people's lineage and residence. These things would speak commentary to who you would be, and to your character.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." – John 1:45-46

We do this all the time still! We create generalizations about people based on where they are from. This creates expectations about people in our minds. The Jewish teachers of the law had done the same thing regarding the prophecies of the Messiah. They had begun to expect Him to be a certain way and to save according to their understanding of things. But they forgot that God's ways are so much different than our ways.

In having Jesus be born and raised in a humble place, He is upending our understanding of both power and influence. Jesus, the King of all Kings, the Creator Himself, comes to us in the form of man, but doesn't come in a palace, or with any kind of pomp or circumstance, but comes in a most humble and ordinary way: through human birth in a

common place. Jesus was not raised in a palace, or given the best things on earth, but was raised in a town that was not anything special or unique.

I believe that God had His Son born and raised in the most humble of places in order to remind us that heaven is wherever He is, and wherever He is, heaven is there. Which for us means that there is no place on earth that God doesn't want to bring the gift of His presence to. There is no place too far or too small or too unimportant for God not to care about. Our backgrounds are not barriers to God, and instead are the exact places for the gospel to minister to and bring hope and healing to.

Peasant Girl

Notice that Luke's first description of her was simply "*a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph*"... her identification is tied to her relationship to a man. Talk about mansplaining! But Luke is really emphasizing the humble station in life that Mary is in. Her whole life revolved around her sexual purity, and the man she was to marry in life.

While it is good and proper to stay sexually pure until marriage, and while marriage is a wonderful gift and institution of God, it by no means is to be the defining nature of who we are as people. Neither virginity nor marriage is what defines us, but who we are in Christ is what is to define us.

God choosing Mary shifts the definition and vision of what true humanity is to be about, by re-framing it in terms of our relationship to the Son of God.

Humble Response

Issue of her "fiat", or command to Gabriel.

Vs. 38 is in the imperative form of the Greek, indicating the mood of issuing a command.

Maximalist position:

Command to Gabriel or God? Does the incarnation wholly depend on her?

Minimalist position:

Simple acquiescence to the announcement. Does she have the right to decline?

Her "fiat" is an indication of her humble submission to God..."Behold, I am the servant of the LORD..." declaration of submission to the plan of God.

Her submission to the plan of God was due to her view of herself being the "handmaiden of the LORD".

The question that we most wrestle with in our lives, which defines our ultimate eternal standing, is “whose am I”? We know that we are not truly our own, for we did not will ourselves into existence, but are fully dependent creatures, and the question we need to honestly ask ourselves is “whose am I”? How I answer this question will forever define the rest of my life, my actions, my motivations, and my quality of life here and now and into eternity.

Mary’s humility is seen in her knowledge of herself being a servant of God first and foremost.

Mary’s Piety

And Mary said,

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.”*

– Luke 1:46-49

Jesus already upending the social structure of society, “the first shall be last, and the last shall be first”. Elizabeth and Mary were in two very different socio-economic classes, yet Elizabeth views Mary as having a higher station than her due to her part in God’s plan of redemption.

Notice Mary’s piety in what this pronouncement inspires in her...to break forth into a song of praise and adoration to God!

Mary’s humility is seen in her knowledge of herself being a sinner and in need for a savior.

The word for savior in the Greek is “soter”, and when it is used in the NT, overwhelmingly used to describe salvation from sin and its effects.

*But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. — **Matthew 1:20-21***

Her worship through song from the deepest part of her being.

Her treasuring and remembering the things of the LORD in her heart.

How often do we forget the glory of God as we gather, or are in Bible study, or in personal worship?

Takes an intentional act of keeping and remembering.

Mary's Maternity

*"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel."*

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

– Luke 2:29-33

Mother of the Messiah

She was graciously given the gift of raising the One who would become the Messiah. She got the front row seat to the fullness of the plan of redemption which begun way back in the Garden of Eden with the promise of the Redeemer and Savior in Genesis 3:15.

And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

– Luke 2:34-35

Mother of Sorrow

While Mary certainly has the esteemed place of being the mother of the Messiah, she also was still a mother who loved her son, and who would experience heart ache and heart break at the brutal treatment and murder of her little boy.

As we saw in the previous point, Mary was not sinless, nor was she impervious to those kinds of emotions we all feel as human beings, especially as parents. She, too, would experience the piercing of soul that God does through the Holy Spirit.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

– Hebrews 4:12-13

Mary would experience the sorrow of the loss of her beloved boy, as well as the sorrow that comes from the godly guilt over sin. She, in more ways than one, was truly the first Christian of the NT Church.

Just as Mary was not immune to the need for a savior and the gracious ministry of the piercing of the Spirit in her soul, so we too need the Spirit of God to bring conviction of sin, and sorrow for sin which leads us to repentance.

And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him... And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

– **Luke 2:40, 51-52**

Mother of Instruction

Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

– **Proverbs 1:8-9**

My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching
–**Proverbs 6:20**

Why was it necessary for Jesus to grow in knowledge just as we all do? Why was it necessary to have Jesus experience each stage of human development as we do?

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

– **Hebrews 2:17**

Jesus chose to be humiliated and to experience human weakness by allowing His human side to be taught.

Jesus redeemed and sanctified each stage of human growth and development. He lived the perfect life in every stage of human life so that all of life might experience the wonder of redemption and salvation.

Mary was integral in the growth and development of Jesus as a human being. She was part of His education, His formation as a person, and His love for the things of God. Jesus was the fulfillment of what Solomon wrote in Proverbs, that to hear and heed the instructions of our mothers would be a garland of grace for our heads and pendants for

our necks. Jesus received the loving instruction of His mother, teaching Him the things and ways of God as best she could!

Mary's humility is seen in her faithful instruction of the Son of God.

While I am sure that there may have been some insecurity in being given the responsibility to raise and instruct the Son of God in His own ways, she humbly and faithfully executed her duties, and the fruit of which is seen in how seriously Jesus took His own sense of His place and stature with God the Father.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart."

— Luke 2:46-51

In each stage and season of life, God gives us proper ways to live which are intended to bring Him glory and to promote human thriving. It is incumbent upon us to humbly and faithfully live out those proper and right ways in each stage and season of life. Mary humbly accepted the call to raise Jesus in the ways of the LORD, even though she was not very well educated, even though she came from a poor village, even though her own son was the Creator Himself, even though – still, you can tell from this scene that she faithfully and humbly lived out the call of God in her life!

Conclusion

Let's circle back to the definition of humility that we started with: Humility is rightly knowing and living out who I am in Christ, for His glory and to serve others.

How do we see this in Mary's life?

Mary's humility is seen in her knowledge of herself being a servant of God first and foremost.

Whose are you?

Mary's humility is seen in her knowledge of herself being a sinner and in need for a savior.

Who will save you?

Mary's humility is seen in her faithful instruction of the Son of God.

Who are you discipling?

In each of these, her singular identity is fully in herself being a justified sinner, who sought to serve the LORD however He called her to, and humbly and faithfully did it even when her credentials may have caused her to doubt or not do it at all.

Where are you at this morning? How are you viewing yourself and the season of life that God has for you now? Where do you need to seek to live out the example of the humility of Mary in your life today?

Let's pray.