

Advent, 2025
Joy
The Magnificat, Part 1
Luke 1:26-56

A Quote and an Extra Thought

Arthur A. Just: As Eve contained in her womb all humanity doomed to sin, now Mary contains in her womb the new Adam who will father a new humanity by his grace (Romans 5:12-21). Thus, the angel says “rejoice,” for Israel – humanity – is now to be reborn through the Son in Mary’s womb. The Lord is with Mary – he is with his church. (Just does not mean, here, that all will be saved – but for all who believe, his promise is the same as his promise to Mary – the Lord is with you.)

From Kent Hughes: “Overshadow,” is the word in the Greek OT (the Septuagint) used for God’s presence in the tabernacle and the temple, and in the NT for God’s presence at the Mount of Transfiguration.

From the Sermon

Because this topic is dense and there are few notes, I have included an extended excerpt (over half) of the sermon so that you can study and reflect.

Luke 1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

When you think about Mary, I am sure most of you know she was likely a teenager, somewhere between 12 and 14 years old. She was of humble estate, as she will acknowledge in her hymn of praise. Even so, she knew the Scriptures, as will become evident. Mary showed remarkable poise for – well, for anyone, but especially for a 12-13-year-old girl. Perhaps Gabriel toned down his appearance a bit, but it was enough to trouble her greatly. Even so, she sought to process and understand this encounter.

Most of your translations have Gabriel’s first word as, “Greetings!” Some of your translations say, “Rejoice!” which might be a better translation. Gabriel identified Mary as a favored one. In the Greek, this could be read, “one who has been favored by

God.” The point is not that Mary was so good that God chose her, but that he chose her and privileged her to be the mother of God.

Let’s talk a bit about the confusion surrounding Mary, and it is okay if this is too much for you and you tune out for the next few minutes. This should be helpful to some of you. I especially wanted the children to hear this complex theological explanation I am about to share, although I will only be skimming the surface. I have included much of the sermon in the sermon notes.

The Catholic Douay Version of the Bible translates verse 28, “Hail, full of grace.” The English Catholic translation – again, the Douay-Rheims Version – was translated from the Latin Vulgate, not the Hebrew and Greek. The poor translation of this verse in the Latin led to the medieval misunderstanding of Mary as a dispenser of grace rather than a recipient of grace. But as has already been mentioned, the Greek does not indicate that Mary possessed all spiritual and secular gifts, but, rather, that she was the recipient of God’s grace and blessings.

You might have missed that last bit, though, because I had just said that Mary was privileged to be the mother of God. As John Frame says, this phrase could be jarring to Protestants, but it is perfectly fine theologically. We believe that Jesus is one person with two natures – a divine nature and a human nature. In the fifth century, a heretic named Nestorius, claimed that Jesus was two persons with two natures, and he wanted to say that Mary was Christotokos, “the Christ-bearer,” not Theotokos “the God-bearer.” At the council of Ephesus in A.D. 431, and later at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, Nestorius’ teaching was condemned as heresy.

So, to summarize, the phrase, “Hail Mary, full of grace” which means Mary gives grace and so people should pray to her – not theologically correct, at all! To call Mary the “mother of God,” is correct. “Mother of God” is an orthodox title for Mary, although Protestants don’t use it very much.

Back to earth! Mary was betrothed to Joseph, whose line could be traced directly to David. Mary and Joseph were not yet married, but they were more than engaged. A betrothal was a legally binding state that insured marriage, and the only way it could be broken was through divorce. There is more to this story in Matthew, but Luke focuses on Mary. Verses 30-34:

30 And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 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, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

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

Wow! Remember, Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but their relationship had not yet been consummated, so Mary understood enough about Gabriel’s proclamation to know that this would not be an ordinary conception. It would be an ordinary birth, but not an ordinary conception. Mary would bear Jesus, whose name meant savior, but it was a common enough name. It was not common, though, to be called the Son of the Most High! This was the promised Messiah of Israel, descended from David and born as the king of Israel, the king of God’s people.

This is astounding, of course, and no words will ever capture the full implications of what God did to save us, but here is a taste of God’s magnificent plan in the words of Arthur Just, quote:

“As Eve contained in her womb all humanity doomed to sin, now Mary contains in her womb the new Adam who will father a new humanity by his grace (Romans 5:12-21).” Close quote.

Jesus would become one of us; he would look like Mary; he would have her mannerisms. But he would be, as he always had been, God. It was necessary for Jesus to be 100% God and 100% man so that he could be the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Mary didn’t understand all this, but she trusted God, and she asked how it could be since she had not been with a man. When Zechariah questioned Gabriel, he was struck silent. When Mary asked a question, Gabriel answered her. The difference? Zechariah asked with a spirit of, “Really? I doubt it,” and Mary answered with a spirit of “Okay! how?” The answer is given in verses 35-38:

35 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. 36 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. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38 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.

When Mary asked how, Gabriel might have said, “The Trinity.” “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High, or Yahweh, or God the Father, will overshadow you, and the child will be the holy Son of God – Jesus!” “Overshadow,”

is the word in the Greek OT (the Septuagint), used for God's presence in the tabernacle and the temple, and in the NT for God's presence at the Mount of Transfiguration. Mary's response? A perfect response for every believer: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

As Kent Hughes says, this was not a normal man-woman type of union, but likely Mary felt the arrival of Jesus by the Holy Spirit, just like the Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism and just as the Holy Spirit came upon believers at Pentecost. Gabriel told Mary about Elizabeth's unusual conception, and after Gabriel departed, and after Mary conceived, she hot-footed it to see Elizabeth – probably a 3-5-day journey. What a wonderful story! Verses 39-45:

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Six-months in the womb, John the Baptist now leaps with joy in his mother's womb when Jesus' presence came into the room. Oh, that we were as sensitive to Jesus' appearance! One thing is for certain – if we are aware of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is present according to the plan of God the Father!

Mary was a very young woman, if you could even call her a woman. Elizabeth was an old woman. Yet, God blessed them both with children. John the Baptist would play a crucial role in preparing the way of the Lord, as he had been prophesied to do in Isaiah 40:3-5. Jesus, as we know, was the fulfillment of God's plan to save his people from their sins.

The story to this point sets up The Magnificat, Mary's song of praise to the Lord. "My soul magnifies the Lord," indeed! I will ask you to stand for the reading of Luke 1:46-55, with verse 56 closing this story. As I read, the worship team will come forward to lead us in our final hymn. One of the names for Jesus is the Second Adam. Be looking for these words in our final Christmas carol. Next Sunday will be an exposition of The Magnificat. Luke 1:46-56:

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Prophecy about John the Baptist:

Isaiah 40:3 A voice cries:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
4 Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Prophecy about Jesus:

Matthew 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 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. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."** 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). (This is from Isaiah 7:14)

24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.