

## Christmas 2019 - Luke 1:28: Putting Mary in Her Place

As we turn to Luke's gospel, I want to begin by saying that we live in a culture that prides itself on throwing the baby out with the bathwater. We see a particular thing that is wrong, connect it with other things, and condemn everyone and everything associated.

We see someone with a MAGA hat eating Oreos and all of a sudden Nabisco must be funding the Trump campaign so we're boycotting Yoke's because they would have the gall to sell a product that fuels Russian collusion.

Or someone confesses that once upon a time they ate pancakes with Vermont maple syrup and therefore they are supporting businesses that pay taxes to Bernie who wants to take all my Mrs. Butterworth's and give it to those on welfare.

We don't throw the baby out with the bathwater, we **catapult** the baby out with the bathwater. This even has a name: it's cancel culture. If someone thinks you've made one wrong move the mob attacks and you're done forever; regardless of what the truth really is and regardless of what you might say to correct it. And 2 weeks later no one even knows what all the fuss was about but you're life is ruined.

What does this have to do with Christmas or Luke's gospel? What it has to do with us is that as Christians we often are guilty of cancel culture. Especially in more conservative and reformed circles. We see something we don't like (maybe justifiably so), we figure it must be compromise or heresy or heading that way and we cancel people. Cut them off, and pronounce them anathema. We inherited that from our fundamentalist forefathers, who inherited it from the puritans who inherited it from the reformers. I know it's bad form to talk bad about the reformers but their lack of charity was often breathtaking.

When it comes to Christmas, I think as reformed protestants we've cancelled someone out of Christmas who deserves to be in the story. I titled my sermon to be somewhat provocative: "Putting Mary in Her Place" because I think as Protestants we've gone full cancel culture on Mary.

We've seen the abuses and false teaching of the Catholic Church and we rightly reject those things. But we've gone further than that and we've catapulted Mary out the window with the Roman Catholic bathwater. We have have evacuated her of any significance at all in the story of redemption.

Especially this time of year as we are contemplating the birth of the Lord, in which she played such a pivotal role, we need to be reminded that Mary is our sister in Christ; she is in heaven right now in glory. And as we talk about her she's not just a concept or a theological point of argument, she is a fellow Christian redeemed by the blood of Jesus. I think if Mary were with us in the room when we talk about her she would be embarrassed by what we say and how we say it because we're not treating her as a godly saint who has gone before us, but as a topic of argument and disgust.

As much as Catholics are guilty of exalting Mary, I think we are guilty of debasing her. And as we consider her part in the Christmas story I think we need to put her back in her rightful place. She is a saint like Sarah or Ruth or Esther who were favored of God.

So first, I want to look at how Mary has been wrongly exalted and mischaracterized. Although most cults have a wrong view of Mary, we will focus mainly on Catholic doctrine because our view of Mary is largely fueled by a reaction to the Catholic view. And I hope you know that I'm not just here to pick on the Catholics. But we usually respond to their view of Mary. So we'll look at the bad.

And then we'll transition to a proper view of Mary. And then look at how she along with us worship the Son of God whom she gave birth to. So let's talk about 5 ways Mary is misrepresented:

1st (and most offensive) mischaracterization: Co-redemptrix. Now, this is not technically part of Catholic dogma. But there are some Catholics who believe Mary had a hand in the redemption of humanity. That her position as Jesus's mother was more than just a godly woman who brought Jesus into the world. They would say that she is "essential...in redemption, notably that she gave free consent to give life to the

Redeemer, which meant sharing his life, suffering, and death, which were redemptive for the world.” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Co-Redemptrix#cite\\_ref-1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Co-Redemptrix#cite_ref-1))

This is rightly offensive to any true Christian because we know the work of salvation - the work of redemption - was accomplished solely through Christ and no other. Nowhere in the NT is the work of redemption ever attributed to anyone other than Jesus in any sense. Just because she played a role in his life doesn't mean she had a part in redemption. As someone once said: The only thing anyone has contributed to redemption is our need for it.

We'd never say that Judas was co-redeemer because he sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. We'd never say that Pilate was a co-redeemer because he had Jesus crucified. Or that the Romans guards at the tomb were co-redeemers because they made sure he stayed in there for 3 days. Just being part of Jesus's life did not add to the work he alone did on the cross.

**Isa. 53:5:** “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

It is **Jesus's** suffering and death alone that are the grounds for our redemption. And I think Mary would agree.

2nd Misunderstanding: Immaculate conception. I will define this in a minute. But first know that the Bible teaches the doctrine of original sin. That is, that the sin of Adam has flowed down to all of his offspring: every man and woman from the moment of conception is a sinner by nature. We are not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners. It's in our very nature.

**Rom. 5:18-19:** One trespass led to condemnation for all men...As by one man's sin many were made to be sinners.

All those who are the offspring of Adam are sinners and deserve condemnation simply because we are his offspring.

Well, the immaculate conception of Mary is the idea that Mary was not infected by original sin. Immaculate means without spot or stain. Catholic theology says that God, in his grace, must have prevented Mary from receiving original sin when **she** was conceived. She was still a sinner eventually because she did sin and therefore needed a Savior. But God kept her from having original sin and he did so so that she wouldn't pass it down to Jesus.

A lot of questions are raised by this: Why doesn't God just do that with everyone? Why do it with Mary when she'll sin anyway? If he can prevent Mary from receiving original sin with 2 sinful parents, why couldn't God just do so to Jesus directly? It seems as though the immaculate conception is just pushing the issue of Jesus being sinless back a generation.

There really is no Scriptural evidence to justify this teaching at all. The Catholic Encyclopedia: “no direct or categorical...proof...can be brought forward from Scripture” (Frederick Holweck, "Immaculate Conception" in The Catholic Encyclopedia 1910). But some will try to use **Luke 1:28** to justify this claim. **Read 28**

Now, does that passage speak at all about original sin or God preventing it from coming to Mary? No. It says that Mary is favored. And they interpret that as “blessed” or “without sin.” There's no justification for that in the original language, the word simply means someone who is the recipient of God's grace.

Do you know why Jesus was without sin? It's not because of Mary. It's because of the Holy Spirit. **Read 35**

So the angel tells Mary that the Spirit will overshadow her and come upon her. There's no sexual connotation in those words, by the way. These words are also never used of the normal conception process. They are often used for the divine presence over the Ark in the Tabernacle or power of God in a miraculous event.

So why is Jesus sinless? The angel makes the connection: The Spirit will come upon you, the Most High will overshadow you - there will be a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit - **therefore** the child will be called holy. Why was Jesus holy, without sin? Jesus is holy and sinless and because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit. It had nothing to do with Mary's original sin, or lack thereof.

Her virgin birth in conjunction with the Holy Spirit kept Jesus from original sin, not immaculate conception.

**3rd Misunderstanding:** Perpetual virginity. Perpetual means continual or always. So this is a teaching that Mary never knew a man in an intimate way. Not before Jesus and not even after.

Of course, the Bible is clear that Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus. She was shocked at the angel's message because she had never known a man. But Catholics take that a step further and say she never knew a man.

**Look at Matthew 1:23-25.** Because Catholics believe that there was something quasi-intimate happening between Mary and the Holy Spirit, they also claim that she had a special state of holiness and would not have ever been intimate with another man. But this goes against the clear teaching of Scripture. **Read 23-25**

**Vs. 25** makes it pretty clear that while the events surrounding the conception and birth of Jesus were miraculous, intimacy between Mary and Joseph was normal after Jesus's birth. He knew her not **until** she had given birth. The word "until" indicates a termination point. We work until 5 o'clock. We stay up until bedtime. The Dolphins play football until the playoffs. It's an odd sentence for Matthew to include if what he meant was he never knew her.

**Look over at Matt 12:46-50.** This is where Jesus is gaining in popularity. He's preaching and the house is packed. And his mom and brothers don't believe in him yet. They think he's a crazy man and want to get him to stop teaching. Mark's gospel makes that a little more clear than Matthew. But here we see the reference to mom and brothers. **Read 46-50**

Catholics will say that the word for brother in Greek - ἀδελφός - does mean brother but it can also mean cousin. And that's what it must mean here because Mary couldn't have had children. There's actually a word for cousin in Greek that never means brother (ἀνεψιός) - and Matthew doesn't use it.

But the point Jesus is making is that whoever obeys the Word of God becomes just like a brother to Jesus. Not cousin, not aunt or uncle twice removed. When you trust in Christ and obey his Word you become his mother or brother; his intimate family. Mary and the boys hadn't done that yet.

His brothers are named, by the way in the next chapter. **Read 13:55-57**

This was a large family. At least 5 boys including Jesus, and at least 2 daughters. James and Jude would later become apostles and write the books of the Bible that bear their names.

Side: As Christians we usually get painted for those being against sexual immorality - which is true. But we also need to be the ones who uphold the reality that intimacy within marriage is good and right and healthy and God-honoring. There's nothing sinful or defiling about Mary being intimate with Joseph. The gospel is not compromised because she had other kids. Mary, just like any other mom, blessed her kids by pointing them to Jesus.

**4th Misunderstanding:** Praying to Mary. Protestants reject the murky bathwater of praying to Mary. Why is that? Because the only person to whom we pray is God. And through Jesus we have direct access to the throne of grace. Our High Priest Jesus has given us access to the throne of God almighty. He is our Father who delights to hear our prayers. Why would we ever pray to someone else as though they can even hear our prayers or answer our prayers.

Well, Catholics will often say that it's like asking a friend to pray for you. Sure you can pray, but wouldn't you want a friend to pray? And especially a godly friend who is with the Lord because maybe they can nudge God a little more since they're right there with him.

That's a cute analogy, but it undermines the reality that God is everywhere and hears our prayers himself and cares for us. That's why we can cast our burdens on him. Yes, other living believers should pray for us - we're commanded to pray for each other. We're never commanded (and never see) Christians praying to Christians who are with the Lord.

5th Misconception: Using the phrase Mary is the "Mother of God." This title initially came about in the 4th and 5th centuries by Christians to uphold the dual nature of Jesus as truly God and truly Man. To deny that Mary was the mother of God was to deny that Jesus was God. We're all on board with that.

"Since Mary is Jesus' mother, it must be concluded that she is also the Mother of God: If Mary is the mother of Jesus, and if Jesus is God, then Mary is the Mother of God. There is no way out of this logical syllogism. Although Mary is the Mother of God, she is not his mother in the sense that she is older than God or the source of her Son's divinity, for she is neither. (<https://www.catholic.com/tract/mary-mother-of-god>)

So what he's saying is that "Mary, the mother of God" is simply a truism. It's just a true statement by its definition. He goes on to argue that to deny that Mary is the Mother of God is to deny the divinity of Jesus.

But here's the deal: truisms are often used to convey something more than just their own words. We use the phrase "it is what it is" - and it's probably the most popular truism of our day. But we don't say it for the words "this reality is this reality;" we say it because it implies something, which is: there's nothing we can do about this situation, don't complain, just keep going. That's what we mean. Words and phrases have implications.

The same is true when people call Mary the Mother of God. They don't do it because it's a logical truism. They do it because it exalts her. In fact, if you were to read the paragraph I just read to you when it uses the phrase "Mother of God" the word "mother" is capitalized. Why capitalize it? Because this has now become her title. If I were to write out that "I am the father of Zach" I wouldn't capitalize "father" because it's a truism, not a title. They capitalize Mother because it gives her an exalted status. Catholics also refer to her as Queen Mother or theotokos, which means God-bearer. I think these titles give her a status above the Scriptures.

By the way, the biblical writers never call the mother of God. They do, however, call her the mother of Jesus (**Acts 1:14, John 19:25**) or as we'll see "mother of the Lord." I think that's a wise and biblical way to refer to her.

So those are 5 wrong things Catholics and many others believe about Mary. Turn over to **Luke 1** again. What about us? What corrections do we need? How should we put her back in her proper place?

1) We forget that God poured out incredible favor on Mary. **Read 26-33**

Translation: Mary, you have hit the divine jackpot! Twice the angel says to Mary "You are favored by God." Just stop there for a second. Imagine you're sitting at the dinner table one night eating leftover pizza all alone. And out nowhere an angel in bright and brilliant glory shows up and offers you 2 words of encouragement: You are favored and God is with you. That'd be pretty awesome! I don't know about you but there's been some times in my life where I could have used a message like that. Mary had that.

God could have just had the angel say "Hey you're pregnant, it's from the Spirit, call him Jesus." But he doesn't say just that. He says "you are favored by God. God loves you and is on your side!" I think it's safe to say that's pretty special. So special the angel says it again in **Vs. 30. Read**

And what comes next is the massive reality that she will be carrying the Son about whom all the promises of the OC pointed. **Read 31-33**

So Jesus is the whole show, he's the Messiah to whom all the prophets have pointed. He will reign on David's throne in heaven. He is the Son of the Most High. But she gets a front row seat to the action. That baby is in your womb. Not your neighbor's, not your distant relative. God in the flesh is in your womb. That's pretty cool. She was specially favored by God.

2) Though we saw how Mary and Jesus's brother's initially rejected Jesus, it's important to keep in mind that by and large she was an incredibly humble woman. **Read 34-38**

So we often do pregnancy announcements at church and it's cool. Babies are a gift, so we all clap and holler, and we should. But imagine you're a teenage girl - as Mary likely was. And an angel comes to you and tells you you're going to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. And you've never known a man before and you're not married. How's that pregnancy announcement going to go over in synagogue? It's not going to be awesome. And it's not going to be awesome with your husband-to-be, either.

There's going to be slander and gossip and accusations. This blessing that God pours out on Mary is going to feel to her like a curse, at least from a human perspective.

How do we know she was humble? Because she submits to the Lord's plan. **Read 38**

God, you're in charge. I'm just your servant and whatever you say goes. If you think about the conversation here, it's actually pretty brief. There's not a lot of detail, not a lot of explanation. But Mary submits. No argument. No hesitation. If this is God's Word, then let it be so. Absolute humility.

3) Third way we know Mary is blessed among women: In the very next section God himself tells us she is 4 times. **Read 39-45**

So Mary hears that Elizabeth is pregnant from the angel and heads out to see Elizabeth. Elizabeth knows Mary's pregnant but why doesn't Elizabeth judge Mary? Why doesn't Elizabeth assume that Mary has been immoral? Because really they are experiencing similar miracles. Both of their pregnancies included miracles that were announced by angels. Elizabeth had been barren all her life and was too old to have children. Mary had the opposite problem: she was young and had never been with a man. And so when Mary comes it's no surprise that God is at work.

And 4 times Elizabeth we see that Mary is blessed.

**Vs. 42:** Blessed among women - that is she stands out among all women for her role her. Blessed also is the fruit of her womb - the baby.

She also blessed because she is called the mother of the Lord in **Vs. 43**. I don't want to rehash the whole mother of God title thing again. But notice that Elizabeth considers it an honor that Mary would come to visit her precisely because she is the mother of the Lord. **Read 43**

She saying "this is a special blessing because in your womb is the Lord." Even John the Baptist - still in utero - knows the blessing of Jesus and leaps for joy.

And Mary is called blessed in **Vs. 45** for believing the Lord's message through the angel.

But here's what we need to see. This isn't just Elizabeth's opinion about Mary. This is God the Holy Spirit filling her to say these things. **Read 41-42a**

The Spirit is speaking through Elizabeth. He is the one telling us that Mary is blessed in all these ways. I mean, if for some reason we didn't believe the angel sent by God, maybe God himself would be enough to convince us Mary has a special place of blessing in God's redemptive story.

So Mary is favored by God, incredibly humble, is proclaimed to be blessed by the Spirit.

4) Mary herself recognizes her place of blessing. **Read 46-56**

Now, just a small side here. Imagine your teenage daughter had to go through a trial that no one else understood, she would be constantly slandered and misrepresented, but in the bigger scheme of things you knew it was a blessing. Wouldn't you want her to react with a song of praise like this? This is an amazing song. It's really a parallel to Hannah's song in **1 Samuel 2** when Hannah who was barren had given birth to Samuel and then gave him to the Eli at the Temple. Here, Mary is a young woman who is filled with Scripture and responds in joy at this situation.

And we see in **Vs. 48** that Mary realizes that all generations will call her blessed. She's not demanding to be called "Blessed Mary" - we are not required to give her that title. The point is all generations will look at how God used her in the amazing story of redemption and conclude "Man, what an awesome privilege it would have been to be the mom of Jesus!"

Just like it's not pride when the CEO knows his role is more weighty than a janitor, Mary is not saying she is better than anyone else. She's saying her role in Jesus's life was one everyone would agree is a blessing.

**Turn to Acts 1.** Mary, as you know struggled to understand her Son. When he was 12 she and Joseph get on him for staying at the Temple in Jerusalem when they thought he should have come back with them. During his ministry she tries to shut him up because she thought he was crazy. But she is at his side at his crucifixion when Jesus tells her "Woman, behold your son" and he tells the apostle John "Behold your mother." Jesus passes responsibility to care for Mary not to his brothers, but to his disciples as she finally comes to believe in her son.

The last time we see Mary in Scripture is in **Acts 1** and she's only mentioned in passing. Jesus has just ascended to heaven moments earlier and what do we see? **Read 12-14**

What do we see? We see that even though Mary was favored with God and was blessed for her part in the life of Jesus, she's simply taking part in the life of any other believer. She's devoted herself to prayer. She's devoted herself to the fellowship of believers in the death and resurrection of Jesus in light of his ascension that happened just moments earlier. And she longs for his coming.

We put Mary in her rightful place when we refuse to exalt her. But we also put Mary in her place when we acknowledge the amazing role she played in the life of her son, the Lord Jesus.

And more than that, her role is as our sister in Christ who was saved by her son in the same way we are saved by her son. Not of works, but of faith. Mary's place, though blessed immensely, is next to us at the feet of Jesus for all eternity.

**Pray**