

MARY - “HIGHLY FAVORED AND BLESSED AMONG WOMEN”

As we approach what is known as the Christmas season, we often take the time to revisit the Biblical record of the people God used in the incarnation of Christ. We regard them as Heroes of Faith because of their virtue and character. Of course, high among these people is Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The purpose in studying Mary's character and the cost she paid to serve in God's plan, is so we too can fill the calling God has for us today. Sometimes we are asked how we as Christians are supposed to handle the high cost of godly living in our culture. When we consider the heroes of faith, and the grace God gave them to fulfill their calling, then we realize that in humility and faithfulness we can rise to the challenges of serving God in our generation. When we turn to use some of Satan's props then we are destined to fail.

Sadly, one of Satan's continued assaults on the human race is to deflect worship away from God and His Son the Lord Jesus. He has persuaded even some of those who consider themselves the church of Christ to exalt other humans, especially those who were involved in Jesus' incarnation. We would like to affirm some of Mary's attributes that confirm her humanity.

Mary and her parents had a fallen human nature just like the rest of us. We affirm that Jesus was human but without any sin. We cannot believe that Mary even had victory over personal sin. The Bible plainly teaches us, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;” Romans 3:23 and “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:” Romans 5:12 Furthermore, no ritual or rite can deal with this fallen human nature and its depravity except a personal conversion experience. But life in Christ makes the difference. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Romans 8:2-4 We are not here to point out Mary's faults, but in studying the Holy Scriptures, we see evidence that she expressed a self-centered nature that Jesus did not have.

Mary did not retain perpetual virginity. “And (Joseph) knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.” Matthew 1:25 The implication is obvious. Furthermore, Matthew recorded, “Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?” Matthew 13:55-56 It is obvious that Mary became the busy mother of at least seven children and was widowed in her lifetime. This should be a consolation to us in the journey of life as we too find ourselves in changing seasons with their varied tests.

Mary's body has not been taken up into heaven. Growing out of the false doctrine of perpetual virginity and sinlessness, some would teach the doctrine of the assumption. The inspired Word of God plainly teaches us “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:” 1 Thessalonians 4:16 We do believe

the souls of all of those who die in Christ Jesus are “with Christ”, but their bodies do sleep in the dust of the earth until that glorious day when all the dead in Christ shall arise.

Mary is not involved in apparitions, or miraculous appearances to Christians in order to help them. We do know who that is. “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.” 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 We know that faith comes by hearing the Word of God in our dispensation. We do know that in the future angels will go forth preaching in the day of the Lord (Rev 14:6-11) Right now they are forbidden to do so. Galatians 1:6-8 As fellow Christians, we are called to assist each other, lifting up the hands that hang down. Hebrews 12:12. Spirits that pretend to do these things are demonic. Paul’s letter to the Galatians confirms that the early church was very susceptible to false teachings, and that our validity is confirmed by our allegiance to the Word of God.

Mary cannot play any intercessory work for Christians at the Throne of God. When Jesus was here, He emphasized He is the link the disciples would have with God and that “No man cometh unto the Father but by me” John 14:6. He is the only mediator between man and God. (See 1Tim 2:5). One sign of a false religion is when men pretend to be priests or intermediaries between the needy soul and the Heavenly Father. Only Jesus can fill that place and when Mary is proclaimed as a substitute one has forsaken the foundations of the Christian faith.

Mary is not the “Gate of Heaven” (nor the Queen of Heaven). In the book of Jeremiah, the title “Queen of Heaven” is used to refer to a false goddess that the people of Judah worshipped instead of the true God. Some scholars believe that the goddess was Ishtar, the Assyrian goddess of love, fertility, and war. Again, the words of Jesus echo down to us today, “But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Matthew 12:48-50
What good then can be said about Mary, Jesus’ mother?

Mary gave her body as a living sacrifice for God’s purposes. We are all called to do this today. Our society believes in “women’s rights”. The idea that we are a body with a soul tends to filter into our thinking. The truth is that we are souls in a very temporary tent. This tent is to house us for a brief period of time, but this tent is to be placed at God’s disposal, for His use and His purposes. One of God’s calling was highlighted by the Apostle Paul as something that Timothy should pass on to first generation disciples. “I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.” 1 Timothy 5:14

Part of Mary’s giving her body to God was that she kept her virginity for her marriage (and in her case up until after the birth of Jesus.) Purity of body and mind are mocked in our culture today. But it is only the “pure in heart” that shall see God. If we desire to be among the blessed, we will need to be intentional about maintaining our purity in our corrupt world.

All of the virtues Mary expressed were because she believed, (Luke 1:45), she worshipped (Luke 1:46-48) and she surrendered her will to God (Luke 1:38). “And Mary said, ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.’ And the angel departed from her.” Luke 1:38

This kind of life brought great cost. The following are a few things that being Jesus’ mother cost Mary. They are typical of the cost that followers of Jesus may have to pay today.

- Mary's special nest for her newborn son was only a stable for animals
- Mary soon became a refugee in a foreign land
- Sometimes she sought her son sorrowing, because He was about His Father's business (Luke 2:48-49)
- A sword often pierced her own soul
- She heard her own Son say, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" (John 2:4)
- She heard her own Son say, "Who is my mother?" and then he declared that all women who bow to His will and obey His commands are His mother (Matt 12:50) She had no exclusive rights to Him.
- She saw her Son, die on the cross, and in the dying heard him "Woman, behold thy son." John 19:25. Was this a call for her to acknowledge her need of Him to save her? Or was it for her to adopt her nephew John as her son?

Thinking deeply about Mary, and her role in Christ's advent, is helpful for us in finding our own place in His service. We dare not worship her, neither dare we abandon her example. If we want to be Jesus' mother, brother or sister, the cost is still the same. *For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.* Matthew 12:50

~Steve Ebersole