

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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## MARY THE VIRGIN MOTHER OF JESUS CHRIST

Mark opens his gospel with the words that declare his purpose for writing: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1). Actually the gospel of Jesus Christ had its beginning, not in the waters of his baptism in the Jordan, but in the prophecy of the Old Testament where "the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquires, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating..." (I Peter 1:10, 11). These prophecies began to be fulfilled when a poor carpenter and his wife traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be taxed, and while there a son was born that was a fulfillment of the prophecy made in Genesis 3:15. This son was "the seed of the woman whose heel would be bruised by Satan, but who would bruise Satan's head."

The angel Gabriel told Mary "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). This is spoken in reference to the human nature of Christ, and this passage proves that one reason why Jesus was called the Son of God was because he was begotten by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. Alexander Campbell wrote in *The Christian Baptist (May 1827)*: "The names Jesus, Christ, or Messiah, only-begotten Son, Son of God, belong to the founder of the Christian religion, and none else. They express not a relation existing before the Christian era, but relations which commenced at that time. There is no Jesus, no Messiah, no Christ, no Son of God, no Only-begotten before the reign of Augustus Caesar. Jesus is called the Son of God, not because of an 'eternal generation' (which I conceive to be nonsense), but because he was born as the angel described to Mary."

Mary the mother of Jesus is mentioned at least fifty times in the gospels (sometimes different gospel writers' site the same occasion) and once in the book of Acts. Catholicism has made much of the angel's statement to Mary in Luke 1:28: "Hail, highly favored; The Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." This verse has been the basis of the title given her: "The Blessed Virgin Mary." She is said three times to have been "blessed" in Luke 1:42-48), but she is said to be blessed *among* women, not *above* women. The word is *makaridzo* and is used throughout the New Testament and variously translated as "happy" "blessed" and "fortunate" as in James 5:11: "we count those blessed who endured." Once upon hearing Jesus teach "a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed.' But he said, 'On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it'" (Luke 11:27, 28). When Mary is said to be "blessed" it was not due to herself, but to the great fortune of her being chosen by God and her obedience to Him. The Scripture speaks of other women who were, in the same word, declared to be blessed: Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite: "Blessed shall she be above women in the tent" (Judges 5:24) Leah in Genesis 30:13: "Then Leah said 'happy am I! For women will call me *blessed*.'" Psalm 144:15: "Blessed is the people whose God is the lord." Mary said: "My soul exalts the

Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46, 47). Mary was as much in need of a Savior as any other sinner. She was not saved because she was the mother of Jesus, but becoming a believer as everyone else.

However, she has been exalted and venerated above what the Scripture says about her. Following are two examples: *The Catholic Encyclopedia* on "The Immaculate Conception" states: "The blessed Virgin Mary in the first instance of her conception was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin by a singular privilege and grace granted by God in view of the merits of Jesus Christ the savior of the human race." On December 23, 2000 the New York Times ran a major story on an international Catholic movement seeking to encourage papal definition of the virgin Mary as *Co-Redeemer*.

In *Christianity Today*, a popular religious magazine, the Editor, David Neff, wrote: "When Mary came to visit Elizabeth her child leaped in her womb. Mary's spirit too jumped to a higher plane. In the inspired exchange between the cousins, one pregnant virgin sang a prophetic hymn in praise of God's salvation. In that prophecy Mary praised God for filling the hungry with good things and sending the rest away empty. We call her hymn 'The Magnificat' and we Christians have been singing it as a regular part of worship since about the year 500." In the hymn Mary restates Old Testament prophecy. She thanked God for helping Israel and remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his seed forever. It might sound strange that Abraham and his seed and the mercy God showed them would be mentioned at the birth of Jesus. However Jesus was a fulfillment of the promises God made to Abraham. Paul makes a point of this in Galatians 3:16 when he says: Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds.' As referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ." Then in verse 29 he states: "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise." When Christ is said to be the *seed* of Abraham we think of the promise of God in Genesis 3:15: Speaking of Satan God said: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." The woman here is Eve, the wife of Adam, not Mary. All mankind are descended from Eve. But the special seed referred to here that would crush the serpent's head was Jesus. It was only because Jesus was born of Mary, "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4), that he was able to fulfill these words. Mary must have known that her son would be the fulfillment of this promise God made to Abraham. Norval Geldenhurs in his *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* stated: "The Virgin Mary celebrated the mighty reversal of things which in principle has already been accomplished by the entrance of God upon the course of history and the life of mankind, through the coming Messiah, her promised son."

In his *Clark Epistle #79* the late Floyd Clark gave this provocative sentiment concerning what might have happened relative to Mary's visit to Elizabeth, her return to Nazareth, and the events surrounding Jesus' birth. He entitled it *When Mary*

*Ran the Super Marathon.* “Luke says that after Mary had been told she would have a child by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35) she ‘went with haste’ *spoudin*, the Greek root from which was derived our word ‘speed’. She must have run all the way, over 100 miles. When Mary knocked on Elizabeth’s door, she burst into song (Luke 1:46-55). The trip back to Nazareth, three months later, would have been quite different. Zachariah would have sent two of his servants, with the donkeys, to see that Mary got home safely. And that would have taken several days. Mary would not have been welcomed by her family when she got home. She could not tell her story to anyone, knowing they would not believe her. She may have been championed by her sister, who later married Clopas, and was with Mary at the cross when Jesus died (John 19:25). But we read nothing about any others. When Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant he pushed to break his bargain for Mary, telling no one. But the angel told Joseph the unknown part of the story (Matthew 1:18-25), so they had a wedding unattended by his friends who were sure Mary had conceived by some other man while she was away. You know how scandal travels. In days everyone in Nazareth would have heard the story, and said ‘Tut tut’. The six months till the trip to Bethlehem must have taken a toll on both Joseph and Mary. They were not happy teenagers anymore, but silent people. Joseph would have worked in his carpenter shop. Mary would have socialized with no one, and probably did not leave the house. It did not get any better when Joseph was forced by Romans to travel to Bethlehem to register for the taxes to be leveled on the nation of Judah. It had to have been a painful trip of several days for Mary. And when they arrived in Bethlehem none of his relatives there would invite them in. The scandal had preceded them. They had to take shelter in the sheep pen under his relative’s house.

“If any of Joseph’s relatives helped Mary with her delivery we are not told so. Eight days later a priest or Rabbi circumcised Jesus, and named him ‘Savior’ as the Lord had instructed Mary (Luke 1:31). Thirty three days later Joseph took Mary and the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem for Mary to offer the sacrifices for her cleansing. While there Simeon and Anna made predictions about Jesus that amazed Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:25-38). There is nothing else in the record about what happened in the next two years. But when the Astrologers came from Iran, Joseph and Mary were in a house (Matthew 2:11). Not enough is said about the wealth the Magi brought and gave to Jesus. No small army would have traveled such a dangerous 1000 mile road to bring Jesus what was taken up in Sunday School last Sunday. All the gifts would have been very costly, and light enough for Joseph and Mary to have carried those treasures safely to Egypt and back. Archeology has revealed one bit of evidence to support the fact that these visitors supplied all the money Mary needed to provide for Jesus till he was thirty years of age. When Joseph returned to Nazareth he still had enough money to buy just the right placed to raise his family, inside the walls of the city. Jesus was not raised ‘in the sticks’, but ‘downtown’ where all the people went by.”

In the genealogies recorded in the Bible, it is always stated the birth of a son was born to the father, not the mother, but concerning Jesus it was declared: “Matthan begat Jacob and Jacob begat Joseph” but does not say “and Joseph begat Jesus” rather Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ (Matt. 1:16). Contrast this with the announcement of John the Baptist: “Thy wife, Elizabeth shall

bare *thee* a son (Luke 1:13). There is no *to thee* in the announcement to Joseph; rather “...and she shall bare a son” (Matt 1:21). Jesus was not a son born of Joseph, rather: “She shall bring forth a son”. Jesus was not a son brought forth to Joseph but to the Father in Heaven. However, Joseph provided for both Mary and Jesus a normal family relationship. It was Joseph, not Mary, who named Jesus: “and *he* called his name Jesus” (Matt. 1:21). As was the Jewish custom Joseph taught Jesus a trade, and he is referred to as “the carpenter’s son” (Matt. 13:55) and Jesus is spoken of as “the carpenter” (Mark 6:3). Evidently the family of Mary and Joseph did not fit in with highly social standards of the day. When she, according to the law concerning her ceremonial purification offering after the birth of a son, she offered either “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons” (Luke 2:24). According to Leviticus 12:8: “if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons for...an offering.” Authur C. Culance in *The Seed of the Woman* stated: “The irony is that she brought two birds *and* a lamb. For the child she brought was indeed a sacrificial lamb if she had but realized it at the time.”

While they were in the temple Simeon took the child in his arms and prophesied (Luke 2:25-32), then he “Blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed---and a sword will pierce even your own soul...’” (verse 35). A sword pierced her soul throughout his ministry, beginning at the age of twelve when he was left behind in the temple at the conclusion of the Passover festival (Luke 2:41-52). When they found him they asked, “Why have you treated us this way? Behold your father and I have been anxiously looking for you.” And he said to them, ‘Why are you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?’” (Luke 2:48-49). They did not understand what he meant, but “Mary treasured all these things in her heart.”

It is an interesting fact that Jesus never in public addressed Mary as “Mother”. No doubt in his growing up years he did call her Mother, but the two times he addresses her in public he used the word “Woman”. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* interprets the word “woman” as “a form of address used in kindness and favor or in respect.” At the wedding in Cana of Galilee, where he performed his first sign (John 2:1-11), when the wine gave out his mother told him “They have no wine.” There was no spoken request that he do something, but he must have known it was a request. His answer, evidently a rebuke for her presumption was “Woman, what have I to do with you? (literally “What to me and you) My hour has not yet come.” On the cross, when Mary’s need of comforting must have been most pressing, not only had his disciples (excluding John) deserted him, but his brothers and sisters, who did not believe in him (John 7:5) and thought he had lost his senses (Mark 3:21), were absent. “There were standing by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household.” Here, despite her loneliness in the last hours of her son’s life, he did not call her by that most enduring name, *Mother*. The prophecy of Simeon had at last been fulfilled. The sword had indeed pierced her heart.”