

Scripture Reading:

Luke 1:39 “Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, **40** and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. **41** And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. **42** Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! **43** But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? **44** For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. **45** Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord." **46** And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, **47** And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. **48** For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. **49** For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. **50** And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. **51** He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. **52** He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly. **53** He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty. **54** He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, **55** As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever." **56** And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.”

Learning the Right Lessons From Mary?

This morning is Christmas Sunday which follows the four Sundays of Advent in our new Church Year. Next Sunday is Epiphany Sunday which means manifestation: We will see Jesus in the hands of Simeon, consider the Wise Men the following Sunday and then study the reaction of Herod and the world. Lord willing that will bring us back to our series on Luke & Acts. One of my prayers for this coming year is to see all of us here at Church of the King becoming more practical in our response to the Lordship of Jesus ...

- And that should obviously start right here with the sermons!**
- I will strive to make applications from our text that help us to better understand the world around us, and our calling to be the New Creation in Christ**
- A good example comes this morning as we consider the lessons that Mary can teach us today in the 21st Century**

This past year, we participated in several ProLife activities in our stand against the sin of abortion including a prayer vigil down at Planned Parenthood. This put us shoulder to shoulder with many local Catholics.

It would be easy to say we could have avoided them by skipping the vigil, but when near 25% of those who identify themselves as Christian in our country say they are Catholics, it makes them a little hard to avoid!

- Should we risk ignoring them and hoping that no sharp Catholic will try to convince one of our young people to join the Roman Church?**
- A better way is to learn how to use such situations to teach all of us how to respond Biblically and to make sure we are living Biblically in their midst.**

My purpose this morning is not to tackle the entire question of how we respond to the Roman Church, trying to determine who among those within the Roman Catholic Church we will see in Heaven:

- Thankfully, God and God alone will sort all of that out!**

However in this case, those who went down to the vigil could not miss one aspect of the Roman Church's practices that ties very closely to this Christmas season:

- **Rosary beads & "hail Mary's" abounded from those Catholics that were present at the clinic**

We will see this morning that they are very wrong on this front, and it is important that our young people, as well as all of us, understand this properly from the Bible. We will see this morning that the Roman Church has made Mary into an idol, but those of us who come from the Reformed traditions and many Evangelical Churches must also consider whether completely ignoring Mary is the proper response to this Catholic error, which is what we often have experienced

- **We will see this morning that when we simply ignore Mary, we can lose the many lessons that Mary's life can teach us!**

So first, what is the error that the Catholics and many of the Eastern Churches have made? At bottom, they have simply failed to listen very well to what Mary herself had to say! We will see this very clearly when we look at the text.

- **Mary is a young woman who is greatly used of God**
- **She is rightly called the "Mother of my Lord" by Elizabeth**
- **And, as Mary stated, she is to be called "blessed" by all generations because of how she was mightily used by God**

However, the fact that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary causing her as a virgin to bear the Son of God, does NOT mean that we should then:

- **Make her into a sinless Saint for her entire life**
- **Make her a virgin for all her life**
- **Have her ascend into heaven without facing death**
- **Encourage Saints to pray to her**
- **And as we find in some Catholic circles today, even being considered a co-redeemer with Christ Himself.**

If we consider the simple words of the hail Mary that is repeated over and over you can see how truth and error are subtly mixed:

Hail Mary,

Full of Grace,

-- *both wrong*

The Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women,

and blessed is the fruit

of thy womb, Jesus.

-- *all true*

Holy Mary,

Mother of God,

-- *true only in Jesus*

pray for us sinners now,

and at the hour of death.

-- *Rank idolatry*

- What the Roman Church has done in making Mary an idol is not uncommon in the history of God's people!
- It is a lesson taught often in the Old Testament.

The clearest example comes when God responds to the usual grumbling of His people in Numbers chapter 21: God was moving them around the nation of Edom when it says, "the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way."

As we approach this New Year, this can be our first practical application!

We must be careful that we have not become 'discouraged' with the WAY that Jesus has laid out before us:

- As individuals
- As families
- As a nation
- Or as His Church, avoiding what the Roman Catholics have done with Mary, ...
They wanted more to the story!

As we consider how God dealt with the rebels who were discouraged, we will see how God often uses even times where discipline was needed to teach important lessons:

In this case after He sent poisonous snakes among the rebellious people they then cry out to God for relief: God tells Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived."

➤ **So, kids, what is the lesson to learn here? --**

Salvation by God's Grace!

➤ **Could there be a wrong lesson?**

Yep, and that is just what these rebellious people learned over time: Doing with that fiery serpent what Rome has done with Mary!

We next hear about that brazen serpent in Second Kings four where we read that King Hezekiah, "removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan. [It means a bronze thing]

➤ **We also learn from the Scriptures that ignoring the lesson of the brazen serpent was not a good option either...**

Jesus shows this when He is instructing Nicodemus about the importance of being born again in John chapter 3: After chiding this 'teacher of Israel' for not understanding spiritual things Jesus reminds him of that Brazen serpent saying RIGHT before everyone's favorite Bible verse,

John 3:14 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The Catholic Church has done with Mary what the nation of Israel did with that Brazen serpent, turning a marvelous demonstration of God's grace into a rank idol:

This we must certainly avoid!

➤ **BUT, on the other hand, we cannot simply ignore Mary**

➤ **Are we ready to learn the proper lesson that Mary can teach us?**

For these lessons, we will focus on Mary's short response as she rejoiced with Elizabeth: A prayer – A song...?

- **Certainly inspired and full of Scripture: [Our homework assignment can be to also study the prayer of Hanna in Samuel 2]**

She knew her Scriptures and this is our first challenge:

Are we willing to be men and women, boys and girls of the Word?!

Will we commit to this in this New Year? As individuals, as families and as a Church? More Bible reading & family worship?

- **More respect for the Word and more Psalms in our services!**

We should also note that whether Mary spoke prayed or sang these inspired words, she was speaking!

- **This stands in stark contrast with Zacharias who was stuck deaf because of his proud, stubborn attitude.**

And here lies our next challenge: Will we follow the example of Mary, the willing servant or the example of Zacharias who demanded that God explain everything on his level?

- **BOTH would demonstrate the power of God: Would we rather do it with silence or with song?**

We will see our third challenge comes as we listen carefully to how Mary refers to herself:

Luke 1:46 "And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. 48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. 49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name."

- **She rightly sees her humble estate and her need for the Savior!**
- **She did NOT see herself as a sinless, perpetual virgin who people would one day pray to...**

In fact, we see in the rest of her song that she would be horrified if people took their eyes off the Savior and looked at her:

Luke 1:50 “And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. 52 He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty. 54 He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, 55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever.”

Mary rightly points everyone to Jesus who is the Savior of us all:

- **The promised Messiah sent by the God who keeps His promises!**

Unlike all those ‘resolutions’ we are tempted to make this time of year!

So as the New Year approaches & we take our final looks at those manger scenes and think of Mary holding the Baby Jesus:

Are we ready & willing to learn the lessons we should from Mary’s life?

- **Are we willing to saturate ourselves with God’s Word so that we can be more Biblically minded?**
- **Are we ready to be willing servants who quickly say, “Let it be to me according to your Word” in ALL areas and not just those where we readily agree or it is easy?**
- **Are we ready to be humble servants, as Mary thought of herself as a slave-maiden, or another picture of that drink offering to be poured out as Erik taught us last week?**

Are we willing to keep Jesus at the center of all that we say and do?

It is easy to SAY that Jesus is the center of our lives...

It is easy to SAY that Jesus is Lord...

- **BUT we will show that Jesus is Lord by learning these lessons from Mary this morning:**

WWJD: The slogan “What would Jesus do?” has become a joke in many ways within and without the Church today, even making it into the Presidential debates!

It is somewhat arrogant, and mostly irrelevant to ask this question because we DO know what Jesus did and is doing from His throne in heaven

- **What Jesus did has been the focus of our studies in Luke and Acts!**
- **As we have seen with Zacharias and Mary, the real question is what will the servants of Jesus do? Speak up or be silent?**
- **Mary provides a powerful example of a knowledgeable, obedient and humble servant who comes to Jesus and asks, “what is it that your servant should do?”**
- **THAT is the question that we should be asking today!**
- **When the answer comes and there is a command that makes little sense or seems impossible to carry out in our own strength, Mary teaches us to then say, “Behold the servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”**

That is a New Year’s Resolution that we should ALL embrace!

Communion Meditation: A Victory Drink...

***I Peter 1:* “13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." 17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you 21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”**