

“Blessed Art Thou Among Women”

“The virgin’s name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.”
—*Luke 1:27,28*

ADHERENTS TO CHRISTI-anity throughout the world are nearly universal in the belief that the mother of Jesus was a virgin named Mary, as spoken of in our opening verse. Beyond this, however, there is a wide variation of thought as to Mary’s role and position in God’s arrangements. In what might be considered the most

exalted viewpoint of Mary, she is regarded as being equally high in glory, importance and position as Jesus himself, and additionally, is even considered by some as being co-equal with God.

Unfortunately, many beliefs concerning Mary have come about by way of human philosophy and tradition. If, as most Christians would likely claim, we are to follow the Scriptures as our source of religious doctrine and truth, we would find that many of the thoughts concerning Mary which have been handed down over the centuries are not taught in the Bible. In fact, very little is written about her in

its pages. Only twelve passages make reference to Mary, and some of these are duplications of events recorded by the different Gospel writers.

Contrasting these few mentions of Mary in the Bible with the manifold Scriptures which speak concerning Jesus, we see an overwhelming preference toward her son as the important figure in the Bible, the holy Word of God. Thus, we recognize that much of what is now believed and taught about Mary came later. Notwithstanding her more limited mention in Scripture, those in which she is the focus show Mary to be of a righteous and pure character, and that she was used by God to bring to pass certain critical events in harmony with his divine arrangements.

BIBLICAL VIEW OF GOD AND JESUS

Before looking at Mary's role in the divine arrangement, it is helpful to first examine the Bible's teaching concerning the separateness of God and Jesus. In this regard, an important text to consider contains these words from Paul: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all." (I Tim. 2:5,6) Note the distinction Paul makes. There is "one God," and there is "one mediator," meaning "reconciler," between God and men. The "one mediator," Paul further asserts, is "the man Christ Jesus."

Thus the apostle clearly shows that God and Jesus are separate beings. He also says that it was the "man Christ Jesus," not God, who "gave himself a ransom for all." The word "ransom" means "corresponding price," and the only way a corresponding price could be provided was to have a perfect man, as was Jesus, give himself as a ransom for the perfect

man, Adam, who had forfeited his life and the lives of all his posterity, of whom Mary was one.

The separateness of God and his Son, Christ Jesus, is taught by many Scriptures. We merely cite four here, two from Paul and two from Jesus himself. Paul wrote, "There is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." There is "one God and Father of all, who is above all." (I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6) Jesus emphatically contradicted any thought of equality with God when he said, "My Father is greater than I," and when called "good master" by the rich young ruler, he replied, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God."—John 14:28; Matt. 19:17

In harmony with this is another statement Paul makes concerning God, that he dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see." (I Tim. 6:16) This corroborates what God told Moses: "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." (Exod. 33:20) If it be true, as these verses say, that no human being can see God and live, then it would be highly contradictory to believe that he is one and the same being as Jesus, since Jesus was seen by multitudes—believers and non-believers alike.

JESUS, THE IMAGE OF GOD

We are reminded of the conversation Jesus had with his disciples when Philip requested, "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us," to which Jesus replied, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." (John 14:8,9) Jesus was "the

image of the invisible God,” both in his pre-human existence as an angelic being, and in his life upon earth as a man.—Col. 1:15

Reading the full context of Paul’s words to the Colossians, he wrote: “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.” (vss. 12-15) Since Jesus was the image, or mental and moral likeness, of the invisible God, it was possible for Philip to see what the Father would be like. Yet, as Paul so plainly says, God himself is invisible.

The definitions of the words “Father” and “Son” used in the above passage also shed light on the relationship between God, the Father and great supreme Creator of the universe, and his first direct creation, his only begotten Son. “Father” denotes one who gives life, whereas “Son” is one who receives life—that is, a descendant of his father. Originally, God was alone. His first direct creation was Jesus in his pre-human existence, or the “firstborn of every creature.” Jesus expresses the same thought when he speaks of himself as “the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.”—Rev. 3:14

To speak of Jesus as being the first direct creation of God is not demeaning to him in any way. In his pre-human existence he was at God’s right hand in the great creative works. We quote further from the apostle concerning Jesus: “By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth,

visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him; And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.”—Col. 1:16-19

THE SELECTION OF MARY

Let us now turn our attention to Mary. Many maidens of Israel had perhaps hoped to be the one who would give birth to the prophesied Messiah. Mary, whose descent was from the house of David, was the one chosen by God for this task. She was engaged to be married to Joseph, who also was a descendant of David. Mary’s lineage was through Nathan, King David’s son, and back to father Adam. (Luke 3:23-38) As noted in the *Amplified Bible*, Joseph was the “son by marriage” of Eli, Mary’s father. Joseph’s own lineage came through Solomon, another of David’s sons. In that genealogy, given in Matthew 1:1-16, we are told that Joseph’s father was Jacob.—vs. 16

God’s selection of Mary is recorded in Luke 1:26-38. The angel Gabriel was sent by God and appeared to her, saluting her in the words of our theme text. He then proceeded to tell an astonished and troubled Mary that she was to miraculously conceive and give birth to a son whose name would be Jesus. The throne of his forefather, King David, would be given to him, he would reign over Israel, and his kingdom would never end. When Mary asked Gabriel how the birth of Jesus would be possible since she was a virgin, it was explained to her that the child would be

begotten in a miraculous way. God would, in reality, be Jesus' Father, since the begetting would be accomplished by the power of God's Holy Spirit.—vss. 34,35

To satisfy divine justice, a perfect man was required to offset the perfect life forfeited by Adam. God, the Father, would supply this perfect life—his only begotten Son—and Mary was chosen to provide the organism, a human body. Thus it was that “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman,” who was also the seed of Abraham and the ancestor of King David, since Mary was descended from both.—Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:9,16

When this conception took place, Joseph, who was espoused to Mary, and being a just man, was at first troubled. He thought he should put her away secretly in order to prevent any shame coming upon her from the public, who would not be aware of the special circumstances surrounding the events which were transpiring. (Matt. 1:19) An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and explained that what had taken place with Mary was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14: “Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Joseph was told not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, and that this son, conceived by the Holy Spirit, would be named Jesus, and he would save his people from their sins. Joseph did as he was instructed by the angel.—Matt. 1:20-25

During the nine months Jesus was in Mary's womb, as well as the years of his infancy and childhood, he was not in a position to make decisions concerning the universe. Thus is provided further evidence that the Father and the Son are two distinct beings. It was not necessary that the Son be involved in overseeing the universe during this period of his existence,

because God, his Father, was in full control, dwelling in the heavenly courts.

Jesus would have been born in Nazareth if it had not been that a taxation law was decreed by Augustus Caesar, forcing all Israelites to travel to their native territories which, for Joseph, was Bethlehem in Judea. It was a difficult time for Mary to travel. However, with, no doubt, much help from Joseph, and by God's overruling providence, they made the journey. (Luke 2:1-5) There is no record that Mary or Joseph knew in advance that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, as prophesied in Micah 5:2. Who was directing the matter? It was God, the Heavenly Father, who was guiding and directing every step pertaining to these all-important events in his plan.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Jesus was born in Bethlehem under very humble circumstances. There was no room for them in the inn, and no one was made aware of the event except a few shepherds watching their flocks at night on the hills of Judea. God sent to them his angels which announced the birth of Jesus, and they promptly went to Bethlehem. Finding Mary and Joseph, the shepherds then made known to others the visit by the angels and of their finding the infant, Jesus. (Luke 2:7-17) The account then states, "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." (vs. 19) Nine months earlier it was confirmed to her by the angel Gabriel that this child was to be Israel's Savior. Now that he was born, the magnitude of the angel's words was no doubt embedded upon her heart more than at any previous time.

According to the Mosaic Law, when Jesus was eight days old he was to be circumcised. The Law also required that Mary continue thirty-three days more for purification. (Lev. 12:2-4) When this time was completed, she and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem to present him at the Temple. There they met Simeon and Anna, who were guided by God's Holy Spirit to prophesy concerning Jesus. (Luke 2:22-38) After citing a prophecy from the Old Testament, Simeon told Mary, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul, also.)"—vss. 34,35

While at the Temple, Mary and Joseph also were met by Anna, a prophetess, who had been widowed for most of her adult life. She served God "with fastings and prayers night and day." She no doubt knew of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and had probably also heard of the announcement made by the angels to the shepherds that the Savior had been born. Upon seeing Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus, Anna "in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord." (vss. 36-38) There is no record of Mary's reaction to the words of Anna. We are prone to think that she pondered these, too, in her heart.

JESUS' LIFE IN JEOPARDY

Sometime after the birth of Jesus, when he was a "young child," wise men from the east came to where Joseph and Mary resided to present gifts and worship the King of the Jews. During the course of their travel, the wise men had gone to Jerusalem to ask Herod the king where to find Jesus. Although he did not know where the child and his parents were residing,

Herod inquired for this information from the Jews' chief priests and scribes, who said he was born in Bethlehem, as they were no doubt familiar with the prophecy of Micah 5:2. Herod told the wise men that, upon their return, to let him know exactly where they found the young child Jesus, so that he could go and worship him also.—Matt. 2:1-11

Herod's intentions were only evil. God, however, knew this, and that the defenseless child, Jesus, was in jeopardy. Therefore God warned the wise men in a dream not to return to Herod, but to go back to their country by another route. Following this, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him to flee to Egypt because Herod would seek the child to destroy him. This Joseph did, taking Mary and Jesus to safety as he had been instructed. Finally, after receiving word that Herod had died, Joseph left Egypt with his family and returned to Nazareth, in the land of Israel, where he and Mary had resided prior to Jesus' birth. (vss. 12-23) In all of this, we see that God, the Father, was protecting his Son, Jesus, once again showing that they were separate beings. How reasonable is the record of these events as found in the Bible.

MARY—WHEN JESUS WAS TWELVE

Another incident concerns Mary when Jesus was twelve years old. He had accompanied his parents to Jerusalem, where they went every year to celebrate the Jewish Passover. On this occasion, when it was time to return home, Jesus tarried in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know he was not with the returning group until they had traveled a day's journey. After searching among all their relatives and friends

who were traveling together and not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem and searched for three days. Finally, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his remarks.—Luke 2:41-47

When his parents found him, Mary said, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress. And he said to them, Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house? And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.” (vss. 48-50, *English Standard Version*) We are not to understand that Jesus was showing disrespect to Mary by responding as he did. He was simply making reference to the fact that he was now at an age where he could understand certain Old Testament prophecies, especially those which concerned his mission on earth as designed by his Heavenly Father. Jesus left the Temple and returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph, “and was subject unto them.”—vs. 51

DURING JESUS’ MINISTRY

One incident involving Mary occurred near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, when they both, along with his disciples, attended a wedding at Cana of Galilee. The celebration had run out of wine, and Mary made this matter known to Jesus. Apparently she had some involvement with the arrangements. Our Lord’s initial reply was, “Woman, what does this have to do with me?” Seeing, however, the opportunity to provide a lesson for those attending the wedding feast, Jesus proceeded to provide wine, performing his first miracle.—John 2:1-11, *ESV*

Later, there was the occasion when Mary, and Jesus' brothers also, sought him. They wanted to speak to him as he was preaching to a crowd of followers. Jesus was told of this by one who brought the message to him. Jesus reacted by asking, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? ... Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."—Matt. 12:46-50

This same incident is recorded in Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19-21. Why did Jesus make these statements? It was not that he had no regard for his natural family. Rather, he was emphasizing that spiritual relationships are of greater importance than earthly ones when it comes to selecting "a people for his [God's] name." (Acts 15:14) In other words, being the mother or brother of the man, Jesus, was not as important as being a disciple and true follower of Christ.

MARY IN JOHN'S CARE

Jesus life and ministry was focused on his mission as man's Redeemer. As a perfect man, however, we also realize that he showed proper love, respect and concern for Mary throughout his life. This is particularly shown by the action he took while dying on the cross. He saw his mother standing by the cross with the Apostle John, whom he especially loved. Jesus entrusted his mother into the apostle's care, saying to John, "Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."—John 19:27

Mary had faithfully performed the task given to her by God. She gave birth to Jesus; she nourished him and cared for him as all good mothers do for

their children. What reward did God plan for her? What position could be made available for her? Since Mary was descended from Adam, it was necessary for her to understand that Jesus was, indeed, Israel's and the world's Savior. Believing that Jesus was man's Redeemer was no problem for Mary. She had received much in the way of evidence during the roughly thirty-four years since the angel Gabriel first announced to her God's plan that she would give birth to the Savior of mankind.

THE BLESSINGS OF PENTECOST

When Jesus was resurrected from the dead, he showed himself on a number of occasions to his faithful company of followers. The last time they saw him was in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 1:1-12, before his ascension. Mary was there. They were told not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The eleven apostles were present and are named by Luke, assembling in the upper room. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."—vss. 13,14

Together, the number of them being about 120, they waited until the Day of Pentecost when they were blessed by the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:15; 2:1-4) Mary was one of these, having been called and chosen by God to be a member of the body of Christ. If she continued faithful unto death, she would receive a "crown of life" and have the privilege of living and reigning with Christ in his Father's kingdom.—Rev. 2:10; 20:6

There is no further mention of Mary in the Scriptures. As far as we know, she remained with the

Apostle John until she died. Some say she died in Jerusalem. Others say she later traveled to Ephesus with the Apostle John. The Scriptures are silent. What is important, however, is that, if faithful in her consecration to do God's will, she will receive her portion in the body of Christ. Mary and all faithful followers of the Master are, as Paul says, "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. ... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."—Gal.3:28,29 ■