

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 19, 2010**

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Hymns: 274, 78, 104, 275, 343:2.

Lessons: Isaiah 7:13-14, Galatians 3:26-4:9, Luke 1:39-56

Sermon Text: Luke 1:26-38.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In our Old Testament lesson you have the clearest, plainest prophecy of how God's Son would come to save the world. Matthew's Gospel makes it clear that the birth of Jesus Christ of the virgin Mary was the fulfillment of this prophecy: *"An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" --which means, "God with us." When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."* Matthew 1:20-25. And, of course, the familiar Christmas Gospel from Luke chapter 2 tells us of that birth.

Our sermon text makes it plain that Mary submitted to the will of God and had only praise for God for this marvelous miracle that he would work in her. Today let's look at

**MARY, THE VIRGIN MOTHER OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD**

1. Who she is.
2. What God does through her.

From scripture we know little more about Mary than that she was a virgin, a descendant of the great King David. Tradition and human decree has created much fiction about her. The names of her parents are fiction. They are unknown from scripture. The claim that she was conceived without sin is a complete fiction. But that doesn't matter, because what does matter is who her son is. Her son is the very Son of God, who became true man to live among us and be tempted in every way just as we are but never sin. Her son is the true God and true man who suffered and died for our sins so that we, by believing that, might receive eternal life in heaven.

The angel Gabriel, the same angel who appeared to Zechariah to announce the birth of John whom we know as John the Baptist, was sent to Mary. This happened in the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah. The angel appeared *"to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary."* What made her special is that God chose her. There was nothing in her to deserve such a high honor. She *"was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be."*

What comforting words: *"The Lord is with you."* Could there be anything more comforting than to be told that the Lord is with you? Surely she would experience much in the coming months and years of her life. Can you imagine the scorn and shame that others may have heaped upon her? She stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home to Nazareth. It is likely that Jesus was conceived in her at the very time Gabriel was speaking to her. There is no mention of any other time that this occurred. Then she was gone away from her home town and away from her betrothed husband for about three months. Imagine people in her home town wondering where she was and what she was doing. Imagine her returning to her home town and soon

showing her pregnancy. Just think of how gossips count months today, and realize that people were no different 2000 years ago. I say these things because it is easy to think that she was a very private person, not one who would have shared all her thoughts and emotions with many other people. She doesn't act like a gossip who can't wait to tell everyone what has happened. We read several times that she kept the things that happened to her in her heart and pondered them. One was when the shepherds visited after the birth of Jesus. We read that the shepherds *"hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."* Luke 2:16-19. After he was 40 days old, and they took the baby Jesus to the temple, and Simeon and Anna spoke what they did about Jesus, we read *"Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'" Luke 2:34-35.* What a strange comment, that a sword would pierce her soul. We know now, of course, that she watched her firstborn son crucified, not just crucified as a criminal, but crucified for all the sins of all mankind, so that everyone who believes on him would have eternal life. How terrible to watch your son be executed unjustly! After they returned home from Jerusalem when Jesus was 12 years old, we read of his parents: *"But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart."* Luke 2:50-51. Now these words, too, suggest that Mary was very knowledgeable about the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Savior.

She rejoiced in God her Savior in the words we call "the Magnificat" from the first Latin word of Luke 1:46-55. In those words she recognized her humble state and praised God for giving her a marvelous gift: She was the mother of the Savior whom Eve had been expecting with her first child. Several thousand years had passed since the first prophecy of the Savior. Far more that a million girls had been born to the believing descendants of Eve, of Sarah, of Ruth, and all the other mothers who believed in God who would rescue them from their sins. And God had chosen Mary, a simple maiden descended from David, now living in Nazareth. When she says *"From now on all generations will call me blessed,"* she is not boasting. Notice the reason people would call her blessed: *"for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name."* She speaks of God's grace, love, and mercy: *"His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation."* She reflects on the history of the world, and of his chosen children, Israel: *"He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble."* She acknowledges that God has not just blessed the nation, but he has blessed individuals in that nation. She makes God's goodness and blessings a very personal thing, something we could even acknowledge in our own lives: *"He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty."* She points to what God has done for his people: *"He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."* She is mindful of her role in the history of God's salvation, but does not boast in the least.

Mary was the Lord's humble servant. She submitted to him and to his will for her life. Mary submitted to the Lord with her husband in doing all that was commanded in the law about what should be done to Jesus, and what should happen to him. She would be one who submitted to her husband, not usurping any authority over him, but just as she yielded to the Lord's will, we have no reason to think that she was a liberated woman in the sense of a liberated woman of the world in our age. She was truly a humble, believing child of God, a model for all mothers and wives. Elizabeth, her older relative, honored Mary in a way which is certainly God pleasing. Her praise was also motivated by the Holy Spirit. We Christians today will also honor Mary as an example of faith and service. But we dare not go beyond what Scripture tells us and regard Mary as someone different from us, as some humans have claimed, for she too was sinful. The child to be born of Mary was as much her Savior from sin as he is our Savior from sin.

Much has been written and sung about Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus. But we must stick to scripture and any speculation about her must be plainly labeled as speculation or fiction. The fact is that she was the mother of our Lord.

Luke records the birth of Jesus so simply: ***“And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”*** Luke 2:6-7, King James Version. The New International Version puts it this way: ***“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”***

If you mothers think back to the birth of your firstborn, or any of your children, for that matter, you would be able to write pages and pages about what happened. Your preparations, your trip to the hospital, how people took care of you. It appears there was no one there to care for her. Even Martin Luther and other writers have become very poetic, very elaborate, very wordy and some have become very imaginative in describing what they think happened that night in Bethlehem. We imagine a place not very warm, not very clean compared to our birthing rooms today. Scripture has no mention of warm water or doctors or nurses or midwives. How humbly our Lord came to this earth!

But we must never forget why Jesus came to earth. He had a hard task ahead of him, this child born of a virgin. And his mother would see not only his growing up, his coming of age, his ministry, but also his death.

If we think for a moment about the prophecy of Simeon that a sword would pierce her soul, we are reminded of exactly why her firstborn son came to earth from his heavenly throne.

Jesus came to earth to save us from our sins. To do this he had to live a perfect life and then be punished, the guilty for the innocent. And he died a horrible death, the death of an executed criminal.

Parents are supposed to die before their children. That may have been the case with Joseph, the husband of Mary, since he is not mentioned in Scripture at the crucifixion of Jesus. But that wasn't the case when Jesus was crucified in the presence of his mother. And to watch your son die such a horrible death! A common criminal! No the worst of criminals! Suspended between heaven and earth, not having your feet in either place. But Mary knew the scriptures. And she would have been comforted by her son's words which John records in this way: ***“When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.”*** John 19:26-27.

So simply is the last mention of the Virgin Mary recorded in Scripture. But in her we find one from whom we can learn a great deal. Listen again to her Magnificat, her great song of praise to God: ***“My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath [helped] his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.”*** Luke 1:46-55 (King James Version) May that humble spirit of the mother of our Lord become our humble sprit. Amen.