

The Virgin Mary

Isaiah 9:1-7 Ephesians 1:3-9

Luke 1:26-38 (Mary's story) Matthew 1:18-25 (Joseph's story)

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Pastor Dave Bolte



When you think about the history of the Kingdom of God, there are some people that **stand out** because of their *one-of-a-kind* role and vocation that they played in history. For instance,

MOSES. God called Moses through the burning bush on Mount Sinai to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. He was 80 years old at the time, but in the best shape of his life. For the next 40 years, he led the Israelites out of Egypt, gave them the 10 commandments, performed miracles amongst them, preached the Gospel, dealt with intense antagonism, and led the Israelites to the edge of the Promised Land¹. Moses was given a *one-of-a-kind* role and vocation in the Kingdom of God.

JOHN THE BAPTIST would be another one. John the Baptist stands between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He is the last of the great prophets, and he is the first of the New Testament witnesses to the arrival of the Messiah²! He was the forerunner of the Christ, announcing the coming of the Lord, and calling people to repent of their sins and to trust in the forgiveness of the coming Savior. John the Baptist was given a *one-of-a-kind* role and vocation in the Kingdom of God.

¹ Notes these remarkable words from Deuteronomy 34: "There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel."

² Jesus even commented on John's unique role, saying, "Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Matthew 11:11)." Jesus highlighted John's unique role, but then reminded us that those who have faith in Christ in the New Testament era are even greater because they know the full work that the Messiah would do for the sins of the world. (John would never know of Jesus' death and resurrection, because he was martyred early in Jesus' ministry. [Matthew 14]).

Today we want to take a look at another person who was given a *one-of-a-kind* role and vocation in the Kingdom of God. It's **MARY**, the mother of Jesus.

The place to start when you think about Mary is **why** she was chosen. There are plenty of false teachers claim it is because of her own righteous life: that she was humble, obedient, had great faith and was morally pure. They believe she earned this position by her own goodness and virtue. Some even elevate her to God-like status and pray to her³. **Fortunately**, the Bible teaches us something different. Mary was chosen by grace, as a gift from God and not because of her virtue.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" Luke 1:26-28

The word that is used here in Luke for "**favored one**" is *the regular root word for grace in the New Testament*. Mary was chosen by grace, and not by works ... just like you and I are. The Angel nowhere mentions Mary's goodness nor virtue as the reason for her selection. She is blessed by **God's grace**; she is given – *as a gift from God* – a *one-of-a-kind* role and vocation in the Kingdom of God: she is the mother of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ! No wonder all generations will call her blessed!

That is how God has chosen you as well: **by grace**, and not because of some sort of goodness or virtue within you. Before the creation of the world, God chose you **by name by grace in Christ** to be His very own.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. Ephesians 1:3-4

God chose you by grace, before He created the heavens and the earth, to be His very own. At a certain point in history, He sent His Son Jesus to be your Savior, to do the

³ This is idolatry. One Roman Catholic website writes, "because Mary is the Mother of God and the disciple par excellence, we should not be surprised that she is our preeminent intercessor among the angels and saints. (www.catholic.com)" The most common prayer to Mary is called the "Hail Mary" and it goes like this: "Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." As conservative Lutherans, we consider this blatant idolatry, and a false teaching.

work of salvation for you and in your place. And then during your lifetime, He worked to bring you to Holy Baptism where He created faith, washed away your sins, and gave you all the gifts of eternal salvation. He is presently at work in your life through His Word and Sacraments to strengthen and nurture your faith as you live each day. And someday, He will graciously take you from this veil of tears to live with Him forever in the Kingdom of heaven⁴.

Like Mary, you were chosen **by grace**, and not by works. It's God's mercy and love at work in your life -- and it is not dependent on any goodness or virtue within yourself.

Mary was given a *one-of-a-kind* role and vocation in the Kingdom of God: she is the mother of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ! Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary⁵. That means that Jesus has a **divine nature** from the Holy Spirit, and a **human nature** from His mother Mary. In theology, the way to speak about Jesus is to say that He is **One Person with Two Natures**, a divine nature and a human nature. He is both God and Man at the same time: 100% God and 100% Man.⁶

Of all people, Jesus Himself had one-of-a-kind role and vocation in the Kingdom of God! He is the Savior of the world! As True God and True Man, He lived a perfect life under the 10 commandments for all of us: He was perfectly holy and

⁴ This paragraph is a summary of the Doctrine of Election (also called “Pre-destination”), where God chooses you by name, by grace, in Christ, to be His very own. Your “Election” can be summed up in these four actions of God: Before Creation, Christ’s Atonement, Your Baptism, Eternal Glory. {Those who do not have faith have rejected Christ and His salvation out of their own hard heart and sinful ways. You cannot say that God has not chosen them, for Christ died for the sins of all people. See John 3:19-21.}

⁵ Note that Joseph is not Jesus' father, God is His Father. Joseph is Jesus’ “guardian” who, with Mary, raised Jesus as a boy in their family. One benefit of this is that Original Sin was never passed on to Jesus, since Joseph was not His biological father. (Original Sin comes from Adam, which is passed on through the fathers, and totally and thoroughly corrupts us.) Jesus was without sin, perfect and holy in all things at all times.

⁶ As conservative Lutherans, we confess our faith in Biblical and Historic Christology like this: “we believe, teach, and confess that the Son of God, although from eternity He has been a particular, distinct, entire divine person, and thus, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, true, essential, perfect God, nevertheless, in the fulness of time assumed also human nature into the unity of His person, not in such a way that there now are two persons or two Christs, but that Christ Jesus is now in one person at the same time true, eternal God, born of the Father from eternity, and a true man, born of the most blessed Virgin Mary . . .” The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concordia VIII.6 The Person of Christ

righteous every moment of every day of His life. His holiness and righteousness is given to you as a gift of salvation, and that is how God now considers you through faith. You are declared holy and righteous in God's sight.

Because Jesus is 100% God and 100% man, having both a divine nature and a human nature, He was able to die for the sins of the world. All of your sin and guilt was collected and placed on Jesus where He dies in your place and on your behalf. His death has eternal value because He is the Son of God: He took away the sins of the world. Because of the death of Jesus, Who is both true God and true Man, your sins are forgiven. You have peace with God. You are reconciled to God the Father. You are given eternal life.

Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, is the Savior that God sent for you. Jesus is One Person, with Two Natures: a divine nature and human nature, and He has done everything needed to secure your eternal salvation. He lived a perfect life and He died a sacrificial death for you.

As we approach Christmas, you can have **complete assurance** and **absolute confidence** that you are saved; that your sins really are forgiven, and that you belong to God. Your salvation is not dependent on you or any supposed goodness and virtue within you: it is completely dependent on the Lord Jesus. Salvation is a gift that God gives to you because He sent His Son Jesus to do the *one-of-a-kind* work that only He can do: **to live and die for your eternal salvation!**

And now in faith, we live out our lives in holiness and righteousness. You may not have been given an *historic one-of-a-kind* type work to do that will change history, but you have been given *one-of-a-kind* type work that only you can do in your vocations: in your marriage, your family, your workplace, and your circle of friends. The Holy Spirit works through you so that you can love God and serve your neighbor with your gifts, talents, and personality!

Like the virgin Mary, you were chosen by name and by grace both to believe in Christ and to serve him in your vocations!

Amen!

Father in heaven,

we thank you for your grace which so freely flows into our lives from your good hands.

We thank you for all the good gifts you give to us because you love us and care about us.

We praise you for our election by grace, for Your Son Jesus, for our baptism, and for the hope of glory.

Help us to live holy and righteous lives, in the gracious vocations you have given to us,

so that we may love you and serve our neighbors throughout our lives.

We pray this in your Son's Name, and by the power of the Holy Spirit,

Amen

Luke 1:26-38 (Mary's story)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Matthew 1:18-25 (Joseph's story)

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son

of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Ephesians 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Isaiah 9:1-7

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

- 2 The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.
- 3 You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
- 4 For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
- 5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.
- 6 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God Everlasting
Father, Prince of Peace.
- 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do
this.