

Advent 2021 - Week 1: Candle of Hope

Mary, Do Not Be Afraid

Luke 1:26-38

And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.” – Luke 1:30-31

Mary, Mother of Jesus, is widely thought to have been born in Nazareth, a Galilean town of around 500 people. Mary, who would have been called Miriam (Hebrew Myriam and Greek Maryam), spoke Aramaic with a likely Galilean accent, (Matthew 26:73). She also would have understood Latin from the strong Roman presence in her region, Greek as the primary language of commerce, and Hebrew as the language of all Jewish worship and teaching. While her age in the Luke nativity narrative is not known for certain, it is certain that in Palestine during the time of Jesus’ birth, women ordinarily married around the age of 13 or 14.

Views toward Mary have historically (and unfortunately) been skewed toward two equally dangerous extremes, dependent upon which side of the Roman Catholic – Protestant schism one sits. On one side, Roman Catholic doctrine has tended to exalt Mary to a position of dispenser of grace – even co-savior alongside her Son – and interceder for piety. On the other side, Protestant doctrine has often reduced Mary’s role to the extent that she is an afterthought, ignoring Luke 1:42, which clearly states this obedient woman had not only “found favor with God,” but that she is “blessed among all women” to carry the incarnate Son of God.

In all reality, Mary is, as the Council of Chalcedon affirmed, the *theotokes*, or God-bearer, mother of God. This is not a title given to confer a divine status on Mary, but to defend the truth of the deity of Jesus. She was a blessed recipient of God’s grace, but not a dispenser of His grace. Mary is to be honored among women as a faithful and favored servant within the Lord’s plan of salvation.

* Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) was held to repudiate the single nature of Christ and defend the fully human, fully divine natures of Christ.

Advent Prompts

1. The reading of the “Christmas Story” often begins with the birth of Jesus foretold by the angel Gabriel – a birth worthy of worship and celebration. What special ways do you and your family celebrate the birth of Jesus? How will you worship the Savior’s advent this season?
2. It is thought Luke spoke with Mary as one of the “eyewitnesses” to his gospel account. If you could interview Mary, what would you ask her?
3. What does it mean that Mary “found favor with God” (Luke 1:30)?
4. What five claims about Jesus did Gabriel tell Mary (Luke 1:32-33)? Which one of these five is most encouraging or hopeful to you?
5. Luke 1:36-37 seems like an afterthought, or out of place. Why do you think Gabriel shared the news of Elizabeth’s pregnancy with Mary? What are the differences / similarities between their circumstances?
6. Do you believe that “nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37)? Have you ever experienced this truth? Is there a correlation between experiencing this promise and believing as Mary did (Luke 1:38)?
7. What is your view of Mary? What is your “theology” about who Mary is and her role in our faith? Have your perspectives changed over time?
8. Having learned and loved this passage, how are you called to live it out?

Prayer

Our Most High God, we praise you as the Almighty for whom nothing is impossible. We praise you for your plans and ways that are beyond all we can comprehend. We praise you for taking on flesh, as the One who is fully divine and yet also fully human. We praise you that your Word reveals to us your nature as Jesus, the Son, sent by the Father, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born in purity, to live, die, and arise in purity, that we might one day stand before you in your righteousness and purity. We thank you for your blessed servant, Mary. May her heart, obedience, and faithfulness be an encouragement to us. May we also find favor in your eyes as faithful and just, and may we be willing to trust and serve in whatever ways you desire of us. May our days be lived according to your Word. Amen.