

**WHO'S MARY?**  
**Sermon for the 1<sup>st</sup> mid-week Advent Service, 2025**  
**Luke 1:26-38**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Luke 1:26-38: **In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup>But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup>And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. <sup>32</sup>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, <sup>33</sup>and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."** <sup>34</sup>And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>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. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup>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.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Who was Mary? The Bible tells us a lot about her, especially in Luke chapter 1. We are introduced to Mary as we see the angel Gabriel being sent "**from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.**"

The word angel comes from the Greek meaning "messenger." Gabriel has a message. He's been sent. Where is he going? "**To a city in Galilee called Nazareth.**" Angels live in eternity, in the presence of God, and don't visit us very often. But when they do, it's very, very important. So this angel leaves heaven and breaks into our world of space and time to visit a particular person. This same Gabriel had been sent to the prophet Daniel centuries earlier to tell him the time had come for the captives in Babylon to return home. Gabriel was on a similar mission here, for the time had come for the Messiah to appear and set free all who are in bondage to sin. It had to be this way, because the Messiah must be a flesh-and-blood human sacrifice to take away the sins of the world.

Now, Nazareth is a town way up north, far from the main places and people like Jerusalem. Nazareth is never mentioned in the Old Testament and was hardly the kind of place to expect the Messiah. The Jews from there were a bit different and spoke with an accent. You might call them the bushies of their time. Remember how Philip had found Nathanael and said to him, "*We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph,*" and Nathanael replied, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" (John 1:45-46). Nazareth wasn't known as a happening spot.

But isn't it just like God to create something out of nothing? As the angel himself says, "**With God, nothing is impossible.**" He who made the sea could change it to support Jesus' feet—and Peter's! He who created gravity could suspend it so Jesus could ascend into heaven. And He who imposed death on sinful mankind could reverse it, letting Lazarus return to life and Jesus Christ, God's Son, rise from the grave after dying for our sins, so that everyone who believes in Him, as Mary did, may live in the

confident hope of eternal life. “*O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*” the Apostle Paul once wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:55).

So Gabriel is sent to a woman named Mary. How old is she? We do not know. All we are told is that she is a *virgin*. That would mean she is a young woman of marriageable age, presumably well brought up by her family in the faith and physically mature enough to bear children. This had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah: “*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel*” (Is. 7:14). She was a good Jewish girl in the sense that Abraham was the father of the Jews: “*He believed the Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness*” (Gen. 15:6). That is, she believed in the promises of God that one day He would send a Messiah, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. Paul says in Romans 2 that a true Jew is one like Abraham, who lives by faith (2:28-29). So I think we can say that young Mary had heard the Scriptures read in the synagogue and believed them, and surely she was praying for the Messiah who was to come.

Such was the prayer of every mother in Israel, for God had promised a Man born of woman to destroy the serpent. In fact, when Cain was born, Eve thought that he was the promised one. How wrong she was! It took many, many centuries and endless genealogies before Jesus was born.

Here is Gabriel in front of Mary. I suppose there were lots of virgins in Nazareth at that particular time, maybe even a few named Mary. But Gabriel was sent to this one particular virgin named Mary. Was there some intrinsic virtue, some quality in her to attract the attention of the Lord? The Bible doesn't say. But what it does say is that “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23). That “all” includes Mary. We acknowledge her as a saint, for so she is. But like the rest of us Christians, she is at the same time a saint and a sinner, just like the rest of us. Her choosing by God the Father to bear His Son, Jesus, was by grace alone.

People have a lot of strange ideas about Mary, especially in the Church of Rome—making her out to be things that she's not, things the Bible doesn't say about her, even things the Bible rules out.

Think of the Roman Church, which holds the notion it calls the “immaculate conception.” This is not about Christ, who, of course, was born without sin, nor does it apply to Mary. It applies to Mary's mother. This is so that the cycle of sin, which is passed from parents to children through the reproductive process, had to be broken. So for Mary to have been holy and the mother of Christ, Rome says, she herself had to be born without sin, which meant her mother had to conceive her without sin. Thus, one story has Mary's mother, Anne, conceiving *her* without sexual intercourse. No. Sorry. What about Anne's mother before her, and so forth and so on, like a hall of mirrors right back to the Garden of Eden? Paul, himself a saint and sinner, tells us in Romans 5, “*Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned*” (Rom. 5:12).

The pope also presents Christ as a stern, unforgiving judge who punishes sin and sends people to hell. If you want to approach Him, you go through His mother, who, supposedly, unlike Christ, is soft and warm and welcoming. So you pray to Mary to get to Jesus. No again. Scripture says, “*There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim. 2:5).

Article XXI of the Augsburg Confession addresses this issue. We are to remember the saints and celebrate their lives as examples of Christian behaviour. The *Lutheran Service Book* lists August 15 as the saint's day of St. Mary, Mother of our Lord, among “Feasts and Festivals” (*LSB*, p xi). We name churches after saints. Luther himself was a pastor of the Church of St. Mary in Wittenberg, Germany. We honour the saints, but we don't pray to them.

Mary was a human being like the rest of us, but “**the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.**” Mary found favour the same way all the saints did: by grace alone. Take Noah, for example: “*But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord*” (Gen 6:8). Some Bible translations, such as the King James Version uses the word “grace.” Same for Noah, same for Mary,

same for the rest of us who are being redeemed. In the Small Catechism, Luther counsels us to pray to God as dear children ask their dear father. God loves you! He loves you so much that He sent His only-begotten Son to die for you. All by grace. Beautiful, one-sided grace that draws us to Jesus by Word and Sacrament. All glory to God alone!

And all because of that Son, who's the reason the Bible teaches us about Mary in the first place. The angel talks about this Son to be born to her. He is to be called Jesus. That's the Aramaic form of the Hebrew name *Yeshua* or *Joshua*. You know, lots of people cling to rules and regulations. They like Moses, who laid down the Law. Dos and don'ts—this is wrong, that's forbidden! But Moses, who represents the Law, never made it into the Promised Land. It was Joshua, a clear type of Christ, who led the people of Israel across the Jordan and into Canaan. In the same way, Jesus, whose name means “God saves,” did everything for our salvation—fulfilled all the dos and don'ts and then went to the cross for our didn'ts and dids—and gives us that salvation as a free gift.

The angel goes on to say that Jesus will be great. Both true God and true man. You can't get any greater than that! **“The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”**

And so it came to pass that Jesus was born of Mary, and all the angel's words were fulfilled. Now Jesus rules and reigns over all things. His kingdom has come, and you are in it! In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.