



# Mary

the Mother of God

Advent 2023

Faith Memorial Church is blessed beyond measure with the contributions of Dr. David and Sally Case. They have given themselves sacrificially and humbly in service to the Lord Jesus Christ and the people of Faith are the favored recipients of their generous gifts.

Once again, Dr. Case has provided us with fresh eyes to appreciate the richness of the first Advent of Christ. As believers in waiting for the return of our Lord, we are encouraged to be active and not passive as we await the second Advent to be fulfilled. Jesus came to this world! He is coming again! The same Holy Spirit who animated the womb of a young virgin named Mary who then gave the world the long-awaited Messiah is still breathing new life into lost souls. People are still coming out of the darkness into the light, passing from death to life, and turning from idols to the one true living God in the name of Jesus.

As the Church, breathe deeply the fresh air of Advent - live in the atmosphere of the Spirit of Christ – know the transformative power of the One who came to seek and to save them that are lost – until Christ Jesus our Lord returns!

Jonathan W. Morgan  
Pastor

## December 1

The Christian Religion is a unique faith in that it's Savior was always divine and yet for thirty some years became human. Jesus Christ is the God/Man. From his Father's side he was always eternal, existed alongside God the Father, in fact, was God the Son. From his mother's side, he received his humanity. He became tired, he became hungry, he died on the cross and rose again on the third day. I have been thinking about Mary. I don't want to pray to her; I don't believe that salvation comes to individuals through her. But I do want to join my voice with those "who will call her blessed." (Luke 1:48)

This Advent we will do three things: 1) review key biblical texts that speak of Mary; 2) note early Church Councils that speak of Mary; and 3) suggest a contemporary Protestant evangelical understanding of Mary.

All the while we will be haunted by Mark Lowry's question, "Mary, did you know?"

December 2  
Luke 1:26-38

For the Christian faith, it all begins with the intention of God the Father's plan to send the second member of the Trinity, God the Son, into our world as a baby boy. This is what we call the Incarnation. Question: Whom would God choose to be the mother of God the Son? Our first thought would be a grandmotherly type that had already raised a number of children herself and would know how to protect and care for this special gift from God. God had a different idea!

God chose a teenage girl by the name of Mary. Her story is told in today's Scripture reading. In the first century, girls didn't receive a formal education. They were taught at home all the skills needed to get married, keep house, and rear children. Mary had such knowledge. She also had a deep faith in God. She was something before being assigned this special task. She was favored (1:28). Gabriel explained to Mary her part in God's special plan. She will bear a child and call his name, Jesus. He will be great and accomplish God's plan of saving a lost world.

Upon hearing this announcement, Mary is speechless. She knows how babies come into the world and she is a virgin. Her response, "How can this be?" A question of how, not "no." It will be a divine moment in her life. Nothing is impossible with God! Upon hearing God's word and waiting to continue to be obedient to God's plan for her life, she exclaims what her only response could possibly be, "Do it to me!"

December 3  
Luke 1:39-45

We first must note the close connection of today's reading with that of yesterday. There we saw that a heavenly visitor, by the name of Gabriel, was sent to a village in Judah named Nazareth. His mission was to inform Mary of the part she will play in God's redemptive plan. Upon hearing Gabriel's message and understanding that this would be a "God-thing," Mary shouts out, "Do it to me!"

What next? Scripture is silent, so very carefully we read between the lines. Mary tells her parents what will happen to her. What was their response? Again, Scripture is silent. But we can imagine something like this took place. While we know nothing of the spiritual character of her parents, unless they were especially God-fearing individuals, we could imagine her parents saying, "Oh sure." Whatever did take place, Scripture tells us Mary went in a hurry to a village up in the hill country of Judah. There lived Elizabeth, her relative along with her husband, Zacharias.

Elizabeth and Zacharias did not have children. She was advancing beyond the child-bearing age and had given up hope of becoming a mother. Gabriel told Mary that her relative, Elizabeth, had conceived in her old age and was six months with child (1:36). Elizabeth will give birth to John, the Baptist.

The teenage girl and the woman in her old age meet. These events that parents may not be able to comprehend, and that the people of Nazareth will not believe, are celebrated by these two women. They celebrate what God is doing in their lives. The baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy when Mary entered the house and Elizabeth exclaimed, "and how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?"

December 4  
Luke 1:46-55  
The Magnificat

Today's reading is one of four Nativity Hymns found in Luke 1-2. It is called The Magnificat because in the Latin Vulgate translation, the opening word is Magnificat, which means exalt. The theology of this hymn put to rest any thought that Mary is a naïve teenager.

First, Mary reviews how God has blessed her personally. As she begins to think about God's dealing with her, she is filled with joy and exaltation. Mary knows that she is a poor girl in Nazareth. There is nothing about her background that would qualify her for what God is planning to do for all humankind. Gabriel has previously announced her to be the "favored one" and assured her, "the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). Mary recognizes the fact that by becoming the mother of Jesus "all generations will call her blessed" (Luke 1:48). Rather than regret what she is being asked to do, she declares, "the Mighty One has done great things for me" (Luke 1:49).

But what God is doing in Mary's life has been duplicated over and over again throughout generations "towards those that fear Him" (Luke 1:50). Mary knows that for those who revere God and live in harmony with His will, they, in return, will see His power exercised toward them. For instance:

- He has scattered those who were proud
- He brought down rulers
- He has exalted the humble
- He has filled the hungry
- He has sent away the rich
- He has given help to Israel

Mary is just one in a line of recipients of God's grace and mercy.

December 5  
Luke 3:23-38

The writer, Luke, reminds his readers that Jesus began His ministry at about thirty years of age. There are two genealogies of Jesus: one is found in Matthew's Gospel (1:2-16) and this one in Luke's Gospel. There are several differences between the two accounts. Matthew begins with Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, while Luke traces the line in the reverse order and goes back to Adam, showing Jesus's relationship to the whole human race. From Abraham to David, both genealogies are almost the same, but from David on they are different. Some scholars suggest that this is because Matthew traces the legal descent of the house of David using only heirs to the throne, while Luke traces the complete line of Joseph to Abraham. A more likely explanation, however, is that Matthew follows the line of Joseph (Jesus' legal relative) while Luke emphasizes that of Mary (Jesus' blood relative). Although tracing a genealogy through the mother's side was unusual, so was the virgin birth. Luke's explanation here that Jesus was the son of Joseph "as was supposed" (v. 23) brings to mind his explicit virgin birth statement (1:34-35) and suggests the importance of the role of Mary in Jesus' genealogy.

## December 6 Luke 2:1-7

Both Matthew and Luke write of the birth of Jesus. Luke is the only Gospel writer who relates his narrative to dates of world history. Jesus' birth occurred during the reign of Caesar Augustus (31 BC-AD 14), perhaps the greatest Roman Emperor of all time. During this span of time, Quirinius, the governor of Syria ordered a census to be taken of all inhabitants of the land. Luke is very specific. This was the first census ordered by the governor. Quirinius was governor on two different occasions: the first – 6-4 BC; the second – AD 6-9. Luke referenced the first census while Acts 5:37 refers to the second census. A census was used for military service, from which Jews were exempt, and for taxation. Everyone was to return to the city of their family origin. Joseph went from Nazareth to Bethlehem (at least a three-day trip) and Mary, being engaged to Joseph, went as well. Mary was well along with child.

Upon arriving in Bethlehem, the question arises as to where the two will find lodging. At this point, we recall the phrase, “there was no room in the inn for them” (v. 7). We all have heard sermons on the cruel inn keeper who wouldn't take pity on this couple. But, remember, Joseph wasn't looking for the nearest Motel Six only to find a no vacancy sign. In those days, buildings had large upper rooms. Recall Acts 1 reports 120 were in an upper room just prior to Pentecost. Since everyone was to register for the census (v. 3) the whole Joseph clan was gathering in Bethlehem. What do you suppose was the reaction when Joseph and his pregnant teenage girlfriend arrived? Perhaps Luke is trying to get around a delicate situation by simply saying “there was no room in the inn!”

Mary and Joseph end up in a stable. This was probably a cave used as a stable. It was there that Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and laid Him in a manger.



December 7  
Luke 2:22-33

Today's reading tells us about Jesus' presentation at the temple. Following the birth of a son, the mother had to wait 40 days before going to the temple to offer sacrifice for her purification. If she could not afford a lamb and a pigeon (or dove), then two pigeons (or doves) would be acceptable. The parents and baby Jesus traveled to the temple in Jerusalem. The distance from Bethlehem to Jerusalem was only about six miles. The firstborn of both man and animal were to be dedicated to the Lord. The animals were sacrificed, but the human beings were to serve God throughout their lives.

As the parents and baby Jesus enter the temple, they meet a citizen of Jerusalem by the name of Simeon. Luke informs his readers of the high spiritual character of this man.

- This man was righteous
- This man was devout
- This man was looking for the consolation of Israel
- The Holy Spirit was upon him

Simeon had received a special message from God. Simeon would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

As Simeon took the baby Jesus into his arms, he sang the fourth Nativity hymn recorded in Luke 1-2. Now God is releasing Simeon to die in peace for he has seen God's salvation in this baby. All peoples will share in this blessing.

Both parents were amazed at the things that were said about Jesus. Within a year, they have heard Gabriel, shepherds, magi and now Simeon talk of the greatness of Jesus. It was amazing!

December 8  
Luke 2:41-52

Did you ever wonder what it was like for Jesus growing up as a little boy? Scriptures tell us that he had brothers. What was it like growing up with Jesus as your older brother? Inquiring minds ask questions like this. There are writings from the second and third century that tried to provide some answers to questions like these. For instance, one writer spoke about Jesus at school. The boys are out playing in the mud. Jesus makes a mudball, throws it into the air and it becomes a bird and flies away. Another writer had the boys playing with a ball. It was thrown into the weeds and they couldn't find it. Jesus looks through a large rock and sees the ball on the other side. Such writings as these were seen as obviously false and were not seriously considered canonical.

In today's reading, Luke provides a short look at Jesus in his twelfth year. It was time to observe the Feast of Passover. All adult males were expected to make their way into Jerusalem for this Feast. Family members were normally included in the trip. A caravan of people made the trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem. After spending the full number of days at the Feast, the caravan heads back to Nazareth. Jesus is not with his parents, but they think he is with others in the caravan. A day out of Jerusalem they begin looking for him. Not finding Jesus, they return to Jerusalem. Three days later, they found Jesus in the temple, both listening and asking questions.

A mother's anxiety kicked in: "Son, why have you treated us this way? Behold your father and I have been anxiously looking for you." His response contrasted "your father" with "My Father." The parents did not understand, Jesus continued in subjection to them. Mary treasured all these things in her heart.

Mary, did you know...

December 9  
John 2:1-10

Yesterday's reading was concerning Jesus as a twelve-year-old boy. That would be the last account of His early years. There was an eighteen-year silence about Him. We do know that He returned with His parents to Nazareth. He grew in favor with God and man. Today's reading continues His story. Jesus is now a grown man of thirty-some years of age. He has begun an earthly ministry that will continue for about three years.

John, the Apostle, tells his readers about an incident in a small village known as Cana, in the region of Galilee. John's story involves a wedding. A Jewish wedding in the first century was a big event. It lasted for a week. The parents of the bride enjoyed the occasion along with the guests. Someone else would be assigned the task of seeing that everything went smoothly. Mary was asked to assume this responsibility. Jesus was there to do the heavy work. Twelve disciples also were at the wedding. Somewhere along in the week, terrible news was heard. The supply of wine had run out. There being twelve men in attendance for no other reason than disciples following their leader probably didn't help the wine supply.

Servants bring the bad news to Mary. The occasion was about to become a disaster and the parents of the bride humiliated. Mary told Jesus, "They have no wine." The servants, Mary and Jesus know the problem.

Mary told the servants, "Whatever He tells you to do, do it." As crazy as it may sound, do it! Mary may not understand everything God was doing in her life. As a teenage girl she learned "do it to me according to your word." Thirty years later, this is still her aim in life. Be obedient to what He may say!

December 10  
Mark 3:31-35

Being the mother of the God/Man was not an easy task. Back when He was twelve, Mary reacted as any mother would: “Why have you treated your father and I like this?” On the other hand, at the wedding in Cana she told the servants, “Whatever He tells you to do, do it!” Today’s reading provides us with another picture of this complex situation.

One New Testament scholar calls Mark 3-5 an example of one long day in Jesus’ ministry. A quick reading of these chapters leaves one almost breathless as one reads of Jesus’ ministry that day. Our text is an important text, as it is repeated in all three Synoptic Gospels.

Jesus came home (probably Capernaum, the home of Peter and Andrew – v. 20) and a large crowd gathered around Him. Upon hearing this, his own people (kinsmen, people, Mary and His brothers) went there to take custody of Him. Why? The family, thinking He had lost His senses (Mark 3:21), probably wanted to get Him away from His heavy schedule. The crowd was so great, Mary and her sons could not reach Him. They sent word to Him and called Him.

The crowd close to Him told Jesus that Mary and his brothers were outside and were looking for Him. Jesus responds that family relations were not a purely earthly connection but relationship to Jesus was based on hearing and obeying God’s Word.

Mary expressed her motherly concern, “Son, you are about to lose it!” Jesus’ attitude, “I must attend to the work God sent Me to do while it is still daylight. The night comes when no man can work!”

December 11  
John 19:25-27

The three-year earthly ministry of Jesus was not always clearly understood. His audience would often plead, “speak to us plainly.” His disciples would often ask Jesus, in private, to interpret for them his teaching in parables. They would often question among themselves, “who is this?”. Even His own mother would sometimes think, “he’s going to lose his mind.” Then, she would with confidence say, “Whatever He says to do, do it!” Perhaps this first century audience had difficulty combining the Jewish hope of a Messiah with Jesus’ understanding of fulfilling the Isaiah 53 prophecy of himself being “the suffering servant.”

The three years came and went quickly. It is now Passion Week, early Friday, and we are at a crucifixion scene. Who is not at the cross? His disciples are absent. Why? They are fearful of being associated with him and suffering the same judgment. All but one disciple ran away. Who is at the cross? Three women and one disciple: His mother, her sister Mary, the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene, and the Apostle John. The text draws attention to Mary and John.

In a moment of tenderness, we hear Jesus say, “woman, behold your son; son, behold your mother.” Why? Probably, Joseph has already passed away. Mary would be in her mid to late forties. Joseph was considerably older than Mary. Even as he was dying, Jesus was concerned about his mother’s future welfare. But there is another reason. Probably, his other brothers were not believers as of yet. Jesus trusted the care of his mother to “the disciple He loved.”

## December 12

### Acts 1:12-14

The crucifixion was a lonely vigil. His mother, two other women and John were the only ones mentioned as being there. After the resurrection and forty days of post-resurrection appearances, there were 120 people gathered in the Upper Room awaiting the Day of Pentecost. Why the increase in number? The Gospels record ten or eleven such appearances which served two purposes. First, to convince and confirm what Jesus told his followers. "The Son of Man must go to Jerusalem; he will be crucified, die and be buried. On the third day, he will rise from the dead!" His followers must be convinced of this fact. Secondly, the post resurrection appearances had an evangelizing effect. Some, who previously didn't believe, became converts (his brothers – Acts 1:14).

The disciples, the women, his brothers, and all the others, needed Pentecost. They needed the Holy Spirit infilling into their lives. But what about Mary? Did she need infilling as well?

We began our study of Mary with Lukes' version of the heavenly visitor informing a young teenage girl of the plans God had for her. She has become a testimony of belief in God's Word and the faith this belief will produce. Mary's exclamation of "do it to me" stands as an example of obedience to God's word. Mary was the first disciple of her Master. But does that mean she had escaped the common plight of all humankind? Paul wrote that the effect of Adam's sin had passed on to all people, in the form of a sinful nature (Romans 5:12). Did Mary somehow escape this penalty. Protestant Evangelicals answer in the negative. She was a product of humankind. Mary needed the cleansing effect of Pentecost as do all humankind.

December 13  
Galatians 4:1-7

The textual study of Mary, thus far, has been from the Gospel accounts. This is probably to be expected. The first Gospel was written somewhere at 65-70 AD. Today's reading is different. It is written by the Apostle Paul. It comes from his earliest Epistle, written to the churches of Galatia, around 49 AD. In the canonical order of the New Testament, it includes the last reference of Mary.

In referring to the Jewish people, Paul divides biblical history into two categories: law and faith. These two categories will produce two different kinds of people: slaves and sons. Paul reminds the Jewish Christians in Galatia that "before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith that was later to be revealed" (Galatians 3:23). Thus, the child-like slave status. How did biblical history move from slave-like law to a status of sonship?

Paul's answer is that at the right time in human history, God sent His Son into our world (Galatians 4:4). The coming of the Son into our world made faith in the work of Christ by His death/resurrection, a reality. But notice verse four carefully. God sent forth His Son, born of a woman! Who was she? Did Paul know her name? If so, why doesn't he name her? Perhaps the answer could be explained in this way. Halfway into the first Christian century, the humanity of the Son was the important issue and not the mother's name of Mary. The sent Son had a real mother. He had a human nature. He was the God/Man. That, for Paul, was the most important point. The God/Man changed human history. Through His entrance in our world, the way was made to move from law to faith, from slavery to sonship. The son had a mother. She had a name. Later, Church Councils will establish Mary to her rightful place. For Paul, the humanity of the Son is his important concept.

December 14

### Gabriel's Message

The angel Gabriel from heaven came  
His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame  
"All hail" said he "thou lowly maiden Mary,  
Most highly favored maiden." Gloria!

For known a blessed mother thou shall be  
All generations laud and honor thee  
Thy Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold  
Most highly favored maiden, Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head  
"To me be as it pleases God," she said,  
"My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name."  
Most highly favored maiden, Gloria!

Of her Emmanuel, the Christ was born  
In Bethlehem all on a Christmas morn  
And everyone throughout the world forever saved  
Most highly favored maiden, Gloria!



December 15

For the past few days, we have experienced a brief survey of New Testament texts regarding Mary, the mother of Christ. What can we learn from this brief survey? What follows is the beginning of some lessons we can learn from Mary.

### **Mary “was” before she “became”**

We know of Mary because she became the mother of baby Jesus. However, she was chosen to become His mother because of her early life of piety and her devotion to her God. Gabriel’s greeting, “Hail favored one, the Lord is with you” was predicated on the fact that Mary was already “with the Lord.”

### **Despite Mary’s fears, she trusted God’s Word**

Gabriel’s announcement was unnerving to this teenage girl. It challenged every fiber of her faith. But she trusted her God, and His word. Her passionate outcry, “do it to me,” revealed her trust in the Word of God.

### **Mary’s sufferings drew her closer to God**

If our thinking about the way her parents reacted to her news and the rejection of Joseph’s family at Bethlehem are correct, this would only be the beginning of the ridicule and scorn she would experience all through her life. Mary could have become bitter. She could have rejected her God. Instead, she drew closer to God and her trust in His word increased.

December 16  
Ezekiel 34:1-10

We continue today with some further lessons we can learn from Mary.

**Mary trusted God with the unknown.**

God did not reveal to Mary everything that would take place over the next thirty-three years. It would have terrified her. Individuals like Simeon told her some things and she pondered them in her heart. As the life of Jesus developed, Mary's faith and trust in God also grew.

**Mary surrendered to God's will**

As a teenage girl, she had a "not my will, but thine be done" attitude. She probably taught her son to also have this same attitude. Thus, Jesus could say, "I have come to do your will, Father" during his earthly life.

**Mary was the first to experience the reality of "Christ in you"**

This will become a favorite Pauline phrase in his Epistles, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." This would be Paul's way of expressing the fact of Christian conversion and new life in Christ. Mary was the first to experience this reality – for nine months. Mary was the first convert to Christianity.

**Mary's experience with the Holy Spirit at Gabriel's announcement was a foreshadow of the reality of Pentecost**

Gabriel told Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." This activity of the Holy Spirit conceived baby Jesus in her womb. Her experience in the Upper Room with the others awaiting Pentecost will produce an infilling of the Holy Spirit in her life.

There could be more, but this is a start!

## December 17

The Apostle's Creed, though not written by the Apostles, is the oldest creed of the Christian church. And, it is the basis for others that followed. In its oldest form, this Creed goes back to at least 140 AD. Many of the early church leaders summed up their beliefs as they had an opportunity to stand for their faith as seen in 1 Timothy 6:12. These statements developed into a more standard form of expressing one's confession of faith at the time of baptism. It is not Scripture, but it is a simple list of the great doctrines of the faith.

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, who was **conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary**; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and was buried; He descended into Hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.*

*Amen*

## December 18

The Church Fathers agreed, as the following statements show, that it is proper to call Mary “the Mother of God.”

Irenaeus

“The Virgin Mary, being obedient to his word, received from an angel the glad tidings that she would bear God.” (*Against Heresies*, 5:19:1 <AD 189>)

Hippolytus

“To all generations the prophets have pictured forth the grandest subjects for contemplation and for action. Thus, too, they preached of the advent of God in the flesh to the world, his advent by the spotless and God-bearing (*theotokos*) Mary in the way of birth and growth.” (*Discourse on the End of the World* 1 <AD 217>)

Gregory, the Wonderworker

“For Luke, in the inspired Gospel narratives, delivers a testimony not to Joseph only, but also to Mary, the Mother of God, and gives this account with reference to the very family and house of David.” (*Four Homilies* 1 <AD 261>)

Methodius

“While Simeon was thus exultant and rejoicing with exceeding great and holy joy, that which had before been spoken of in a figure by the prophet Isaiah, the holy Mother of God now manifestly fulfilled.” (*Oration on Simeon and Anna* 7 <AD 305>)

Cyril of Jerusalem

“The Father bears witness from heaven to his Son. The Holy Spirit bears witness, coming down bodily in the form of a dove. The archangel Gabriel bears witness, bringing the good tidings to Mary. The Virgin Mother of God bears witness.” (*Catechetical Lectures* 10:19 <AD 350>)

December 19

Still other well known Fathers add their agreement to calling Mary “the Mother of God.”

Ephraim the Syrian

“Though still a Virgin she carried a child in her womb, and the handmaid and work of his wisdom became the Mother of God.” (*Songs of Praise* 1:20 <AD 351>)

Athanasius

“The word begotten of the Father from on high, inexpressibly, inexplicably, incomprehensibly, and eternally is he that is born in time here below of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.” (*The Incarnation of the Word of God* <AD 365>)

Gregory of Nazianz

“If anyone does not agree that holy Mary is Mother of God, he is at odds with the Godhead. (*Letter to Cledonius the Priest* <AD 382>)

Cyril of Alexandria

“I have been amazed that some are utterly in doubt as to whether or not the holy Virgin is able to be called the Mother of God. For our Lord Jesus Christ is God, how should the holy Virgin who bore him not be the Mother of God?” (*Letter to the Monks of Egypt* <AD 427>)

December 20

We conclude this brief review of some Church Fathers and their understanding of calling Mary “the Mother of God” by making reference to one of the most famous Church Councils in the early centuries of the Christian church.

#### Council of Ephesus

“We confess, then, our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, perfect God and perfect man, of a rational soul and a body, begotten before all ages, for our salvation, born of Mary the Virgin according to his humanity, one and the same consubstantial with the Father in Godhead and consubstantial with us in humanity, for a union of two natures took place. Therefore we confess one Christ, one Son, one Lord: According to this understanding of the unconfused union, we confess the holy Virgin to be the Mother of God because God the Word took flesh and became man and from his very conception united to himself the temple he took from her.” (*Formula of Union* <AD 431>)

## December 21

The Reformation has been called a “tragic necessity.” The neglect, almost disappearance, of Mary in Protestant theology belongs to the tragic side. The Reformation rightly rejected an overemphasis on Mary’s role in late medieval piety but they also spoke of Mary with a love and respect that is instructive for us today. As heirs of the Reformation, Evangelicals do well to revisit the Marian thought of the Reformers.

For Luther, Mary is the workshop in which God operates to bring about the salvation of the world. Mary is the person and place where God has chosen to enter most deeply into the human story. She is the one who hears the Word of God, the one who responds in faith and thus is justified by faith alone. Both Zwingli and Bullinger joined in the “Hail Mary, full of grace” not as a prayer to Mary but as an expression of praise in honor of her. Calvin too referred to Mary as “the treasure of grace” and spoke of how Christ “chose for himself the virgin’s womb as a temple in which to dwell.

In recent years, Mary has once again become the focus of constructive reflection among Evangelicals, and this is a positive development. Evangelicals see her as the figure the Bible presents her to be: the handmaiden of the Lord, divinely chosen to give birth to the Messiah, she who stood loyally by Jesus at the cross where he offered “a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the world” (Book of Common Prayer, 1662). Mary’s aim was to exalt her Son and to point others to him. We do not detract from Christ by showing proper reverence to his mother.

## December 22

An important aspect of this reverence is to acknowledge our common confession of Mary's prophetic ministry of proclaiming the message of salvation. Inspired by the Spirit, Mary's Magnificat announces the divine restoration of creation in parallel with Jesus' own proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19). Mary is not simply a passive instrument of God's plan. She actively participates in the Spirit's charismatic activity, which from generation to generation serves as a model for men and women who seek to proclaim the gospel "in the power of the Spirit." Consequently, there is a continuity of the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit that Mary's unique vocation demonstrates and lives on in the vocation of the Church.

The common confession of Evangelicals includes the virginal conception of Jesus and Mary's role as a *Theotokos*, the God Bearer. This term has been resisted by some believers because it can be confused with pagan notions of fertility cults and goddess worship. Yet the debates leading up to the Council of Ephesus (431), which defined Mary as *Theotokos*, were framed by the New Testament witness to the deity of Christ. This title was always christologically driven. It had less to do with the status of Mary than with the unity of divinity and humanity in her Son.

To confess Mary as the God Bearer is not to project some notion of a pagan goddess; it is to declare what the Bible says – that Mary was the human mother of he who is the eternal Son of God.



December 23

There has been in recent years Evangelicals writing on Mary and her part in Protestant understanding of Jesus. Two such writings are briefly noted in today's reading. First, we look at a book entitled, *The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus*, written by Scott McKnight and published in 2007.

In this small book, McKnight attempts to get Evangelical Protestants not only interested but also excited about Mary. The author wants Evangelicals to discover the "real" Mary – based on her "life and character." McKnight draws out characteristics that not only describe the real Mary, but with which his readers can sympathize and hopefully come to identify themselves in relation to the mother of our Lord.

The chapter subtitles tell us Mary is a "Woman of Faith," "Woman of Justice," "Woman of Danger" and so on. McKnight concludes, "This real Mary is no offense to Protestants, but rather she is a woman for us to honor."

But there is more to an Evangelical understanding of Mary than examining her "life and character." The real question is: What will a new look at Mary do to my theology? Tim Perry dives into this issue with his book, *Mary for Evangelicals: Towards Understanding the Mother of Our Lord*, published in 2006. Perry's book does not shy away from serious theological reflection on Mary and instead faces it head on by addressing a rather straightforward historical retracing of Christian thought regarding Mary. The author achieves this by engaging material from the early centuries of Christian theology. These are the centuries, some Protestants may not be aware, before there was a "Catholic Church." One of the great gifts of Perry's work is that it serves as a helpful introduction to the Church's history and struggles to not only understand Mary, but Mary in light of Jesus Christ.

December 24

Evangelical theology shines most clearly in its hymnody, and Graham Kendrick's hymn, *Meekness and Majesty* (1986) expresses this point well.

*Meekness and majesty, human and deity, in perfect harmony, the One who is God, Lord of eternity, dwells in humanity; kneels in humility and washes our feet. Oh what a mystery, meekness and majesty, bow down and worship, for this is your God.*

Evangelicals confess the historicity of the virginal conception of Jesus. J. Gresham Machen, who published a classic study of the virgin birth of Jesus in 1920, recognized this common ground and declared that the gulf between Rome and the Reformation was negligible compared to the abyss that separated both traditions from others who eviscerated the historic Christian faith.

Evangelicals affirm both Mary's virginity and her maternity. Mary was not merely the point of Christ's entrance into the world – as though she were a channel through which he passed as water flows through a pipe. She was truly human and a real mother. Her tender care and life-giving love for Jesus calls for all believers to love and honor her.

December 25

Today, we remember the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Especially today we recall his mother Mary and acknowledge her part in this glorious moment in history. We pray this day – in words Richard John Neuhaus composed for us before he died.

*Almighty and gracious God, Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who was in the fullness of time born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, from whom he received our human nature which, through his suffering, death, and glorious resurrection, he won our salvation, accept, we beseech you, our giving thanks for the witness of Mary's faith and the courage of her obedience.*

*Grant to us, we pray, the faithfulness to stand with her by the cross of your Son in his redemptive suffering and the suffering of your pilgrim Church on earth. By the gift of your Spirit, increase within us a lively sense of our communion in your Son with the saints on earth and the saints in heaven. May she who is the first disciple be for us a model of faith's response to your will in all things; may her "Let it be with me according to your word" be our constant prayer; may her "Do whatever he tells you" elicit from us a more perfect surrender of obedience to her Lord and ours.*

*Continue to lead us, we pray into a more manifest unity of faith and life so that the world may believe and those whom you have chosen may, with the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, rejoice forever in your glory. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and forever.*

*Amen*



# FAITH

MEMORIAL CHURCH

Join with the family of FAITH in observing and celebrating the unexplainable wonder of Advent

Sun, December 3, 10:30 am First Sunday of Advent Worship

6:00 pm In Concert, Mark Narmore

Sun, December 10, 10:30 am Second Sunday of Advent Worship  
Faith Kids Christmas Presentation

Fri, December 15, 7:00 pm Columbus Symphony Orchestra  
Christmas Concert

Sun, December 17, 10:30 am Third Sunday of Advent Worship

2:00 pm Lancaster Community Band  
Christmas Concert

Sun, December 24, 10:30 am Fourth Sunday of Advent Worship

6:00 pm Christmas Eve Candlelight Service