

Is Mary Worthy Of Worship?

Beginning With a Conclusion

David C. Grabbe

Given 04-Oct-03; Sermon #633s

One of the major areas of doctrine that sets Roman Catholicism apart from the rest of this world's Christianity is her view of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. There are enormous schools of thought and doctrine that center on the person and the function of Mary. If one examines Roman Catholicism to any degree at all, the importance they place on the mother of our Savior becomes readily apparent. These beliefs are not just intellectual. They have led to applications and manifestations that literally fill volumes and libraries.

For example, when a Catholic prays the rosary, the Hail Mary is said nine times as often as the Lord's Prayer. When one goes into a Catholic church, there is almost always a statue of Mary, if not an outright shrine, and the graven image of Mary is very often more prominent than the graven image of Christ, which probably is a good thing, but it shows the emphasis that they place on Mary. Last October, one of the controversies that reappeared in the Vatican as it does every so often, was the part that Mary plays in salvation and redemption. There are large numbers of Catholic scholars, theologians, and clergy, including the current Pope, that are pushing for Mary to be officially recognized as a co-redemptrix, meaning she is a vital part of the Catholic's redemption, although they are quick to point out that they never put her quite on the same level as Jesus Christ.

In the church of God, our sole source of doctrinal teaching is the Bible, the inspired Word of God. For Catholics, though, the Bible is only one of the sources used for dogma and doctrine. And of course they even have their own Bible which allows them even greater liberality when they do look for scriptural basis. Catholics also use church tradition and what they consider to be divine revelation as two other sources of doctrine, even in cases where the Bible directly disproves it. The doctrine of the worship of Mary is an excellent example of this, and this is what we will examine briefly this afternoon.

The Catholic Encyclopedia's article on Mary never explicitly gives a reason why Mary should be venerated in the way that she is. The closest it comes is to say that there is evidence that the early Christian church, meaning between 150 and 400 AD, venerated her, and so we should do likewise. That is their official starting point (and hold on to that thought because it will become important later on). But the sole scriptural reference that even remotely implies that Mary *might* be worthy of worship can be found in the first chapter of Luke. Please turn there with me. Luke 1, starting in verse 26.

Luke 1:26-30 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice [or hail], highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

While Mary is given a number of high compliments here, there is nothing that indicates Mary is worthy of our worship, let alone being an intercessor between Jesus Christ and His people, which is another one of their doctrines, or being a co-redemptrix or being sinless for the entirety of her life, or being given any other honor aside from being God's chosen vessel for the purpose of the Son of God being made flesh and blood. I do not mean to denigrate that role in the least, because truly that is a very great honor, but God throughout the ages has chosen various people to fill different roles according to His will and purpose, and there is absolutely no indication given that any of them are worthy of our worship.

In verse 28, Gabriel tells Mary in his greeting that she is highly favored, and he says again in verse 30 that she has found favor with God. The Greek word that is translated highly favored in the King James means to grace or to endue with special honor or to be accepted. The only other place that is used in the Bible is in Ephesians 1:6, where Paul says to the church at Ephesus specifically and to the Body of Christ in general, that God has made us accepted or highly favored in Christ. And from this example we can see that being highly favored is not synonymous with being worthy of worship.

Everyone in the Body of Christ is highly favored because God has made us acceptable to Him through the justification brought about by Christ's sacrifice.

I want you to notice something else in verse 28. If you check with an interlinear Bible, you will see that the phrase "blessed are you among women" is not in the original Greek. As with a number of other passages, the translators took some liberties in adding in this phrase. Gabriel, the archangel never told Mary that she was blessed among women, but it was spoken by Mary's cousin Elizabeth, as we will see later in verse 42.

In verse 30, Gabriel tells Mary that she has found favor with God. The word translated favor is the Greek word *charis*, which means graciousness or manner of action. It also means that which brings delight. It indicates favor on the part of the giver and thankfulness on the part of the receiver. This word is most often translated in the New Testament as grace. So Gabriel tells Mary that she is the recipient of *charis*, of grace and favor by God, and the emphasis again is on what God is doing. The type of grace bestowed on Mary is implied to be sweetness, charm, loveliness, joy, and delight, but once again, nothing in this verse gives us any indication that Mary should be worshipped. She simply received God's favor by being chosen to fulfill this role.

Drop down to verse 41.

Luke 1:41-43 And it happened when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Mary's cousin Elizabeth is inspired to recognize that Mary's baby is not just an ordinary baby, and she calls Mary and her unborn son blessed. This word literally means to speak well of. It signifies celebrating with praises and invoking blessings upon a person. The word is used very frequently in the New Testament, sometimes in relation to Christ, but very often in relation to inanimate objects such as fish and loaves of bread. The Amplified Bible

translates it as favored of God, and once again there is nothing in the wording that indicates that Mary is worthy of our worship.

Please turn with me back to the book of Judges, chapter 5 which contains the song of Deborah, which is composed after the victory over Jabin, the king of Canaan. We will be reading verse 24, where it says,

Judges 5:24 "Most blessed among women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed is she among women in tents."

Jael is the woman who invited the fleeing Sisera into her tent, encouraged him to sleep, and then drove a tent peg through his skull. Here she is counted as blessed, but I have never heard of a shrine dedicated to Jael, nor of anybody worshipping Jael. She is simply recognized and given a very honorable mention for the part she played in carrying out God's plan.

There is an incident back in the New Testament where a woman tries to draw special attention to Christ's mother, and Christ puts things in the proper perspective for us. Please turn with me to Luke chapter 11, verse 27.

Luke 11:27-29 And it happened as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Jesus Christ agreed that even though His mother was happy and to be envied, as the Amplified Bible puts it, even more blessed are anyone who hears God's Word and obeys it. Christ acknowledged that yes, His mother was a fine lady, but anyone focusing on the personage of Mary was really missing the point. Christ was interested in the attitude and the conduct of people, not their veneration of any human being. We see a similar phenomenon within mainstream Christianity today, for the Protestants tend to twist the gospel of Christ into simply a message about the person and they like to gloss over the message that Christ actually spoke, which is repent, so you can be in alignment with the soon-coming Kingdom of God. They are so in love with the personality that they cannot hear what He says.

In addition to receiving a unique calling and favor by God, Mary was blessed in other ways. There is evidence from the few scriptural references to Mary. It is likely that she was poor in spirit. She was meek, merciful, and pure in heart. And so according to the beatitudes of Matthew 5, she was considered to be blessed. In addition, she was undoubtedly persecuted for righteousness' sake because she gave birth to what the world considered to be an illegitimate child.

It appears that more than three decades after this incident there is still remembrance of Mary being pregnant while betrothed, because the Pharisees snidely remarked that they were not born in fornication, implying that Christ was. If the people did not believe that Christ was the Son of God after seeing Him live a perfect life and perform many miracles, they would have no reason to believe that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth. Mary was persecuted and stigmatized because she accepted a responsibility that was anathema to those around her. She knew the truth, Joseph knew the truth, and of course God knew the truth, and that was enough. It appears she endured the circumstance without complaining, and so she was blessed.

We have just examined the core scriptures the Catholic scholars use to try to prove that Mary is somehow worthy of our worship, and as we have seen, the verses say little more than that Mary was given grace and favor by God, as we all have. We could also examine a whole host of scriptures relating to death and resurrection and show that Mary is in the same condition as the rest of the saints that have died. They are awaiting the resurrection and without consciousness. We could look at a vast array of scriptures that show that Mary worship is indeed idolatry, because only God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are truly worthy of our worship. Not even angels fall into that category. These are not difficult concepts, and the material that I have presented here is not earth shattering to anyone who has had experience in the church of God.

Nevertheless, there is a vital lesson to be learned from this obviously erroneous doctrine. The veneration of Mary, like many pagan practices, has its origin in the Babylonian religious system created by Nimrod and Semiramis. Time does not permit me to go into full detail, but the worship of Mary originates from the worship of the mother and child figure, and that tradition started with the worship of Semiramis and her truly illegitimate son

Tammuz. Through the millennia, the symbol of the mother and child has been repeated, and one can find evidence of mother and child worship in all of the nations in ancient times. Though her characteristics varied from culture to culture, the common element was that she was the queen of heaven and that she bore fruit even though she was a virgin. One historian sums it up this way. Thus we see the virgin and child were worshiped in pagan times long before Christ was born. From China to Britain and even in Mexico, the mother and child were worshipped.

You see, brethren, Satan understood the prophecies perfectly well and inspired his own servants to include some of the same types and symbols in their false worship. This false worship, having spread from Babylon to the various nations, finally became established at Rome and throughout the Roman Empire. And one of the repeated patterns of the Roman Universal Church is syncretism, bringing foreign and pagan beliefs and practices into the church to keep certain groups happy. So the church allowed the pagans to continue with their worship of the great mother only in a slightly different form and with a new name.

Many pagans had been drawn to Christianity, but so strong in their minds was the adoration of the mother goddess that they did not want to forsake her. Compromising church leaders saw that they could find some similarity in Christianity with the mother goddess worship of the pagans and could increase their numbers by bringing these pagans into their fold, and of course Mary fit the bill perfectly. So the pagans were allowed to continue their prayers and devotion to the mother goddess, but her name was changed to Mary. And in this way, the pagan worship of the mother was given the appearance of Christianity, and the course was set.

We saw earlier that Scripture cannot be used as a starting place in attempting to prove that Mary is worthy of worship. The starting place for this practice was with Semiramis and the Babylonian system begun by Nimrod.

Once the Roman Church adopted this practice, support had to be found for it until they interpreted Scripture in a way that would lend credence to this practice. So when you read articles and resources like the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, it is apparent that they start with a conclusion and then attempt to support it. There is not any indication that the church of God is

going to adopt the worship of Mary anytime soon, at least not that I have heard of. And the things you have just heard probably are not shocking if you have been in the church for any length of time.

But there is a very important object lesson here. Each one of us has our own preferences, our own perspective, our own inclinations, and our own weaknesses, and these things can accompany us when we study the Bible.

Sometimes there are things that we would like the Bible to say based on our experiences and perspective and particular circumstance. So just as the Catholics created a major doctrine out of nothing but pagan tradition, so there is also the potential for us to start with a conclusion or a thought of what makes the most sense to us, and then interpret or even twist the Scriptures to fit our worldview. The pagans brought their inclinations and preferences of the mother goddess into the Roman Catholic Church, and the church officials then sanctified the paganism. This can happen to us too if we do not seek the whole counsel of God first and then draw our conclusions later. This can happen to us if we are not careful to prove all things and hold fast to that which is good. It is a great irony that Augustine, the renowned Catholic theologian, once said, "If you believe what you like in the gospel and reject what you do not like, it is not the gospel you believe but yourself."

Please turn with me to II Peter chapter 3, starting in verse 14. We will finish up here.

II Peter 3:14-18 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

The false doctrine of mother goddess worship is supported by scriptures that have been twisted, and those who have done this have done so to their own destruction because they have led millions upon millions and perhaps billions into idolatry. Peter's warning applies to us as well. It is prudent then when we are studying, at all times to recognize our own limitations, our biases, and our inclinations so that we can see the biblical truth without interference from a faulty lens.