

Life Group Notes 11/26/2023
Pastor Mark Warren NT Heroes of Faith Mary

[No doctrine is a given unless it has been found in the Word given by the Holy Spirit and received by you. If you have observations or questions, feel free to send me an email with your comment or observations at tbeachhead@comcast.net. Thank you for taking the time—Pete Mehegan, the Scribe.]

Remember: Be good to one another. Be sensitive and kind. Let God heal our hearts...and guide our discussions. **PLEASE PRE-READ THESE NOTES AND CHOOSE THE DIRECTION THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR GROUP.** BE COGNIZANT OF YOUR GROUP'S TIME AND BE SENSITIVE! **Some groups would like to dwell on a single idea. Let the Spirit be your guide. Never feel obligated to complete this study.**

Note: I have highlighted suggested discussion questions that Pastor Mark has raised this week, 11/12. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to guide all our discussions, using the highlights as trail blazes. **The purpose is to minister to one another.** I include each of the passages mentioned in full, to facilitate the enjoyment of these notes. Footnotes are not meant to distract. This week's footnotes include:

1. [On Gabriel.](#)
2. [On marriage in Jesus' day.](#)
3. [On Mary and her parents and immaculate conception.](#)
4. [On Mary's virginity.](#)

*****Important:** At the very [end of these notes](#), I've included passages that were mentioned in this week's message for deeper study using SOAP journaling to help further your study during the week. ***

Pastor Mark begins Mary's story with Gabriel's visit.

Look up Luke 1: [26](#)In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, [27](#)to a virgin pledged in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. [28](#)The angel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

[29](#)Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. [30](#)So the angel told her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. [31](#)Behold, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. [32](#)He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, [33](#)and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end!"

1. What do you know of Mary?
2. Pastor Mark says, within her culture, not having yet married, she was very probably in her early teens. Is this news to you? What does it make you think? (See [footnote 2](#) below.)
3. Mark quoted Roman Catholic traditions from the apocryphal second century "Gospel of James." What do you know of Mary's family background? Were you taught anything about her parents? See [footnote 3](#) below. Have you thought of their

response to Mary's pregnancy? Talk about the contrast between Mary's high degree of favor with God, and the task she's given through nine long months. Was she favored in her town?

4. Mark lists other incidents where Mary appears throughout the gospel: It's at her behest that Jesus produces wine at the wedding of Cana. She and her other sons, Jesus' half-brothers come to Capernaum to "rescue" him because he's receiving crowds and must be "out of his mind." She's one of the first witnesses of the resurrection, and is present in the upper room when the Holy Spirit is poured out at Pentecost. Can you think of any other incidents? What do you see of her character?
5. He speaks of the diverging beliefs concerning Mary between the Roman Catholic church, who believe she was immaculately conceived (her mother was sinless, and bore Mary free from the stain of the Original Sin, see [footnote 3](#) below.), remained a virgin throughout her life with no other children, and, upon her passing, her body was taken up into heaven immediately, and the protestants who grant her extraordinary honor without miraculous exception, speak of Jesus' brothers and sisters as the gospels do ([footnote 4](#)), and assume a passing like any others.
6. Look at Gabriel's first words to Mary in verse 28 above. Who calls Mary favored? Why? Before the angel's appearance, what were Mary's expectations? Where did her heart reside? (Make a conjecture.)

Look at Mary's response: [34](#)"How can this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" [35](#)The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. [36](#)Look, even Elizabeth your relative has conceived a son in her old age, and she who was called barren is in her sixth month. [37](#)For no word from God will ever fail." [38](#)"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it happen to me according to your word." Then the angel left her.

1. Why is it that what Mary says in verse 34 does not display unbelief? What does it display?
2. Review Genesis 1: [2](#)Now the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. [3](#)And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. How are these moments similar? Compare what happened at creation with what Gabriel describes as coming to pass.
3. What happens when the Word of God and the Spirit of God combine their forces?
4. What happens when Mary accepts the Word and the Spirit?
5. Now explain John 1: [14](#)The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. Does John treat the miracle of the virgin birth differently? Or is this just more light?
6. Talk about the humility of Mary. When she accepts the angel's Word, and receives the Word into her womb, how has her life changed?
7. What risks is she willingly accepting?
8. What are the benefits of willingly saying, "My life is not my own?"
9. What does the culture say about that?
10. Pastor asks, "What if your life was designed to fulfill God's purposes?" Answer him. What would that mean? What would it look like? Who would benefit?

11. Look at Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane: Luke 22: [41](#)And He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, where He knelt down and prayed, [42](#) "Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me. Yet not My will, but Yours be done." [43](#)Then an angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him. Compare this humble prayer to Mary's in verse 38. How are they similar? How are the results the same?

Mark points out that Mary had to be equipped to overcome:

- The stigma, the shame and ridicule of her imminent pregnancy out of wedlock.
 - She also had to overcome the natural fear from the encounter with the angel, and the overwhelming nature of the task she was being given beyond the pregnancy.
1. How do the Word of God and the Spirit of God combine to give courage?
 2. How does this encourage you? What promise do you remember from your past?

Look up Hebrews 11: [5](#)By faith Enoch was taken up so that he did not see death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. [6](#)And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who approaches Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

1. Why was Enoch taken up?
2. Who else in the Old Testament was taken up?
3. What did Elijah and Enoch have in common? Did they have faith? How did they please God? Was Elijah perfect?
4. What does verse 6 tell you?
5. Now describe Mary's faith. Did she know everything? What sets her apart?
6. According to this verse, what are the two things that faith requires? Which is most difficult for you?
7. Review Micah 6: [7](#)Would the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? [8](#)He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? According to Micah, what are the three things required to please God? Which of these three are most difficult for you?
8. If a person believes in the existence of God, believes He rewards the diligent seeker, sets out to seek Him by acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly, will he find favor? What else is required? How heavy is this yoke?
9. Review 2 Peter 1 [5](#)For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; [6](#)and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; [7](#)and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. How does the process of growing in faith, progressing from faith to virtue, etc., compare to Micah's exhortation? Why does virtue come before knowledge?
10. Mark picks up 2 Timothy 1: [6](#)For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. [7](#)For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control. How does this fit? What did Timothy receive at the laying on of hands? Why wasn't he instantly fear-free?
11. Mark says to pray this prayer, "Holy Spirit, fill us. God, I do not want to be played by my own emotions. I want to rest in you, and I want to have your Spirit fill me with

power and love. I want to be able to control myself." What does a prayer like that change? What does an answer look like?

Mark took a look at Joseph's perspective when Mary brought the news of her pregnancy.

1. What was required of Joseph?
2. What did he do?
3. Have you ever worked with someone through whom God was actively working? What was the evidence that it was God working and not indigestion? How rare is it today to find one who is being activated by God?
4. Did the friend stay faithful?
5. Who is the most prominent man of faith you have ever seen or known. Describe him.
6. Pastor Mark says, because it's so rare, we've actually narrowed our own faith down to what we can actually see. What do you think?
7. Why MUST we walk by faith and NOT by sight?
8. What births faith? What birthed Jesus?

Mark points to God's grace. He came to Mary. He made the choice. He found a willing vessel in Mary, and all the favor we have been offered was poured out on her. She was required to walk in and through what she had freely chosen to receive. He walked with her. Recall what Simeon, who prophesied in the temple in the days of Jesus' birth, said:

28 Simeon took Him in his arms and blessed God, saying:

29 "Sovereign Lord, as You have promised,
You now dismiss Your servant in peace.

30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation,
31 which You have prepared in the sight of all people,
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to Your people Israel."

33 The Child's father and mother were amazed at what was spoken about Him. *34* Then Simeon blessed them and said to His mother Mary:

"Behold, this Child is appointed to cause
the rise and fall of many in Israel,
and to be a sign that will be spoken against,
35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed—
and a sword will pierce your soul as well."

1. Imagine Mary's response.
2. Look specifically at what Jesus will cause (v. 34). What thoughts come to mind?
3. Who rises? Who falls? Who speaks out against the sign?
4. What thoughts get revealed? Is this still happening today?
5. How was God's grace sufficient for Mary?

Look up Ephesians 2: *4* But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, *5* made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved! *6* And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, *7* in order that in the coming ages He might display the surpassing riches of His grace, demonstrated by His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

*8*For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God,*9*not by works, so that no one can boast. *10*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance as our way of life.

1. How does God display His grace? To whom? How does His kindness to us display that grace? Do we deserve any of it?
2. What were we created to do? When were those works prepared to us?
3. What does it take for us to do these works? Can they be completed without us? What will happen if we refuse to complete these works?
4. Apply this to Mary. When did the surpassing greatness of God's mercy begin to be shown? When Mary's task was completed and Jesus was born, what was left for Mary to do? Who carried the load throughout?
5. Jesus says, "My yoke is easy and my burden light." Is it easy to trust God to carry the load?
6. Mark says, "Faith is our part and grace is His part." Think of Mary's story: how often was she directly and deliberately guided? Do you have a testimony of such guidance?

Mark's final point. Mary's decision to accept came from her early determination to obedience. The guidance came, and the obedience was the continual, natural and only possible response. He says her decision to say yes to Gabriel was her determination to say yes with every subsequent turn. Every moment became a decision to say yes again. He also points out that the difficult decisions did not come first. Mary's acknowledgement of the angel came from a decision early on to be His obedient child. She was highly favored, because she began by walking humbly, doing justly and loving mercy. She knew a God Who IS, and Who rewards the diligent seeker. Sometimes we need to begin there. Mark says she was ready to say, "Choose me, your humble servant." Mark says, "We're trained to be selfish. Find a way to serve someone else. That prepares us to realize we WANT to be prepared to serve those God sends to us. We reorient ourselves around service."

1. What do you see.
2. Does this suggest steps for you to take?
3. How does God already strengthen you in your service today? Do you have a testimony?

Lessons gleaned from Mary's life.

- You hear His voice. You stand ready to respond.
- You build a heart of service. You want to be used by God. You step out of the center and meet others' needs.
- You prioritize seeking God in decision making. Defer to Him in your decisions. Even in daily things. Be willing to yield. Be available and ready.
- You develop a habit of gratitude in worship, acknowledging God's grace and mercy in our lives.

The Follow-up Application

1. Use the [SOAP journal studies](#) below throughout the week.
2. Pray each day this week, "God you can use me as you wish." Write down ideas that come to you. Pray over each idea.

3. Pray this prayer, "Holy Spirit, fill me. God, I do not want to be played by my own emotions. I want to rest in you, and I want to have your Spirit fill me with power and love. I want to be able to control myself." Write what you observe.
4. Answer this: How do you diligently seek Him? Is there a method you use? What is the reward? Write it down, and don't lose the journal.

Take the time to pray.

Scribe's Notes:

1. **On Gabriel**—The Archangel Gabriel is one of only two named angels in the Bible, and the only one who makes an appearance to communicate to people. The other archangel is Michael, who is referred to in Jude, in Daniel, and in the Revelation. Twice Gabriel appears to Daniel, twice he comes to those at the birth of Jesus. He's not called an "archangel," meaning angel leader. Michael is the only one given that title. The name Gabriel is Hebrew. It means "Man of God." The Bible is not a book of Angelology. Most doctrines of angels come from sources outside biblical literature. Though their origins are not revealed, their existence is indisputable. Their assignment to serve mankind, and to be judged by Christians in the end is also clearly written. Jesus ascribes angels who stand before God's face day and night to children.
2. **On marriage in Jesus' day**—Mary was young. It was customary to begin families soon after children reached the age where pregnancy was possible. The average lifespan was not often extended, and infant mortality was high. Pragmatism dictated the practice. Mary was betrothed, which was also a common practice. Joseph's age, like Mary's is not given, but there is no presumption that they were the same age. Joseph could have been much older. Contracts for marriage were arranged between families, and at a much younger age. Joseph's response to Mary's pregnancy shows a high degree of honor. Before he was visited by the angel, he made to protect his betrothed and her reputation, the law having prescribed death by stoning. Once the angel came, the decision to send her to Elizabeth to protect her was an act of grace. There is no mention in any record of what happened to Joseph after Jesus' twelfth birthday where they all appear together in Jerusalem for the last time.
3. **On Mary and her parents and immaculate conception**—Mary has been the subject of legend throughout the history of the church. The Roman Catholic church made an idol of her and by the sixth century wars were fought over whether or not one should bow and kiss a statue of Mary, crawl under and kiss a painting of Mary, or if no image at all were allowed in the church. Mary's birth was treated as sacred as that of Jesus, and by the second century, the legend of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, had appeared in the apocryphal gospel of James, never considered canon, but

used to establish the legend. The feast of the Immaculate Conception is a celebration of Mary's conception, not Jesus', because according to Papal Bull, and Roman Catholic dogma finally cauterized in 1854, Mary was conceived and born without the stigma of the original sin. Schisms rose up over whether Mary was Christotokos or Theotokos, Mother of Christ or Mother of God. The Wikipedia article presents with clarity how far <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theotokos> divisions are willingly pursued.

4. **On Mary's virginity**—Pastor Mark's valid point on her pregnancy has many implications. There are many religions, cults and faiths that insist that Mary could not have been a virgin. The Jews, to begin with, argue that Christians have taken this pivotal verse in Isaiah 7 out of context: **13** *Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, O house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God as well? 14* [*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel.*](#) Jews insist that the Hebrew word for "virgin," עַלְמָה, *almah*, can equally mean "young woman" as it means virgin, and there is nothing that in any way indicates virginity outside of this one verse. The mother is therefore not a virgin. They forget that the ancient text had been translated by seventy Jewish scholars and rabbis in the third century B.C. to Greek in the Septuagint, the LXX, and the word chosen for *almah* was παρθένος, *parthenos*, which is Greek for virgin. The name to which Isaiah refers is another solid indicator of the legitimacy of the Christian claim: *Immanuel* means literally, "among us (in us/in our midst) is God." The detailed account in Luke 1 of Mary vocally and willingly receiving the Word stands as a solid monument to the power inherent in hearing the Word of God, receiving it, and bearing the promise to life itself. It also proves the limitless nature of faith in the Promise of God. That being said, the legendary "perpetual virginity of Mary" is pure Roman Catholic invention. Jude and James were Jesus' half-brothers. Mary was Jewish, not Roman Catholic. There was no sin in bearing children, but there was blessing in abundance. Joseph was blessed as well. There is no historical record of Mary's death but ancient traditions do place her in Ephesus with John the apostle, the aged long-lived elder of Ephesus.
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For further study:

Take a moment each day this week to apply the **SOAP**... (**S**cripture—Copy the scripture. / **O**bservation—Write what you see. / **A**pplication—What is God saying? / **P**ray—What is your response?) ...method to some of the scripture we looked at this week:

Monday: Luke 1:35-38
Tuesday: Luke 1:44-56
Wednesday: Luke 1:31-33
Thursday: Luke 22:41-43
Friday: Luke 2:28-35
Saturday: Ephesians 2:4-10
Sunday: Hebrews 11:5-6

Once again, some passages suggested here have more than the usual number of verses. This is not to increase the burden but to provide clarity of context. Pick the verses that speak to you most clearly, and run these through the SOAP steps.