



Sermon Growth Guide

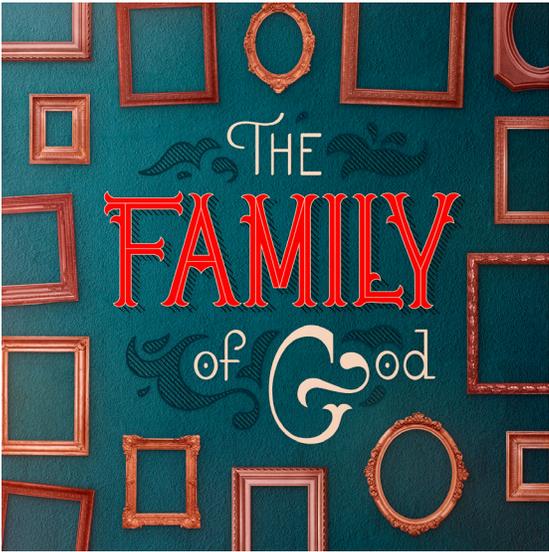
DECEMBER 19, 2021

THE FAMILY OF GOD // "MOTHER MARY"

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Sermon Growth Guide

December 19, 2021

Family of God – Mother Mary

Luke 1:26-38

Key Verse: Luke 1:38 “I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May your word to me be fulfilled.’ Then the angel left her.”

Big Idea: Faith and reason are married in Mary’s mind.

Foundations

This week, Mary. Mary has been overvalued in some faith circles. Scripture does not lead us to pray to or through Mary.

We ought not glorify Mary into a role that the Triune God claims for Himself. We know we are instructed to pray to the Father (Matthew 6:9), through the Son (Hebrews 4:14-16), by the power of the Spirit (Romans 8:26-27).

An equal error is to swing to the other extreme and undervalue Mary by ignoring the honor given to her by God in bearing His Son and ignoring the profound role model she ought to be for us in responding to God when He makes a call upon our lives.

Pastor Tim writes that “Mary is among the greatest models of faith we can possibly imagine, open to the Spirit of God, a heart free and ready to receive the Word of God. ‘I am the Lord’s servant, let it be unto me.’ This is where we all need to be.”

Mary’s faith is not a blind, not-thought-through, faith. Instead, Mary’s faith is a measured faith that leads her to a full and unwavering trust in God.

Blessings as you share your lives with one another and point one another to our true and eternal family.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Luke 1:26-38.

Pastor Tim notes that the word “wonder” found in verse 29 leaves the reader with an incomplete understanding of what is going on in Mary’s mind. “Wonder,” (Greek, dialogizomai) means more fully “to deliberate (by reflection or discussion), consider, dispute, reason, think,” (Strong’s Greek Lexicon G1223 and G3049).

What do we learn this week about how Mary first responds to the news from the angel? How do faith and reason come together in Mary’s life from this week’s passage?

Applying God’s Word

Faith and reason are married in Mary’s mind. What about yours? Host a conversation together sharing the role of faith and reason in your walk with God. How can understanding God better on an intellectual level increase your trust and faith in God in all circumstances?

Witnessing God’s Word

Relative to her intellect and faith, Mary has a “quiet strength.” Paul’s intellect and faith led to most of the New Testament being written. We have a few lines and a stunning song from Mary, but not much more. Yet her impact is tremendous. How might you model your witness of God’s love in Christ from Mary’s life?

Mary. Mother Mary. The nice thing about being a mother at Christmas is that you really don't have to worry about much. It all just kind of unfolds around you. With Santa and all the elves doing most of the work, the mom just sits back and relaxes most of the month. That's how it seems to me. I try to help out with comments like, "Aren't we going to have homemade fudge this year?" and "I like it when all the wrapping paper is themed." You know. Just little ways to be an encourager. But it all just seems to roll downhill with little effort. The same for Mary. It all just unfolded for her quite naturally.

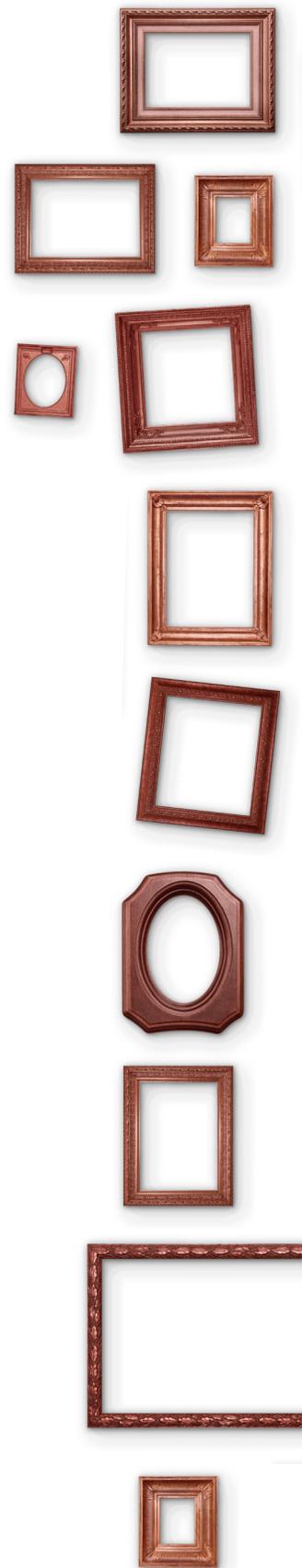
In the **Family of God**, here comes Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She is revered by Catholics and Orthodox—almost deified. She is not God, but she is among the greatest models of faith we can possibly imagine, open to the Spirit of God, a heart free and ready to receive the Word of God. "I am the Lord's servant, let it be unto me." This is where we all need to be. Let it be unto me. But let's take a closer look at Mary. Yes, she let it unfold, but there was more in it than naive passivity. As we talk about spiritual pathways, ways to draw closer to Jesus that are unique to each of us with our own personality traits and tendencies, Mary gets cast as a sort of innocent waif, believing without thinking, trusting without questioning, letting things happen without taking any stake in her own life. That is not accurate. That's not the spiritual pathway Mary walked; and we shouldn't feel guilty if unthinking credulity is not how our faith works either. Get it? An inaccurate representation of Mary's faith creates an inaccurate expectation for ours. We can do better if we are willing to let the Word speak.

Mary was growing up in Nazareth when an angel appeared to her. There is a church built over a spring where they say it happened. The water still flows up out of the rocks. Here comes Mary to fetch water when, "God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to

a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary" (Luke 1:26–27). Introducing Mary. "The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you'" (Luke 1:28). Has God found some righteousness within her that captured His attention and turned His eye? Some bright holiness almost as glorious as His own? No. God shed His grace on her to execute His purposes, as we see, "But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus'" (Luke 1:30–31). You have found favor with God, grace from God, to accomplish His plan of salvation. How does Mary respond? Is she unswervingly believing? Utterly trusting? Actually, as you might expect from any normal person, Mary goes through a process.

The first step for Mary is not blind faith. The first thing Mary does is think. She starts thinking about it all. "Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be" (Luke 1:29). She wondered, it says. The word is "*dialogizomai*" in Greek. This is where we get "dialogue" and "logic." "Wondered" is soft for this translation. *Logizomai* is serious and careful thinking. You could translate it, "Mary carefully parsed out the words and considered them for what they were." She didn't just accept it all immediately. She started thinking and measuring it out. What does this mean? You see, if I were going to assign a spiritual pathway to Mary, it would be an intellectual pathway. The Bible isn't known for wasting words. Mary is demonstrated, right off the bat, to be a thinker.

Where else does this happen? "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). That's the famous verse, but it makes it sound like a child with a wish box. Again, you could go another direction with this. Mary "treasured" these things. The word means she carefully kept and catalogued every



word and event. You could say she treasured them like a court reporter treasures the testimony of a witness, or a Shakespearean scholar treasures the text. Then she “pondered.” Again, this is a little soft. She rolled the words and facts around in her mind, measuring them against one another to come to deeper understanding. Finally, “in her heart,” which in Greek is the same word for mind. Perform a word study of Mary. Take out all the verbs Scripture uses to describe her actions and pile them up, and you find one of the most intellectual figures of the New Testament.

It is a crime when Christianity is presented as unthinking faith. Someone says, “I’d love to be a Christian like you; I’d love to have faith, to walk through life with an impenetrable optimism, hopefulness and naïve rosiness, but, unfortunately, I have a brain.” Faith that feels without thinking is not faith; just as faith that thinks and never feels is not faith. Mary is a thinker. The Bible goes out of its way to tell you when this woman stops to think. An angel of the Lord appears, and this gets Mary thinking.

Next, Mary considers and contends with the implications of what she hears. Gabriel shares his message, “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 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” (Luke 1:31–32). Mary says, “Ehhh ... that doesn’t add up.” “‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’” (Luke 1:34). This isn’t how it works. That’s not what I learned in health class. What will you do when God does something you don’t understand? A lot of people walk away. Faith contends with God. “I don’t get it, God. Why? How? I don’t understand.” Later, James, Jesus’ brother and one of Mary’s later children, will write to the church, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (James 1:5). Faith stays in conversation with

God. Help me to understand. It isn’t wrong, or unfaithful, to ask.

Finally, Mary submits. The angel gives her an answer, such as it is. This will be a mystery and a wonder, but it will be, “For no word from God will ever fail” (Luke 1:37). Remember, everything we are is a product of the word of God. God spoke all that is into existence. Mary submits. Here it is, our key verse, our hope for our own faith: “‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May your word to me be fulfilled.’ Then the angel left her” (Luke 1:38). Let it be unto me. I am the Lord’s servant. Mary doesn’t say these words unthinkingly. This is not unthinking faith. Mary knows. If the Lord’s way is the way, she knows. Let it be unto me. Let what be? Let it be that I suffer disgrace, that I become an unwed mother. Let it be that my whole life, my plans, my reputation, my hopes, my very body are taken from my hands. Let it be that I am ostracized, excluded by my synagogue, from my family, maybe even from Joseph. She doesn’t know. Gabriel never says, “Great! Because I’m headed over to Joseph’s next.” She doesn’t know that God in His mercy will send an angel to him too and keep their marriage together. Let it be. I trust. I submit. I am yours. With full thinking... You know how your mind runs? God is doing something. What does this mean for my life? What are all the implications of how this will play out? With full thinking, Mary submits in faith and trust, and the Savior is born into the world.

I imagine pregnant Mary. God chose to come into the world in the natural, although supernatural, but natural way of pregnancy and childbirth. I have never been pregnant myself, but I understand it to be a rather constant and unrelenting presence. Mary woke each morning to think, “Oh, maybe that was just a dream. Maybe I just imagined all that.” Nope. Here it is. An unflinching and unswerving, ever expanding, ever progressing reality—to bear the Son of God the Savior into the world. Her faith grows with each growing day.



If you doubt Mary as an intellectual, just look at what she writes, the prayer that pours out of her mouth. It's called *Mary's Song, or The Magnificat*. "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name" (Luke 1:46–49). Yes, this is from the Holy Spirit, but it is the Holy Spirit cooperating with the mind of Mary, as it says, "prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). This is Mary's divinely inspired expression and it shows us a mind not only in full grasp of the history of God, the long history of God saving the people of Israel, but Mary displays a knowledge of a very profound principle here, that greatness is revealed in its ability to become lowly.

Let me explain, and I owe a lot of this to a Tim Keller sermon from years ago. What is more can become less, but less cannot become more. What is great can bend down to associate and accommodate to what is small, but it doesn't work the other way around. What do I mean? You can bend down and act like a dog to play with your dog. Your dog will love it. You can bark and growl and put her chew toy in your mouth. You can do that, but your dog cannot stand up and do your taxes. Why? Because human is greater than dog. You can coo like a baby, but a baby can't take the keys and run to the store. Why? Because you are bigger, stronger and more capable than a baby. Here's the thing. Here's the great theological principle: God proves His greatness by becoming small. A church father, Origen, wrote in the second century: "But of all the marvelous and splendid things about him there is one that utterly transcends the limits of human wonder and is beyond the capacity of our weak mortal intelligence to think of or understand, namely, how this mighty power of the divine majesty, the very word of the Father, and the very wisdom of God, in which were

created 'all things visible and invisible,' can be believed to have existed within the compass of that man who appeared in Judea; yes, and how the wisdom of God can have entered into a woman's womb and been born as a little child and uttered noises like those of crying children."

The greater a being, the smaller it is able to become. God proves His greatness by becoming small, and Mary gets it. "He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful" (Luke 1:51–54). The angel says, "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, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32–33). "You, Mary, will bear the Son of God into the world, the Savior, and he will be great! He will be powerful. He will rule the day." And Mary says, "Yes, he is high, because look how low; he is great, look how small; he is strong, because look how weak God becomes to help the weak, to save the small, to lift up the lowly. God saves. Look how low he goes, look how low he stoops. Look how low! That's how I know how great he is." The greatness of the Savior is proven in His journey into lowliness to save and redeem the low. That's us. Follow the faith of Mary. Not unthinking, not anti-intellectual or checking your brains at the door. Follow the faith of Mary who used her mind to walk a path to deeper, fuller, yes, childlike dependence, faith and trust in Jesus—the one who proves His greatness by becoming small, so that we who are so small, could be great. We could be children in the Family of God.

