

Theotokos: What a Blessing

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[0:00] It's good to be here again, as most of you I have seen before. I've been coming here for a number of years as a counseling instructor and also as a pulpit supply when Jim's been on vacation.

We bring you greetings from Grace Covenant Church in Yilbert, Arizona, where I am a pastor and one of seven elders.

And we look upon this church as a sister church and have good fellowship with you. Turn your Bibles to Luke chapter 1.

Some background of my own life. I was born and raised a Roman Catholic. And I'm going to do something this morning that maybe has not been done before in a Baptist church.

I'm going to talk about Mary, the mother of Christ. Now, I know as a Baptist, that's something that is not done very often.

[1:18] In fact, a friend of mine who's a seminary professor, he once commented, who's the greatest saint in the New Testament?

You know, and his reply was Paul. And so I asked different people in the audience, who do you think is one of the greatest saints in Scripture?

And nobody said Mary. It was a Protestant audience. And the thing that I find most objectionable in Roman Catholicism, besides their view of the Lord's Supper and transubstantiation, is their idolization of Mary.

They've raised her to a co-redeemer. In fact, they have a phrase, to Jesus through Mary. In other words, what they teach is that to get to Jesus, the best way is to go through Mary.

And so that repels me. And as it will anyone who believes in Scripture. But the purpose of my sermon is to correct an imbalance in understanding the Virgin Mary's role in salvation.

[2:41] On both sides, those who overvalue her contribution, such as the Roman Catholic, who elevate her to almost a co-redeemer.

In fact, they use that term with respect to Mary. And those who undervalue and feel guilty if they would even talk about her, which also, which most of all is in our tradition, in the Protestant tradition, the Baptist tradition.

But this word up here, theotokos, anyone know what this means?

A few of you do. It means God-bearer. God-bearer. And this is a term that was applied to Mary by the early church.

And that represents one of the earliest creeds, the Chalcedon Creed, which we confess as our understanding of truth.

[3:54] Now, what I would like you to see is the incarnational immensity of what God did, what God has revealed of himself.

Think of it. God became a human. Incredible. The incarnation.

We don't spend enough time considering all that means. Secondly, I would have us see the incarnational immensity, the privilege of Mary and her essential role, her response.

It's revelation, God revealing himself and her response, which is what we all should be looking at as we listen to scripture. What is God revealing of himself?

What is my response to that revelation to be? And thirdly, I'd like you to see the balance between the sovereignty of God and the validity of human action.

[5:07] Sometimes we get that wrong. We swing to one side of the pendulum or the other. You know, either we're all excited about human action and we think it's all about us. Or we think we don't have any part in God's action that it's all about him.

Well, both of those things are true. Mary was a necessary part of God's plan as was her acceptance of that plan, her fiat.

God ordains the means as well as the end of his purpose. So we read in Luke chapter chapter 1. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph.

Any teenage girls here between 13 and 16? No? Well, that's the age that Mary was when this angel appeared to her.

[6 : 25] And we see in verses 29 through 33 her alarm and her wonderment at the fact that an angel, an archangel appeared to her.

The virgin's name was Mary and he came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled.

She was wondering, what is all this about? She was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus. 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 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.

And then Mary in verse 34 requests an explanation of the angel. She doesn't understand this. And Mary said to the angel, How will this be?

[7 : 47] For I'm a virgin. I haven't known a man sexually. How can I be pregnant? 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. Now she knows what he's talking about. She's awaiting the Messiah and she knows that the Messiah will come through a young woman.

But she's amazed at this. 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.

For nothing is impossible with God. So Mary receives this explanation from the angel. Nothing is impossible with God.

This is God. And nothing is impossible with God. That's her basic. And then we have her complete submission and acceptance in verse 38.

[9 : 09] 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 me.

Mother of God. She is going to be the mother of God. God made flesh as a mother. And the Holy Spirit will be the father.

And so she accepts this. And does this alarm you? Mother of God? That term? Would you prefer mother of Jesus?

Or mother of Christ? Christ? Close to 2,000 years ago in 428 AD it bothered a prominent bishop and his followers from Constantinople in Antioch.

This is modern Turkey. And the bishop's name was Nestorius. He objected to the title Theotokos or God bearer given to Mary a few hundred years before earlier by believers.

[10 : 35] And championed by one of the most important and influential early scholars, Bible scholars, and theologians of the early church origin of Alexandria.

See, it's important that we understand history, especially the history of the church and the things that develop because most of the problems that we get into, most of the heresies that we get into are old hat.

They've been around forever and they've been combated in the church forever. We're not the first people who ever believe the Bible. Can you believe that? I mean, there have been generation upon generation for thousands of years that have been studying scripture earnestly.

Now, the theologians in the Antioch school stress the humanity of Christ as opposed to the Alexandrian school led by Cyril, which stress his full divinity.

Theotokos stressed the divinity of the son and not the privilege of the mother. See, many people think this is talking about Mary's privilege.

[11:57] It's talking about the divinity of Christ, although certainly there is a privilege attached to that. Here's mother mother has been highly honored, but the emphasis was on the son as it should be.

It was so even in her life and immediately afterwards in the early church. Now, let me give you a quiz. Get your brain working if it isn't already.

how many natures in Christ? How many persons in Christ?

Not the Trinity. Trinity. Okay, you got that number in your head? There's two natures in Christ. The divine nature and the human nature.

And he is one person. Christ is one person. So there's two natures in one person in Jesus Christ.

This was worked out in the early church and the early creeds that we have.

[13:09] Well, bottom line, the Nestorians lost the battle at the Council of Ephesus and later at the Council of Chalcedon.

It was declared that only referring to Mary as the mother of Jesus and not the mother of God was heresy. Jesus is fully God.

And not to say that Mary was the God bearer or his mother was seen as a denial of his divinity.

That's why she has the title bearer of God, Theotokos.

The church has always taken the person and work of God very seriously. And its confessions reflect great thought and the leading of the spirit.

and there's a much new interest in the confessions, in the early confessions of the church, especially among Baptists.

[14:17] The Chalcedon Creed is one of the earliest ones, 451 A.D. that sets forth this idea that Jesus is fully God.

The confessions are not inspired of scripture, but they reflect the deep thinking of the church since its existence. And to avoid looking at this, looking at what the people thought of and prayed about and came to the conclusion of is really immense pride.

We think we don't need anyone that came before us. At Grace Covenant, we're a confessional church.

We hold to the London Baptist Confession of Faith, which is built on these earlier creeds. And as pastors, we have to subscribe to this wholly.

According to the church fathers, the first revelation of the Trinity in the New Testament took place, at the Annunciation. Now this is one of the great feasts of the church, the Annunciation, because the angel is announcing to Mary that God is becoming human and he is using her for that purpose.

[15:46] Heaven came down and intersected with earth. The triune God and an archangel came to a teenage girl, a virgin, who would become the center of the greatest event of salvation history.

God becoming one of us. God taking on human flesh. God becoming man and entering the world as all human beings do through the body of a woman.

man. What a privilege. What an honor. Think about it. Think if you were that girl and the angel appeared to you and you knew that the Holy Spirit had impregnated you and that you would give birth to the God man.

What an honor. honor. And that's why she was called highly favored. The sending of the Son, one in substance with the Father, as a man born of woman, constitutes the definitive point of God's self-revelation to humanity.

It's a Trinitarian revelation involving the Virgin Mary. Mary is a daughter of Israel, God's chosen people. Mary attains a union with God that is unimaginable to the people of Israel and surely unimaginable to any people.

[17:29] Not only the people of Israel, God coming in the flesh. On the basis of God's promise to Israel, Israel expected that one of them would be the mother of the Messiah, their savior from their oppressors.

But who among them could imagine that the promised Messiah to be born from that woman would be very God of very God? How could that be?

Only by the power of God, the Holy Spirit, who overshadowed her, was Mary able to accept that which is impossible with men, but possible with God.

All things are possible with God. Even virgin births, even the virgin birth of God himself. Mystery of mysteries.

clothed in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity. We sing that so often, how true it is.

[18:47] The natural and the supernatural are united in Mary, in the union of mother and son. The virgin of Nazareth truly becomes the the the the the god man, the god bearer, the mother of God.

Ponder that and worship the triune God and his goodness as we spoke about in Sunday school today.

This demonstrates the goodness of God. I mentioned my friend who called the apostle Paul the greatest saint in the Bible.

I don't know about the greatest. Scripture doesn't really pinpoint anybody as the greatest in the Bible except John, John the Baptist, perhaps.

But I can tell you that who has been the most honored and revered by the church down through the ages is Mary.

[20:05] Whoever received the honor that she received to carry the god man in her womb.

Amazing. Now that's not meant to cause you to worship Mary.

that should cause you to worship the triune God that made this possible. And why has she been revered down through the ages?

She carried the god man in her body for nine months. She delivered the one who was going to be her deliverer. And next in Luke you see this beautiful prayer.

You see the devout nature of Mary and the prayer that is prayed throughout the world as part of the morning prayer in the Psalms.

My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior. Notice Mary has a Savior. and she praises him.

[21:16] For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant and behold from now on all generations will call me blessed. Is that true? Yes.

For he who was mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name. I remember when I first graduated seminary a long time ago after finished preaching this old woman came up to me and she said do you call yourself reverend?

and I said no I don't. She says well good because holy is his name. That was my first greeting after church.

she and his offspring forever.

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. This magnificent what a beautiful prayer. What a gospel oriented prayer. It's speaking of our lowest state and how God has lifted us up and made us part of the upside down kingdom.

[22:59] And again this is a young teenage girl writing this prayer.

It's modeled on the Old Testament a prayer in Old Testament but nevertheless Mary she raised Jesus to manhood and instructed him in the ways of God as every loving mother should.

They had a special bond that every mother and son has. I had a special love for my mother and I'm certain that the love of Jesus for his mother far exceeded any love that I had or any human love.

I still venerate respect worship my mother all synonyms in English but I don't substitute her for God or give her that honor nor should anyone give that honor to Mary but neither should we neglect her neither should we be afraid of speaking with reverence about what God did in her we venerate our heroes of the faith we speak about Spurgeon Augustine Calvin Luther we speak of them constantly and we honor them and we don't pray to them or worship them why Mary why do we avoid talking about her and the part because to avoid talking about her is to avoid talking about the incarnation what God has done this great point of salvific history

God is in a different transcendent category I don't get upset or take it not honoring me if someone respects my mother and speaks well of her quite the contrary I'm honored by that and I think Jesus is also and I also think he's displeased if her role is distorted the other way either way how should you treat Mary in your own life as Jesus did with love honor and respect in our legitimate opposition to Mary worship and I'm quoting here from William Hendrickson Bible commentary in our legitimate opposition to Mary worship we should guard against the opposite extreme not appreciating and honoring her enough see it's all about a balance you know we're creatures of extreme we so easily get out of balance we need to strive for that right balance why should

[26:08] Mary's memory be honored well to mention a few reasons she was the first to believe in him she was the first to receive the news that Jesus was her savior and lord the one who would save his people from their sins including her she was the first to enter his school of faith as she who instructed him was later instructed by him there there there was a mention in Sunday school today

about Jesus learning scripture talks about Jesus growing in faith and in the knowledge of God as he was instructed by his mother and his father and there is no evil in not knowing something she remained faithful to Jesus from womb to tomb and after the tomb even until her death

Jesus last thoughts of her were of her on the cross as he left her in the care of the disciple that he loved the apostle John her last mention in scripture is in Acts 1 14 which has her praying with her son's followers in the upper room is there any question that she held a place of honor among the followers of her son and that she should also hold a place of honor still that she is the most blessed among women chapter 1 verse 42 or do or do I have that wrong it is right and my eyes are going and she exclaimed with a loud cry

Elizabeth blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus it's most blessed most blessed are you among women among all the women that ever lived you're the most blessed why because of anything she did no because she was chosen by the sovereign God to carry Jesus Christ within her and that made her the most blessed Mary among all the women on the earth you are the most blessed is what this is saying and often someone will raise Luke chapter 11 verse 27 and 28 where it says as he said these things a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast that which you nursed but he said blessed rather are those who hear the word of

God and keep it this is not taking away from the blessedness that Elizabeth spoke of Jesus would be contradicting the angel and Elizabeth if that were the meaning what Jesus is teaching is that family alone confers no special blessing if it is not united to hearing and obeying the word of God Mary did both she heard and obeyed the word of God plus she was the the the the the the hymn around Christmas time I love it Mary did you know and I don't know if you sing it here or not but no she didn't know many of the things that her son would do or suffer specifically but her knowledge was extensive and scripture says that she pondered these things in her heart

Luke chapter 2 verse 51 she treasured them she pondered them the things that she saw she knew after all she composed that beautiful prayer the Magnificat she knew she heard Simeon's prophecy in Luke 2 verse 35 that a sword would pierce your own soul too as well as your son's that prophecy was directed to her that a sword would pierce her heart looking at the song's lyrics Mary knew when she kissed her little baby she kissed the face of God that her baby boy would save our sons and daughters that her baby boy came to make all things new that the child that she delivered would soon deliver her that her baby boy had walked where angels trod that her baby boy would one day rule the nations and we look forward to that day when he returns in the clouds of glory that her baby boy that her baby boy was lord of all creation that her baby boy was heaven's perfect lamb that the little child she held is the great I am

[32 : 15] Mary knew do you have you given your fiat to the son have you bowed the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ because that baby that was in her womb is the Lord of all creation and he calls upon you to bow the knee to him to come to him in faith to give yourself your life to him have you kissed the son lest he be angry and you perish in the way has Christ been born in you have you come to him in faith and repented of your sins and cast yourself upon him do you follow Mary's example in following the son as his disciple as one who's learning from him through his word do you point others to him this is the role of every disciple including her that's what she did point others to him in one sense we're all mediators between God and man but there's one mediator between God and man the man Christ Jesus in the sense of salvation we are when we ask one another to pray for the other but there's only one essential mediator and that's the Lord Jesus his mediation is absolutely essential and he's a willing mediator see that's the problem nobody has to go through

Mary or any other saint in order to get to Jesus Jesus says come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest come to me he says he invites you to come to him not through any other mediator for there's only one mediator he invites wants you to come he invites you to come he doesn't tell you come to Mary and she will come on your behalf he doesn't say come to your pastor and he'll speak to me come to me for there's only one mediator Mary's son Christ Jesus point yourself and others to Jesus Gregory a bishop who lived from 213 to 275 wrote you oh Mary are resplendent with light in this sublime spiritual kingdom and you the father who is without beginning and whose power has covered you is glorified in you the son whom you bore in the flesh is adored in you the Holy Spirit who has brought about in your womb the birth of the great king is celebrated and thanks to you oh full of grace that the holy and consubstantial trinity has been able to be known in the world this is not

Mary worship this is trinity worship worship of the father son and holy spirit who were present in the incarnation as we read scripture as we think of the incarnation may we worship that trinity especially the one who was cradled in his mother's arms at birth and that is death the lord who will come to us and comes to us every time we celebrate the lord's supper but he'll come again in power and great glory and we will bow at his feet at that yet time and we will worship him who alone is worthy of our worship Christ Jesus our lord amen so that is the and the