

Women We Should Know From the New Testament & Early Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 October 2021

Preacher: Tom Schmidt

[0:00] Hello, everyone. So I think we're going to, we're just going to go ahead and get started. Hopefully some people will be trickling in. We are in the midst of a series on women in Christianity, women we should know and love and honor.

And John Hinkson has been doing a great job. He's been talking about women in Reformation era, Puritan era, you know, 15, 16, 1700s. And in this class, we're going to go back farther in time to the early church.

And we're going to begin with the New Testament and talk about some of the women in the New Testament. These names, I think, will be pretty familiar to most of us, but I'm hoping that perhaps we'll uncover some new things.

But even if we don't, I'm hoping that their lives will be encouraging to us. And then we're going to move from the New Testament to women in the early church.

The first few centuries, a little bit afterwards of when Christianity began. And these names may be a bit more unfamiliar. Before I begin, I just want to give you guys kind of a warning about the state of evidence.

[1:12] Because when we deal with the ancient world, as with everything in the ancient world, we've lost an enormous amount of material. And so most of these folks we're going to be talking about, we just have little snippets of information, sometimes just a paragraph.

But that actually is worth quite a lot in the context of the ancient world. For some women, we have much more. But this is the case for most men in the ancient world also. We know almost nothing or very little about them.

So because of this, in the past classes in this series, John's focused on just one woman or maybe two. But we're going to be looking at a bunch. We're going to do just a series of vignettes of little portraits.

Some are going to be very quick. Some are going to be a little longer. And hopefully that will give us kind of understanding of the breadth and of accomplishments of these women and how they were used by God to glorify him and to build up his church.

Why don't I begin with prayer? Father in heaven, we thank you for the opportunity to worship you together, to gather here safely in your name.

[2:25] Father, we're going to be reading about women who'd never had that opportunity. And we pray we'd be encouraged by their faith and how much they loved you and how much they sacrificed, how faithful they were in honoring you.

I pray, Lord, that their testimonies would echo in our hearts and would build us up, would encourage us, would rebuke us where we need rebuking, would give us peace where we need peace.

Father, we pray all this in the name of your son, Jesus. Amen. Okay, so like I said, we're going to be starting in the New Testament before we move on to early Christianity.

We're going to start with the name of a woman that many of us know, Elizabeth. She, as you know, was the mother of John the Baptist. And I start with her because she's going to begin a little theme we'll be addressing in the first section of our talk.

And that's because in the Gospel of Luke, Luke's the only writer who mentions Elizabeth. And he talks about, in Luke chapter 1, how after her husband, Zacharias, had the angel appear to him and was told that she was going to become pregnant, which would answer their long-sought-after prayer, despite her age, she became pregnant, she conceived.

[3 : 41] And then in Luke chapter 1, verse 41, Luke describes how Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was pregnant, came to meet Elizabeth, who was also pregnant with John the Baptist.

And, quote, When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby, that's John, leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy, and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

So it's a beautiful passage. This is almost all of the little we know about Elizabeth. What I want to highlight here, though, is how she was filled with the Holy Spirit. And Luke doesn't use the word, but she seems to give a prophecy here about Mary and also about her child, Jesus.

She was filled with the Holy Spirit. And that's going to be a little theme that Luke is going to emphasize, because right after this, in Luke chapter 1, Mary replies with this beautiful hymn, this beautiful song.

[4 : 59] It's often called the Magnificat. Mary says, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed. Mary also then, in reply, gives this sort of prophetic word about her and points out, like Elizabeth did, that everyone from all generations are going to call Mary blessed because she was blessed with conceiving and bearing and giving birth and nursing the Son of God.

This little vignette of Elizabeth and Mary, it reminds us of some of the women in the Old Testament who also sang songs, women like Miriam, Moses' sister, and Deborah, the judge, who all had these sort of prophetic ministries amongst the people and who were called prophetesses, just like these two women.

Luke goes on to tell us that Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes, and Luke also gives us another little hint about something that we have to delve below the surface to understand.

He says in Luke 2, verse 19, when he's describing some occurrences that happened around the birth of Jesus, he says that Mary, quote, treasured all of these things in her heart.

[6 : 32] And then, later on in the chapter, in Luke 51, he says it again. And scholars have pondered why Luke says this, why does he repeat it, and what does it mean?

And there is a theory, which I think is the right one. This is the one I favor, is that Luke is indicating where he is getting his information from.

He's kind of revealing his source for this, that Mary remembered this. And so he either interviewed Mary, or he knew someone who knew Mary very well, who relayed these stories about Jesus' birth.

And Luke is sort of giving this sort of subtly as a clue to where he's getting his information from. There's another, there's a reason why we think this also, because if we keep reading the Gospel of Luke, we quickly, in chapter 2, come across another prophetess, another female prophet, named Anna.

And we know very little about Anna. This is a beautiful, but highly unrealistic picture of Anna. The codex had not been invented yet when Anna was reading.

[7 : 46] So everything was in a scroll. So she, and presumably at 84 years old, she would not have been able to afford something like this. But Luke tells us that when they brought, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the temple, that there was a prophetess, and in his words named Anna, the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher.

She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was 84. And she did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

And coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. That's all we know about Anna.

But what's remarkable is if we start piecing these things together, we see that in the first three chapters, first two chapters of Luke, we have three women who are filled with the Holy Spirit and who are speaking words of encouragement about this coming Savior, about Jesus.

And we have, I've already mentioned them, like Miriam and Deborah, we have examples in the Old Testament, but we see this clustering of Luke emphasizing the role of women in the early life of Jesus.

[9 : 00] And that continues in the Gospel of Luke. If we go to Luke chapter eight, there's this fascinating little passage that we're aching to know more about, but Luke doesn't really let us know more.

But he's talking about Jesus. He says, soon afterwards, this is chapter eight, one through three. He says, soon afterwards, Jesus went through cities and villages proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God and the 12, the apostles, the 12 apostles were with him.

But then Luke gives this wonderful detail. He says, and also some women were with Jesus who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities. Mary called Magdalene from whom seven demons had gone out and Joanna, the wife of Chusa, Herod's household manager and Susanna and many others.

Who provided for them out of their means. So, we have this image of Jesus when he's doing his itinerant preaching and going from village to village.

His disciples, his apostles are with him and that's all true. But Luke lets us know that it was more than just the 12 apostles. That there were also women with Jesus who were following him in his itinerant ministry going from village to village, city to city.

[10 : 15] And not only that, that they are providing for him out of their means. That they apparently fairly well off. They're providing for his ministry. They're supporting it.

And one of them, at least, Joanna, she is called the wife of Chusa who is King Herod's household manager. So, the steward would be kind of the most senior of the household staff or the palace staff.

And she is the wife of this guy. So, she would have been fairly well to do even if Chusa was, it's possible that he was a slave. But back in the ancient world, slaves in this position could be fairly wealthy or have a lot of means behind their jobs.

So, this is also interesting because Jesus' disciples, you know, they tended to be fishermen and carpenters. He was a carpenter. But here we have a woman of some wealth, at least, following him as well.

In total, there are 14 women mentioned by Luke but are not mentioned by any other gospel writer. And this is one reason why scholars think that many of the unique stories that Luke has are because he knew some of these women and they shared with him these stories and that they were the sources that he mentioned when he says in the very beginning of Luke chapter 1 that I wanted to go to the eyewitnesses themselves.

[11:42] That he's not just talking about the apostles, he's also speaking about some of these women like Mary, the mother of Jesus, and perhaps these other women like Joanna or Susanna. There's another beautiful story in Luke which is very famous about Mary and Martha and how Jesus was at their house.

They were hosting him and how Martha, Luke says, was distracted with much serving and preparation and hosting Jesus and all the other people who were presumably there and Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet and listening and learning and there's that Martha gets kind of annoyed at this and Jesus says that, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things but one thing is necessary.

Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her. So this is another little window in the ministry and life of Jesus. What's remarkable here is that Jesus wanted women to learn from him just like the other disciples were and this was not a normal thing in the ancient world to do but for Jesus that's exactly what he wants in his female disciples.

As we go through many of us are aware of the women in the last hours of Jesus' life when he was carrying his cross.

Luke describes how there was a crowd of people but he signals out the women in particular who were following. He describes how Jesus addresses them. He says, daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me but weep for yourselves and for your children and he gives sort of a prophecy about the terrible things that are coming and of course the women were there when they saw Jesus die on the cross and when they laid him in the tomb and wrapped him in clothes and then Luke and the other gospel writers describe how they were the first ones to go to the tomb and other gospel writers indicate that Jesus appeared to them first.

[13:48] Now this is another remarkable aspect of Jesus' ministry. It's often said you may have heard it before that in the ancient world the testimony of women was not valued or not believed.

We see this in the gospel accounts themselves. Luke says that when the women returned to report to the apostles Luke 24:11 that their words seemed like an idle tale and they did not believe it and remember they didn't believe it even though Jesus had said this was going to happen and then they reported and they still are refusing to believe it and I actually wanted to make sure sometimes we hear these assertions that the ancient world was a certain way like they didn't accept the testimony of women and I've tried to track this down and nail it down and I discovered that if you look in Greco-Roman law books if you look also in Jewish customs they do specifically say that the testimony of women is outlawed in court and you have that in Greek law you have it in Jewish law and you have it in Roman law Latin law as well by the by the third century that had changed but there was still a stigma we have jurists you know lawyers in Rome saying yes you know women are allowed to do this but they will even say there's a great prejudice against them and I point this out because it's it makes it all the more remarkable that Jesus chose to reveal himself in this way and the early church acknowledged this there's a writer named Hippolytus he has a commentary on the

Song of Songs and Tyler you'll appreciate this he interprets the Song of Songs as this sort of love song between the soul and God but he also interprets it allegorically as representing all of like the myrrh and the ointments that are mentioned in the Song of Songs he keeps giving these allusions to the women who helped bury Jesus and he laid him in the tomb with all these with all these perfumes and ointments and Hippolytus famously calls the women apostles to the apostles because he says that they were the ones who preached the good news to the apostles so that the apostles could preach it to the world if we keep going with Luke there's that scene on the way to Emmaus where Jesus appears to Cleopas and another person and Luke doesn't tell us who it is it's an anonymous person and there's a scholar Richard Bauckham who makes an argument that this is probably Cleopas' wife and we he says it for a couple reasons but one reason is that we know

Cleopas had a wife because she was at the tomb or helped bury Jesus she was one of the women who was around and so there's good reason for thinking that we don't know that for sure but it's I think very possible perhaps even probable if we keep reading Luke is not done with his discussions of women if we read the book of Acts he mentions that in chapter 1 when all the disciples are together with one accord devoting themselves to prayer he points out specifically that it wasn't just the male disciples he says together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus he also mentions at this point his brothers they apparently hadn't always believed but already in chapter 1 in Acts they're there they've been convinced if we so to sum up we find that in Luke's gospel he tells us that not only did women have a very important place in Jesus' ministry they also had an important place as sources for the gospel of Luke

I think it's very fair to say that the apostles seem to have taken up Jesus' examples of how he interacted with women which was fairly contrary to the custom of the ancient world and this is I'm just going to give some scatter shots here of other women in the New Testament before we get on to women in early Christianity but there was Phoebe a deacon in the church of Corinth who Paul mentions to the Romans there's Judea and Syntyche Paul calls them fellow workers there's of course Priscilla and Aquila the husband wife missionary team they were the ones who sat Barnabas down and explained the word of God more accurately to him and that proved to be enormously influential in the church Barnabas was one of the great missionaries and apostles of the early church and Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned many times in Paul's letters and in the book of Acts also there's a woman Junia who's mentioned in Romans and Paul says that she is quote well known among the apostles and this has proved controversial this passage is controversial for a few reasons one is that the name is feminine it's not a hundred percent sure but it's likely all the evidence is in favor of it but the evidence is not you know completely rock solid and then the question of what that phrase means among the apostles people have debated if Paul is here saying that this woman is famous to the apostles that the apostles all know her and she's beloved by them or if he's saying he is classing her among the apostles as like an apostle herself and this is controversial for several reasons there are some early

[19:25] Christian writers John Chrysostom Theodorette they're writing in Greek and they interpret this passage as referring to a woman and calling her an apostle what seems to be going on is that that term apostle is what we would probably call missionary in the New Testament whenever we translate apostle we usually translate it as like a special term for the twelve or maybe Paul the apostle but it's actually used more broadly in the New Testament to refer to missionaries and general missionaries from churches so that's probably what's going on here but again she was very prominent and then there were also several churches that met in the houses of women and we know some of them like Chloe in Corinth Lydia who's mentioned in Acts Nympha who's mentioned into the Colossians and so these are all some of the roles that women played in the early church we don't know nearly as much as we would like to know about them but these are little kind of fragments that remain that we can pick up okay before we

I think as a fitting transition from the New Testament to women in the early church I thought that we would talk about Peter's mother-in-law in the Gospels we find that Peter has a mother-in-law because she's sick and Jesus heals her and that also tells us that Peter had a wife because he had a mother-in-law and she's never really mentioned in the Bible but she is mentioned in early Christian sources there's this one little paragraph about her it's from a writer named Clement of Alexandria he's writing around the year 190 and he says that all he says is that he has received a tradition that Peter that Peter's wife was executed for her faith that she was martyred and he says that Peter saw his wife being led away for martyrdom and that he called out to her and encouraged her and comforted her and addressed her by name saying remember the Lord and Clement says such was the marriage of Peter and his wife that they would encourage each other like that in their moment of most dire need

Peter of course after this also went on to be executed we don't know how many years afterwards or how soon afterwards but we know that he did now what I want to do is move ahead about a hundred years from Peter's own execution and his wife to France to Lyon's France to a woman called Blandina and I should probably warn you guys that this account of Blandina and then the next account that I'll be talking about is a bit gruesome and terrible I also want to encourage you though that the early church considered these accounts to be immensely encouraging for their faith they did not write these things just to be gory or to shock people but to encourage people in following Jesus and it seems what happened in Lyon's France around 170 was that some rumors started going around about horrible horrible things that

Christians were doing and these were slanders they were false but it stirred up the populace the pagans were eager to accuse the Christians of doing wrong and we have a lengthy letter we have excerpts from what was a lengthy letter describing what happened and the letter begins like this it says when these accusations were reported all the people raged like wild beasts against us so that even if some of them had been moderate towards us because of friendship they were now exceedingly furious and they gnashed their teeth against us and that which was spoken by our Lord was fulfilled the time will come when whoever kills you will think that they do a service to God and what ended up happening the letter is an eyewitness account of what occurred is that they selected some Christians they tracked some Christians down and this happens again and again in early church history there's these slanders that come against the

Christians they tracked down some Christians and then the Romans will try their very best to make those Christians admit that those slanders are true and these were things like Christians practiced incest that they practiced cannibalism they did all these horrible horrible things that they would kill little children and things like that and so these were really awful awful slanders against Christians and being in Rome which was a very brutal state where torture was legal and even necessary that they would torture them and what they did is they grabbed some people they have some names recorded people like Sanctus who is a deacon from a nearby city and some others but the letter goes on to say and Blandina through whom Christ showed that things which appear mean and obscure and despicable to men are with God of great glory and the letter goes on to say that we all trembled in fear of the sufferings that their companions were going to undergo but Blandina was afraid for another reason she feared that on account of the weakness of her body she would be unable to make a bold confession you start piecing things together and what you start realizing is that

[25 : 29] Blandina was probably a small frail woman who was probably poor and insignificant and she was caught up in this and was arrested and was set to be tortured and her one fear was that she would not have the strength to loudly refute these slanders that were being lodged against them the letter writers say that Blandina was filled with such power as to be raised above those who were torturing her by turns morning till evening so that they acknowledged that they were conquered and could do nothing more to her and they were astonished at her endurance the blessed woman like a noble athlete renewed her strength in her confession and she kept exclaiming I am a Christian and there is nothing vile done by us remember that all she had to do was deny

Christ or admit to these slanders to be released from these sufferings and she refused to so after her entire body was mangled from torture they stopped for a time and this is very typical in early Christianity that the Romans would then try to make a spectacle out of everything so they would set up a day like a big it's very perverse but a big celebratory day where everybody would come to the local stadium and they bring out these folks and set them through tortures one more time before executing them hoping that they would recant their faith and so the day was set and it says that Blandina was suspended on a stake and exposed to be devoured by wild beasts that they were going to let in and the letter says this because she appeared to be hanging on a cross and because of her earnest prayers she inspired her fellow martyrs with great zeal for they looked on her in her conflict and they beheld with their outward eyes in the form of their sister the one who was crucified for them that she might persuade those who believe in him that everyone who suffers for the glory of

Christ always has fellowship with the living God they go on to say that Blandina though small and weak and despised yet the mighty and conquering athlete she arose with zeal and overcame the adversary many times and as a noble mother she encouraged her children and sent them before her victorious to the king and then she was executed after that and the letter ends by saying that the heathen the pagans quote confessed that never among them had a woman endured so many and such terrible tortures Blandina is remarkable for many reasons but the one I want to highlight when I conclude this session with her is that this happened in France and that what her actions did planted the seeds of the gospel in France which is still a Christian country to this day with Christian believers there but this happened with much suffering that she bore joyfully we have one more similar story before we go on to less weightier topics this one is of

Perpetua and Felicity these were two women from Africa we don't know what race they were this picture here has portrayed them as sub-Saharan African they may have been there's some evidence that Perpetua at least was a Berber and that's because her name implies a descent from a Berber so that means she was not Greek she was not Roman of descent those are the two privileged ethnic groups in antiquity she was not from them she was from North Africa she was well educated she was married she had a father and mother two brothers one of whom like herself was a catechumen meaning just an early Christian just had recently made the confession to follow Jesus she was 22 years old we don't know the context behind why she and Felicity and some others were arrested but presumably it was similar to what happened in Lyons that some rumor goes out or some governor gets upset and decides he's gonna do something about the

Christians what is remarkable about Perpetua is that we know about her from her own words she left a journal a diary and we still have excerpts from this a later editor who seems to have known her took her journal and kind of prefaced it with some comments and then gives excerpts of her writing and then wraps it up at the end and this is remarkable because she that makes her the first female Christian writer that we have is Perpetua it also makes her one of the earliest Christian Latin writers that we have she's writing around the year 200 AD this is extremely early for Latin Christian literature there really is only maybe two documents that predate this that we have in Latin but they're both anonymous they're very very short and so she's in some ways the first named Latin author that we know about she was 22 years old which also makes her the youngest

[31:16] Latin author that we know about at least that I'm aware of well her journal begins and she says she describes her father coming to her begging her to recant Christ and he's weeping and she refuses and she's she's taken into a dungeon and she says quote after a few days we were taken into the dungeon and I was very much afraid because I had never felt such darkness oh terrible day oh the fierce heat oh the crowds and the soldiery the prisoners are just packed into this hot cell I was very unusually distressed she says and then she gives us a frightful detail she says I was very unusually distressed over anxiety for my infant she also had an infant baby that she was caring for she says there were present there certain deacons of the church who by means of a gratuity this may have been a bribe it may have been a payment that was required they managed to allow the prisoners to get permission for the prisoners to go to a different part of the dungeon that was better and so she says we were allowed to be refreshed there for a few hours in a pleasanter part of the prison she says there

I nursed my child who was enfeebled with hunger and I obtained permission for my infant to remain with me in the dungeon and immediately I grew strong and was relieved from distress and anxiety about my infant and the dungeon became to me as it were a palace and I preferred to be there to be anywhere else she describes how providentially her child was weaned and she was able to give her child to her parents and her brothers and sisters to take care of she also describes several visions that she was given there's one in particular where there's this ladder going up to heaven and there's someone waiting at the top that tells her Perpetua I am waiting for you but be careful that the dragon does not bite you also with Perpetua in prison was Felicity whom you can see there and Felicity is another remarkable woman when she was arrested this account says that she was eight months pregnant and that there was as the day appointed day for this exhibition where they were going to bring out the

Christians and do horrible things to them as that day was coming close there was a law in Rome that a pregnant woman was not allowed to be publicly punished so you could torture them but you couldn't do it publicly and because the folks wanted to do this publicly to Felicity they told her we're not gonna have you wait and bring these other folks out your brothers and sisters in Christ first and we'll wait for you to give birth and Felicity was grieved by this because well she knew her fate was sealed and she wanted to die with her brothers and sisters and so she prayed that she would give birth early in her eighth month instead of her ninth and she did and she gave birth in prison and her little girl was given to a sister in Christ to bring up this was very common in the ancient world the day before that they were to be executed or to be exhibited and executed they had a last meal and again a gruesome custom all the people would come and gather around and watch the folks who were about to die eating their last meal as kind of a way to be entertained and one of the future martyrs very boldly said to them quote note our faces diligently that you may recognize them on the day of judgment and it says thus the crowd departed astonished and from these many believed the last words of perpetua when she was cast before a man with a sword to execute her was stand fast in the faith and love one another all of you and do not be offended at my sufferings perpetua and felicity are models of Jesus words when he says that anyone who loves husband or wife or children or houses or home more than me is not worthy of me and this is exemplified by these two women who sacrificed more than we can possibly imagine in many ways and this was acknowledged by the early church this is an inscription from the third century and it mentions perpetua and felicity as martyrs it mentions their other fellow martyrs saturus revocatus so here's the inscription it's heavily damaged you can see it pieced back together and you can see the name felicity and perpetua here and it's hard to make out but it f-e-l-i-c-i and then perpetua is there and this was discovered some time ago but it goes to show what an impact these women had on their church that there would be monuments put up in their honor and that those monuments would still survive in a sense or in a way to this day well moving on to a woman of a very different station in life that we know about from this statue this is a famous statue called the statue of

Hippolytus I could talk for hours about this my research has concerned this statue quite a bit but what's interesting about the statue is the inscriptions on the statue's chair and these inscriptions allow us to date the statue and they date to the year 222 AD and in fact the inscription says the first year of Emperor Alexander Severus and it's of March or April of that year it's the first year of his reign it's 222 AD and when you start putting some pieces together you realize that this statue was made just a couple months or it was at least inscribed a couple months after Alexander became Emperor and it also turns out that Alexander was only 14 years old when he became Emperor so he's a 14 year old kid that this statue's talking about and when you read through the histories you realize that

Alexander's mother was really the power behind the throne her name was Empress Memea and Empress Memea the mother of Alexander Severus patronized the Christians and what this statue seems to be now there's no hard evidence for this but you put the pieces together and it seems like what's going on is that Emperor Severus became Christian his or Emperor Severus became an emperor his mother patronized the Christians and was now really the ruling power in the empire and that this statue is was able to be made because of this new found freedom that Christians had in Rome and in fact one of the inscriptions there's several of them one of them indicates that Hippolytus wrote a letter to the Empress and we have an excerpt from that letter about what he says we don't know the context he's encouraging her about the resurrection we also know that Empress

[39:11] Memea would summon one of the famous theologians of the early church to her to preach to her and that she would send down a chariot with soldiers to take him on a hundred mile journey to go see her and preach to her so it certainly seems like she was very interested in Christianity we don't know if she actually was a Christian or not there's obviously suggestive that she was and Emperor Severus was also quite benevolent as he grew older and became an adult he was very benevolent towards Christians and this is exemplified by the fact that when he was overthrown about 13 years later so he would have been 26 27 years old when he was overthrown right away the bishops of Rome were rounded up and executed after he was overthrown and we also know that there were many Christians in the household of the

Severan dynasty of the household of the emperor at that time so again we have these scraps these little crumbs that we got to gobble up but this the woman the empress here's a here's a bust of her she seems to have had an enormous impact on the early church in patronizing them in protecting them and in listening to sermons we know she listened to several of them at least inviting these theologians like Hippolytus and like Origen another theologian to preach to her but we wish we knew more this is one of those areas that's ripe for discovery you know presumably an empress would leave some information about her that we don't have so maybe one day we'll find out more well we've talked about early Christian women martyrs and empress but now I want to move to a female slave and missionary Nino of Georgia now we're in the year 300 so with when we were talking about Blandina that was 170

Perpetua was 200 empress mameo was 222 now we're in the year 300 or 320 we're in Georgia Georgia is a country north of Iran south of Russia east of Turkey in the Caucasus west of the Caspian Sea and we have this account of how the gospel came to the Georgian people and it's by a church historian named Rufinus who's writing around the year 380 maybe maybe 50 years afterwards and he says it was at this time too that the Georgians accepted the word of God and faith in the kingdom to come and the cause of this great benefit was a woman captive who lived among them and who led such a faithful sober and modest life spending all of her days and nights in sleepless supplication to God that the local inhabitants started to wonder at what she was doing and this curiosity led them to ask what she was about and she replied with the truth that she worshipped

Jesus as God and this answer made the barbarians wonder only at this novelty this kind of strangeness they didn't know what to make of it Rufinus goes on to say that there was a custom amongst the Georgians that if a child fell sick and the mother couldn't help the child that the mother would bring the sick child from house to house asking people to help do you know what to do do you know what to do and no one knew how to cure this child and she eventually this mother came to Nino and Nino said that quote she knew of no human remedy but she declared that Christ her God whom she worshipped could heal the child and after she had put the child on a shirt on the ground poured out above the child her prayer to the Lord she gave the infant back to its mother in good health and word of this got around to many people and news of the wonderful deed reached the ears of the queen who was suffering from a bodily illness of the gravest sort and had been she asked for the woman captive to be brought to her but

Nino declined this is one of those moments where you know I feel like I would have gone I don't know why she didn't go but you see that in the gospels Jesus does things like this where Jesus is not he's not the carnival come to town he's not a wonder worker he's not here to just do miracles at the snap of someone's fingers that he's there to build faith in God and call people to repentance so Jesus often is a little cagey with his miracles and Nino was too and so after she declined the queen quote ordered that she herself be brought to the captive's hovel and having placed herself on the ground the captive that's Nino invoked Christ's name and no sooner was her prayer done than the queen stood up healthy and vigorous and Nino taught her that it was Christ the son of God most high who had conferred healing upon her and Nino advised her to invoke Christ whom she should know to be the author of her life and well being and the queen returned home joyfully and the king is wondering what's going on and she says

[44 : 46] I was healed by this slave woman and gold or silver or something and the queen said that no she doesn't want any of these she despises gold and silver this alone may we give her as a gift that we worship Christ who cured me but Rufina says that the king was not inclined to do so and he put it off he went on a hunting trip and he was trapped somewhere in the deep forest a storm drew in it was terrible dark he got lost each of his companions Rufina says wandered away and he was alone and he did not know what to do or where to turn Rufina says that there arose in his heart when he was near to losing hope that if the Christ preached to his wife by the woman captive were really God that he might free him the king from this darkness and no sooner had he vowed this not even verbally but only mentally than the daylight returned to the world and guided the king safely to the city and he explained directly to the queen what had happened and he required that the woman captive be summoned at once and so that she might tell them how she worships and then after that happens the king called together his people he explained the matter from the beginning and what happened to them and taught them the faith and a church was put up without delay

Nino is revered in Georgian history as she's often called the apostle to the Georgians the missionary to the Georgians and from that day to this day Georgia is still a Christian country and that was around 330 or so 340 AD Nino is the patron saint of Georgia well we've talked about martyrs and missionaries and empresses I want to turn now though to talk about poets and I speak of a woman named Faltonia Batisha Proba she lived between 300 and 360 or so AD she was from a very well to do family her father was consul that's like number two in the empire her grandfather also had been consul she married into a powerful family she had two sons who were high ranking her family was pagan but she converted to christianity as an adult and her husband and her two sons joined her we know of

Proba almost exclusively from a poem that she wrote it's called the this is a illuminated manuscript of the poem and that's her there and the poem is called the Cento Virgilianus de Laudibus Christi or a Virgilian Cento concerning the glory of Christ and what she did in this poem it sounds a little strange to us but it was very normal in the ancient world what she did is she took the epic Roman poet Virgil Virgil had written about 300 years earlier he died in 40 BC he was like the poet laureate of the Roman Empire the patron of Roman paganism and Roman culture this brilliant poet of course his most famous work is the Aeneid some of you may have read it and what she did is she took his poetry and excerpted various phrases from it and did some rearranging to create a poem to honor Christ but in the style and the wording of

Virgil and this was remarkable because it shows that Christians at this time many of them were not trying to reject wholesale Roman culture Greek culture they were trying to repurpose it and adapt it to the gospel and so what Proba did with great success was to make a poem using the words of Virgil but telling the story of the Bible and telling the story of Christ and this would be if there was a hymn that you really liked that you added some verses to or if there was a song that was so beautiful wasn't really about God but if you could rearrange some stuff and make it sound great many many of hymns come from folk songs where people have done this very kind of thing so I wanted to just read you a quick text now God almighty of course it's not going to sound poetic because it's in translation so forgive me now God almighty I pray receive this sacred song loosen the mouth of your eternal seven fold spirit and open up my heart's inner chambers in order that

I proba may disclose all mysteries of the poet that's Virgil I will declare that Virgil sang about the pious feats of Christ I will relate from the beginning a subject known to all oh father oh eternal might over people and things make my path easy and glide into our souls and then she begins with Genesis she says in the beginning for before there were fires of celestial bodies before there was bright ether or air there was only black night riding in its chariot which held the heavens and chaos extended headlong deep into shadows as the eye gazes up to ethereal Olympus in heaven but then the almighty father who has supreme power over things he separated the murky air and dispersed the shadows and he divided the world in halves for the light and for the shadows as well and he observed all the stars gliding over the silent sky turning his watchful eyes to the region that withstood the southern heat and which turned its back towards the north pole and when he had seen that all was still under a peaceful sky the almighty gave numbers and names to the stars and equally divided so that was like the first day of

[51 : 13] Genesis she did and then as she goes through her poem she eventually comes to Jesus she says now father I turn to you once again and to your great plans I set a greater work in motion I move towards the prophecies that were spoken of old for your child descended from heaven on high and at last brought aid to us who wished for it with the advent of God when at first a woman who had the appearance of a maiden this is Mary gave birth to a boy who was neither of our race nor of our blood she's speaking about how Jesus was not Roman he was not Latin of Latin descent he was of Jewish descent many prophets of old had sung of these late these recent signs that a man with power over the earth and men would arrive from heavenly seed and take possession of the world and the promised day had now arrived her and the she goes on to talk about the slaughter of children that

Herod carried out in the gospel of Matthew and she describes Mary she says who was frightened by all the crying carried her child in her bosom through this raging disorder and fled to a well stocked stable and here under the roof of a lowly house she nursed her son the poem unfortunately kind of breaks off it has these beautiful passages but of course what Proba has set out to do is very difficult because she's limited by the words of Virgil so she's trying to piece all these things together and like I said this poem actually proved to be enormously popular in the ancient world and it was kind of a way that Roman Christians could appreciate their culture but also glorify Christ in the same way unfortunately as I've mentioned that's all we know about Proba we don't know much else about her other than her poem I've spoken of poets and martyrs and other people

I want now though to move to a woman who is most well known as being a mother and a wife and I speak about a woman named Monica she was the mother of Augustine of St.

Augustine and this is a famous picture it shows Monica she's probably wouldn't have been dressed like this in the ancient world this is sort of a middle age idea of what she might be like Augustine's not too happy here because he wasn't for some time and we'll get into that in a moment but Monica was born in Algeria in today Africa she was probably of Berber descent so she was not from Latin stock or from Greek stock she also may have been Phoenician as well and we know most about her because of what Augustine says about her and he describes when she was a child she would often be called upon to go down to the cellar and to bring up some wine for the family and she would always take a few sips as a child now in the ancient world this was normal this was not something that would have been particularly frowned upon unless there was some excess going on but the servant who was with her shamed her and mocked her for doing that and called her a drunkard and

Augustine observes how deeply this affected Monica and that she vowed to live a life of temperance and purity thereafter and as she grew which she did throughout her life and as she grew and became a woman she was betrothed to a pagan she was from a Christian family she was raised as a Christian but she was still betrothed to a pagan and this man was violent he was hot tempered and to make matters worse his mother so Monica's mother in law hated Monica and talk about a difficult situation for someone to be in of course in the ancient world there was no there was no such thing as laws against domestic violence in fact Roman men were explicitly given legal permission to pretty much do whatever they wanted to anybody they wanted in the house so there was no recourse if you were married to someone who who was abusing you

[55 : 53] Monica however decided to despite these challenges to be wholeheartedly devoted to her husband and her mother-in-law and to wholeheartedly submit to them in everything and Augustine writes that eventually he won them both she won them both over that her mother-in-law grew to deeply love Monica and her husband became a Christian himself now this this these two little stories illustrate her character very much because Monica it turns out had this amazing gift of being willing to long suffer with people and also was was very willing to listen and respond to harsh sometimes harsh or difficult advice for instance as this the servant when the servant rebuked her for drinking wine and we'll see this come up again when she gave birth to

Augustine she was 23 years old and she set about educating Augustine in the Christian faith and raising him as a Christian as Augustine grew older though as a teenager he deeply grieved his mother by living a licentious and slothful life his parents had spent an enormous sum on his education and he was kind of throwing it away and he was sleeping around and doing things like that she was deeply grieved by this to make matters worse though Augustine left his Christian faith and converted to Manichaeism Manichaeism was a religion that started by a guy named Manny in Persia around 250 AD so about 100 years before 120 years before Augustine's conversion to Manichaeism and Manny claimed to be a successor to Jesus he claimed to be the paraclete that Jesus had promised in the gospel of John whom we know is the Holy

Spirit but he claimed to be that Manny also claimed to be the successor to Buddha but he was in Persia so he was bordering Rome and India at the time so he had access to these various traditions and so Augustine became a Manichaean and this deeply wounded Monica and she wept much for him she kicked him out of the home for his behavior she sought a priest who had once been a Manichaean himself and she thought this guy will be able to put reason into Augustine she went to the priest and begged him that he would reason with Augustine and prove his ideas false and the priest talked to Augustine and came back and said to Monica that I don't think this is a good thing to do that Augustine is puffed up with arrogance he's not going to listen to anything you just need to just be at peace with him and just love him and she continued this you know terrified her she continued weeping and wailing

Augustine describes it begging the priest to do something until the priest finally said this phrase he said the son of such tears can never be lost and Augustine remarks that Monica took this as a word from God himself and obeyed the priest she settled in her heart to be at peace with Augustine and she welcomed him back into her home and that proves to be exactly what I think Augustine needed so that he wasn't driven away from his mother and his relationship with her though they still had a fairly rocky relationship Augustine at this time was starting to become immensely accomplished as an orator and he actually obtained perhaps the most illustrious position of rhetoric in the entire Roman Empire in Milan in Italy so he's living in Africa so he journeyed to Italy he did not tell Monica he was doing this so he abandoned her she was worried what would happen to him and you know the high city the big city that there'd be temptations and things there and he left her alone in

North Africa and Augustine writes this he says by this time my mother made strong by her piety had come to me from Africa following me over sea and land in all perils she still felt secure in thee oh God for in the dangers of the sea she comforted the very sailors on their travel assuring them of safe arrival because she had been so assured by thee oh God she found me in grievous danger in despair of ever finding the truth what had happened was that Augustine had showed up in Milan and he had heard about the bishop of Milan Ambrose of Milan and heard that he wasn't concerned about or interested in Ambrose for his Christianity it was because he heard that he was this amazing speaker and this was Augustine's job so he thought I gotta listen to this guy and he showed up and had some interaction with Ambrose and Ambrose kind of injected some doubt into Augustine about

[61 : 36] Manichaeism and he was deeply troubled and when Monica showed up she found that Augustine was no longer a Manichaean but not yet a Christian and Augustine says that he was really surprised because when she found out he says quote she did not leap for joy he was expecting her to rejoice at leaving this faith that she did not like but she didn't instead she told Augustine that God had assured her that he would become a Christian and that this was just part of the process and that she was confident it would happen he writes that quote she hurried all the more assiduously to the church and hung upon the words of Ambrose for she loved that man as an angel of God because she knew that it was by him that I had been brought to my present condition my perplexing state of agitation which I was now in so

Augustine writes one more thing I'll share with you about his mother that helped him on his faith journey he says that as was he says my mother's custom in Africa was to bring to the chapels of the saints certain cakes and bread and wine so what was happening now in the 380s was sort of that saint worship relic worship was starting to creep into the church so Monica would go to some of these chapels that were honoring martyrs of old so we someone like Perpetua for example and she would leave I mean effectively offerings like cake and bread and wine and she comes in and this was a beloved practice of hers and she finds out Augustine says that she was forbidden to do so to leave these kinds of offerings and it upset her very much because she loved doing this but quote as soon as she learned that it was Bishop

Ambrose who had forbidden it she piously and obediently acceded to it and I marveled at how readily she could bring herself to accuse her own custom rather than question Bishop Ambrose that it shows her this I hope you see this willingness in her to take harsh advice sometimes or difficult advice even if lovingly given so she stopped that practice and it also speaks well of Ambrose because you didn't want people doing that so by long suffering and many tears as you all know Augustine did eventually become a Christian soon after this and Augustine would go on to use his brilliant mind to write millions of words one scholar has said that he wrote the equivalent of a 300 page book every year for 40 years and Augustine himself was so impressed by his mother's intelligence that he writes about how he would insist that she would join them in his theological discussions with his friends and how she participated just as fluently as all of his fellow scholars did and we know almost everything about

And she describes being in Jerusalem and what the churches were like and what things looked like. It's an invaluable historical treasure for scholars to know what the Christian East was like.

She was born in Constantinople into a wealthy family. Around 805-810 is when she was born. And she was said to be exceptionally beautiful and intelligent and so beautiful, in fact, that when the young emperor was wanting to be married, he decided to have a party where he would invite all the most eligible noble ladies to come, who were the prettiest, and take his pick. And Cassia was there. And the young emperor approached her. And there's this famous phrase where, you know, the emperor is haughty. This is not how you should try to woo a woman, I don't think. But he's very haughty, and he wants to seem superior to everybody. So he just goes up to her, and he says, through a woman came forth the baser things. And he's referring to Eve and how she sinned. And he's trying to put Cassia in her place. And Cassia was said to immediately retort, and through a woman came the better things, referring to Mary bringing forth Jesus. And the emperor was embarrassed and decided not to marry her. And that was probably good for Cassia. She went on to become a nun and never married.

So she has, this is what she says about beauty. She says, one should prefer a drop of luck than great beauty. It is better to possess grace from the Lord than beauty and wealth, which does not gain grace.

[69:23] But to an ungrateful one, friendship is vain. A little is the most if the friend is grateful. But to the ungrateful, the most is the least. She has lots of sayings like this. I will share her most famous hymn with you. It's called The Hymn of the Fallen Woman. And it's about the woman who came to anoint Jesus before his burial and was washing his feet with her hair and mourning over her sins.

And she says this, Lord, the woman fallen into many sins, recognizing your divinity rises to the status of myrrh bearer. So she's bearing myrrh to anoint Jesus. And with mourning, she brings to you myrrh before your burial. Woe to me, she says, for night holds for me the ecstasy of intemperance, gloomy and moonless, a desire for sin. Accept the springs of my tears. You who with clouds spread out the water of the sea, bend down to me, to the lamentations of my heart. You who made the heavens incline by your ineffable humiliation. I will tenderly kiss your sacred feet. I will wipe them again with the hair of my head. The feet who sound eve heard in paradise in the afternoon and hid in fear.

Who can describe the multitude of my sins and the depths of your judgment? My redeemer, savior of souls. Do not disregard me, your servant. You whose mercy is infinite.

I love how she describes this woman wiping Jesus's feet with her hair and remembers in the book of Genesis when it says that Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord walking in the cool of the day and hid from him because they have feared judgment. But here we have this woman coming to his feet and clinging to him. Well, I hope that these little vignettes have given you an appreciation for some early Christian women. We've spoken of disciples of Jesus, especially in the Gospel of Luke, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, Anna, Elizabeth, Mary the mother of Jesus, Peter's wife, and perhaps the wife of Cleopas. And after them, there were the martyrs, Blandina and Perpetua and Felicity. And we also turned to the Empress Mamea, the slave Nino, the apostle of the Georgians, the poet Proba, the loving mother Monica, and the traveler Agiria and Cassia, the hymnographer. I hope these women have encouraged you in your walk of faith. We have a few more minutes if you guys want to ask questions, but I've kind of gone over a bit in time so we can close two if that would be more appropriate.