

The Virgin Birth: A Divine Miracle

Luke 1:34-38

42-12

We are in the process of studying the gospel of Luke. I invite you to turn to chapter 1 in this gospel. Chapters 1 and 2 are long and they are filled with rich, foundational truth for the Christian faith and the gospel. And so we are taking our time working through this profound, rich portion of the Bible.

In fact, we're looking at the section starting in verse 26 and running down to verse 38. Let me read this section to you. "Now in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph of the descendants of David and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in he said to her, 'Hail, favored one, the Lord is with you.' But she was greatly troubled at this statement and kept pondering what kind of salutation 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 name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and His kingdom will have no end.' And Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be since I am a virgin?' And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing will be impossible with God.' And Mary said, 'Behold the bond slave of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her."

Two thousand years ago God entered this world as a human being. Deity put on the robe of humanity. The heavenly Son became an earthly baby. On a night, a familiar night to us, emblazoned by a bright and magnificent star, a child was born not like any other child before or since, the God-Man. This single event was so cataclysmic that it became the apex of history and established the calendar. Everything before this event is B.C., everything after is Anno Domini, the year of our Lord. This was the moment when redemptive history reached its pinnacle and the Son of God, the Savior of the world was born.

And Luke, who is careful as a historian, who is thoughtful and profound as a theologian, who is passionate as an evangelist, recounts for us the story of the Savior's conception and the Savior's birth with compelling, concise and rich detail. The amazing record that I just read to you is a record of a virgin conceiving a child, a real incarnation where God is born through a human. This is the virgin conception that led to the virgin birth, which is the foundation of the gospel. A real incarnation of God in flesh demands a virgin conception. This is foundational, this is critical to our faith. If Jesus had a human mother and a human father, then Jesus is a man and not God. And if He is a man and not God, then He is not the Savior, there is no salvation, and there is no good news.

We have then looked carefully and thoughtfully at the virgin birth, the virgin conception. We have

already considered its foundations. And I mentioned to you several weeks ago that the foundations of the virgin conception, virgin birth are found in the Old Testament promise, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the words of the prophets.

We then looked at the fallacies that surround the virgin birth, fallacies that come out of denial and counterfeiting. There are some who outright deny the virgin conception and the virgin birth and try fallaciously to discredit the Scripture. There are others who counterfeit it. That is they pose other virgin conceptions and other virgin births to sort of destroy the uniqueness of this one true incarnation.

We've gone through those foundations, we've gone through those fallacies and now we've arrived at the facts of the virgin conception. And the facts are clear. They are outlined for us in the text I just read to you.

The first fact is that the virgin conception was announced by a divine messenger. In verse 26 the angel Gabriel was sent from out of the presence of God. And then is indicated the divine choice. He was sent to an obscure town called Nazareth in the Galilee to a virgin, a 13-year-old girl, probably 12 to 14, 13 years old would be in the middle, who had been engaged or betrothed to a man named Joseph. She was the divine choice.

Then came the divine blessing: "Hail, favored one," in verse 28, "the Lord is with you." At the end of verse 30, "You have found favor with God." Then came the indication of the divine child, verse 31, you will conceive, you will have a Son, He will be Jesus, He will be great, He will be the Son of the Most High, He will be given the throne of His father David, a throne on which He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and He will also have a kingdom that is eternal. The divine messenger, the divine choice, the divine blessing, the divine child.

Finally in verse 34 to 38 we come to our text for this morning, the divine miracle, how this is to take place. And as it unfolds, five words we will use as the hooks to hang the progress of thought on.

The first word is supplication. Here is this 13-year-old girl. She has heard this immense, incomprehensible announcement from an angel from God. It has been more than she could comprehend. That is why it indicates in verse 29 that she was troubled at the statement, kept pondering what kind of salutation this might be. And she even had a great measure of fear, as indicated in the injunction of the angel in verse 30 for her not to be afraid. She was literally shaken to the core of her being over this encounter with an angel and what the angel said to her.

This precipitates the supplication in verse 34. She responds, it says, "And Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be since I am a virgin?'" That is her supplication, or her request. In response to the astonishing truth that's been given to her, she asks the question, how? It is not incredulity. It is not that she doubts, it is not that she doesn't believe. She does believe. She doesn't understand how it can happen.

I've told you all along and I tell you again, miracles didn't happen. Miracles only happened in very, very unique times in redemptive history. They didn't happen in her day. God hadn't uttered a revelation for over 400 years. There had been no word from heaven since the completion of the Old Testament canon. There hadn't been any miracles in over 400 years. There hadn't been any series

of miracles in well beyond that, since the days of Elijah. No one had seen an angel in over 500 years. Miracles didn't happen. They weren't normal. They weren't routine. They weren't common place. No one had seen an angel, heard a word from God, or experienced a miracle in centuries.

All of a sudden it all happens. God speaks through an angel about a miracle. She wasn't used to explaining or understanding miracles in a non-miraculous world like she lived in and we live in. She believed. She's not like Zacharias, who didn't believe and consequently when he was told that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a child, he responded to the word from Gabriel with unbelief and he was punished and made deaf and dumb until the child was born as a public testimony to his unbelief. She wasn't like that. She believed. She just couldn't understand how.

And she also understood that the angel was not saying to her, you're going to get married to Joseph and when you come together with Joseph you're going to have a child. She knew that that would not be anything miraculous. She knew that that was not what the angel was saying because she asks the question, "How can this be since I am a virgin?" She knew the angel was saying, you're going to have a Son and you're going to have that Son now. You're going to conceive now before a marriage ever takes place. And she said, "How can this happen? How is this possible to be pregnant while a virgin?" Thus the supplication is simply a question of how. She gives testimony to her virginity, she gives testimony to the understanding that this was not just a prediction, that she would get married and have a baby. The question indicates she knew she was going to be pregnant as a virgin. That's the supplication.

Well God has an answer. The strategy, we'll call it, the strategy. Verse 35, here is the divine strategy unfolded for her by Gabriel, "The angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.'"

The angel graciously answers her question about how with a very simple explanation. The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The Holy Spirit is very active, by the way, in Luke's narrative of Christ's birth. He is mentioned in connection with the birth of Christ, or the conception of Christ six times; three times in chapter 1 and three times in chapter 2 of this gospel. The Holy Spirit was instrumental as well, of course, in...in the life and ministry of Christ all the way along, as we shall see going through the gospel of Luke. But initially the Holy Spirit is very involved in the Messiah coming into the world and being born.

We shouldn't be surprised at this. The Holy Spirit is identified in creation. The earth is *tohu* and *bohu*, without form and void, and the Spirit of God begins to move over the face of this formless mass and begin the creative process that issues in the six days of creation described from then on through that first chapter.

The Holy Spirit, who was the original agent of creation, will again become an agent of creation, this time in the womb of this young girl. Nothing in this text, nothing in any other New Testament text, nothing anywhere in Scripture ever remotely suggests any kind of human sexual activity, only divine power acting on Mary. Joseph was shocked that this occurred when she...when he found out she was pregnant, which demonstrates his lack of contact with her in any physical way. There is no suggestion in Scripture of any sexual activity at all, only divine power creatively acting on Mary.

It is true John the Baptist, according to verse 15, was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, but he was the product of a union between a man and a woman. Zacharias and Elizabeth came together. The miracle was that God gave them the power to conceive together when heretofore they had never been able to do so and were now either in their 60s or 70s and 80s and beyond the capability humanly. The miracle there was that God allowed them to conceive, the child was then filled with the Holy Spirit. But in the case of Jesus Christ there was no human father and the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

In a parallel statement to enrich our understanding, the angel then says, this is another way to say it, "The power of the Most High will overshadow you." The Holy Spirit is the same as the Most High. The Holy Spirit is the Most High. Most High, by the way, is in the Hebrew *El Elyon*, God Most High. It's used at least three dozen times in the Old Testament to describe God. It is a title for God. It means sovereign lordship, sovereign ruler, almighty, all powerful, very common Old Testament name for God. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, or saying the same thing another way, the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Genesis 14:19, "The Lord God Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth." That's what it means to be Most High, it means to be the sovereign over everything that exists in heaven and in earth, sovereign over it all. The sovereign almighty creator God who made and upholds the universe will create life out of nothing.

He uses the verb here "He will overshadow you." "He will overshadow you," *episkiazō*. It means... It's translated "overshadow." There are three times in the New Testament where the transfiguration is described. It's described in Matthew, it's described in Mark and it's described in Luke. And at the time of the transfiguration there was an appearance of the *Shekinah* glory and it overshadowed them. It uses the same verb and translates it "overshadowing." It means to surround. It means to encompass, or it means in the metaphoric sense to influence.

God Himself, the sovereign Creator of the universe, will come and surround and overshadow and influence with creative power the womb of Mary. That's what the angel said. That's the divine strategy to produce in her womb this child. It will not happen through the normal...the normal human process. It will be divine and supernatural and apart from any human sexual activity whatsoever. A creating influence of God moves into Mary's body.

And for that reason, back to verse 35, for that reason, because of this divine creative miracle, "The holy offspring shall be called the Son of God."

First of all, to note that the child that is going to be born will be unlike any other human in that this child will be holy. Your kids may be cute and cuddly but they are not holy. They are unholy. They are fallen. They are depraved. The seeds of every conceivable iniquity is in their heart, as we have been pointing out in our book on parenting. The greatest challenge you have is to lead that depraved child to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. You have an unholy offspring. All humans are born in sin. David said, "In sin did my mother conceive me." He wasn't talking about an illicit affair. He wasn't talking about some adulterous thing. He wasn't saying he was an illegitimate child. He was saying from the time of conception I was a sinner.

Now there has been through the years a rather strange teaching that somehow because Jesus had a human mother and not a human father, He bypassed the sins...the sin nature which is passed genetically from the blood of the father. That's not true. There's nothing in the Scripture to indicate that, there's certainly nothing in medical science to indicate that because you can't find the sin nature

in the DNA. And, ladies, you don't need a man to be sinful or to pass that sin on. You're perfectly capable of passing it on yourself. Sin nature is not in the blood of a man, it's not in male blood. It's not in male chromosomes. I'm not sure where it is. I'm not sure anybody is sure where it is, but it's not isolated to the father.

That's not the point. The point is He was sinless because that's the way God created Him...created Him sinless from conception. That fetus in the womb of Mary was untouched by sin. That's because that's the way God created Him. He was a holy offspring. *Gennaō* is the Greek verb "offspring." It's actually a holy born one. And that's why at the end of verse 35 it says, "He shall be called the Son of God."

Now when you hear the word "Son of God," or the phrase "Son of God," or the title "Son of God," that is filled...for those of you who know the Bible, that is filled with all kinds of meaning, that is filled with all kinds of content. That's a great title that has all kinds of implications in it. But here it's just really very simple. If you can sort of strip out everything you understand about the great title of the Son of God, and we'll learn a lot about that title as we go through Luke's gospel because he refers to it many times, but just kind of strip it down to its basic significance in this particular word from Gabriel, what he's trying to say here is not everything that could be said about the title "Son of God," but this in particular: Because God Himself created this child in the womb of Mary, this holy offspring is the Son of God. He's God's Son, not Mary's Son and not Joseph's Son. It's almost not the technical title of "Son of God" with all that that implies messianically or redemptively, as much as to say it's the Son of God with all that that implies in terms of His nature, of His essence. This is God in human flesh.

Yes, He is the Son of Mary, born from her. Yes He's a Son of David because Mary was from David's line. He is the Son of David also legally because His father, though not His father by natural birth, was His father by human family identity, he too was a son of David. So He inherited David's royal line from His father, David's royal blood from His mother. He was son of Mary, son of Joseph in the legal sense, but He was Son of God in the sense of His nature, in the sense of His essence. He was Son of God in human form.

Nothing says it better than Hebrews 1 where it says, "He is the exact representation of God's nature," Hebrews 1:3. Jesus Christ was the exact duplication of the nature of God. That's why verse 5, God could say of Him, as He does in Psalm 2, "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee. I will be a Father to Him, and He shall be a Son to Me," 2 Samuel 7:14.

This is God's Son. This is essential to the whole of our Christian faith. You have here a child created in a human womb, created by God sinless, holy, and bearing the nature of God, the divine child. That's why in Hebrews 1:8, to the Son the Father can say, "Thy throne, oh God, is forever and ever." This is God's Son, this is God Himself in human form. "We beheld His glory," John 1 says, "the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This is God's Son. Jesus said it again and again. I and the Father are one. It was for this that the Jews executed Him. It was for this which they perceived as blasphemy, claiming to be the offspring of God, claiming to be the exact representation of God, claiming to bear the divine nature was in their view blasphemous. But this is true. Jesus was the Son of God by conception and by birth miraculously.

This title has importance, as we'll see in Luke. This title was affirmed by Jesus Himself in chapter 2, chapter 10, chapter 22. It was affirmed by God in chapter 3 and chapter 9. It was affirmed by demons in chapter 4 and chapter 8. It was affirmed by Satan in chapter 4 verses 3 and 9. It was affirmed by

Paul later on in the writing of Luke and the gospel...in the book of Acts in Acts 9 and chapter 13. So repeatedly He is affirmed as the Son of God by Himself, His own words, by God, by demons, by Satan, and by the apostles. That's the strategy. The Son of God will be born by an act of divine creation.

Thirdly, the sign. Mary doesn't ask for a sign, but God and grace strengthens her faith in giving her one anyway. As I told you, miracles didn't happen. Miracles didn't happen. Angels didn't appear. God didn't speak in this way. Life was just normal. And so this was so unusual, so mind-boggling that the angel graciously gave her a sign that she could look to to strengthen her faith. Verse 36, he says, "Behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month."

Now this probably came to Mary for the first time. She has a relative. Some translations say...use the word "cousin" but really you can't be that specific with the Greek term. She was a relative. She had a relative, an old relative. Now remember, this is a 13-year-old girl or so and she's got an old relative who's in her 70s or so and she knows Elizabeth and her husband Zacharias and she knows that she has been barren, which is the greatest stigma a Jewish woman could have, never to have had a child. And Elizabeth has conceived a son in her old age.

This would be shocking and this one who was called barren. I mean, she had a nickname, she was barren Elizabeth. That's...that's the sort of the scorn that was heaped upon a woman who was childless, as if it were some sign that God had cursed her for some iniquity. She must have had to bear the rebuke of that all her life.

But the angel says, "Behold!" explanation point, "your relative Elizabeth." Just a little footnote on that. Elizabeth, according to verse 5 of chapter 1, was a daughter of Aaron, so she came through Aaron's line, the priestly line. Mary was a descendant of David as the genealogy in chapter 3 will demonstrate. So Mary would have been related to Elizabeth through her mother, who would have been in Aaron's line and she would have been a descendant of David through her father. So this was a relative on her mother's side, the Aaron side. As the genealogy will show, her father's side was the side of David's line.

So this relative becomes a sign for her. The miracle was a miracle of conception. It wasn't a virgin conception, it was just that God allowed two old people who had been married all those years and now were not only barren but beyond the capability of having children, to conceive and have a child. And remember, miracles didn't happen, but Elizabeth is now sixth month pre...six months pregnant. She hid herself for the first five months. Back in verse 24 it says that she hid herself, kept herself in seclusion for five months after she became pregnant. Zacharias, you remember, came home from his priestly duty and they got together and she became pregnant and she stayed in seclusion for five months because if she had come out and wasn't in evidence, they wore those kind of drapy things, and if she went around saying, "I'm pregnant," they would have put her in an asylum. But when she showed up six months pregnant, there wasn't much to argue with.

She's in her six months, pregnancy, wonderful, affirming miracle has already been done by God. You don't need to wonder about it, you can go and visit your relative. And verse 39 says she did immediately, she went with haste. I mean, this was overwhelming to her and she would...she wanted to know what it was like to be pregnant under miraculous conditions. And so she entered the house of Zacharias, verse 40 says, and greeted Elizabeth. And we'll say more about that when we get to it

next time.

But this was the sign that God was able to do miracles, that God could do the humanly impossible. And this conception anchored faith. She had the faith. She wasn't doubting. But this was just an anchor for her faith.

So the supplication, the strategy, the sign, and then a comment on the sovereignty. It's one thing to say it's going to happen, and something else to be able to do it. And wonderfully verse 37 is just dropped in there, "For nothing will be impossible with God." And, you know, in Mary's mind what's going around in there, this is impossible, this is...this is not possible, this is...how can this be, and she is reminded that nothing is impossible with God. And Elizabeth's pregnancy proves it and Mary's conception proves it. This is God's great, limitless power at work.

By the way, Luke is just such a wonderful historian. Sometimes he's rather blatant, and sometimes he's rather subtle. This time he's pretty subtle here because verse 37 is actually borrowed from Genesis 18. It's really... It's really taken out of that verse. And the story in Genesis 18 is the story, you remember, of the birth of Isaac, similar situation, a miracle birth.

Luke has a wonderful way of weaving these in. And this case, of course, Gabriel also is a part of all of this and the whole of redemptive history just kind of flows together wonderfully. And Gabriel takes Mary back to Genesis 18, back to Abraham and Sarah. You remember they were old and they were beyond child-bearing years, and Abraham is 100 and she's 90 and they've never been able to have children. And God says you're going to have a son and Sarah laughs. It's...Abraham and Sarah, it's impossible, it can't happen and she laughs. Verse 12, "She laughed to herself saying, 'I've become so old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?'" I mean, this isn't going to happen. I'm beyond all this. "Shall I indeed," verse 13, "bear a child when I'm so old?" Verse 14, then comes the question, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord? Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I'll return to you at this time next year and Sarah shall have a son."

Now the question — is anything too hard for the Lord? — is the negative side of what I just read you. Go back to the text of Luke 1. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" is the same as saying, "Nothing is impossible with God." If nothing is too hard for the Lord, then everything's possible with God.

So Gabriel draws the attention of Mary back to the classic Old Testament birth miracle, which was the miracle of Abraham and Sarah. And God, who according to Psalm 115:3, is in the heavens and does whatever He pleases. And God, who made the heavens and the earth by His great power and by His outstretched arm, Jeremiah 32:17 says, "Nothing is too difficult for Thee."

God, who according to Daniel 4:35, does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth, and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?" God who can do anything, God whose power has no limit, God who is not bound at all by the laws of nature which He has created as if He were chained by His own creation, God who is omnipotent, all powerful and without limitations can do anything He wants to do. It would be...It would be foolish to believe He couldn't do anything since He created the entire universe and upholds it. But the very reference of Genesis 18:14 takes Mary back to the birth narrative of Abraham and Sarah and reminds her that God has done it in the past. He has demonstrated that nothing is impossible in the past with conception, did it in Abraham and Sarah's case, did it again in the case of Zacharias and

Elizabeth.

And then having said all of that, affirming the great power of God, we come to the fifth point. From supplication, strategy, sign, and sovereignty, to where I wanted to get this morning, more importantly: Submission, submission.

Mary... I think Mary knew the Old Testament. I think when Gabriel referred to Genesis 18 and Mary knew the story of Abraham and Sarah. Every Jewish girl knew that story. That story of miracle conception was perhaps as familiar as any story to the Jewish home. But Mary also knew another story. There was another miracle conception in the Old Testament, most notable miracle conception. Do you remember it?

It involved a lady by the name of Hannah who was greatly distressed and heartbroken because she couldn't conceive and have a child. And you remember, she went to God in 1 Samuel chapter 1 and she cried out to God to give her a child and God gave her a child and his name was Samuel. I mean, these are notable children. Abraham and Sarah were given Isaac, who was the child of the divine covenant of God. Zacharias and Elizabeth were given a child John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah. But the wonderful story, I just want to point one thing out, of Hannah and Elkanah, her husband, is that God also gave her a child who was a marvelous, notable son named Samuel. But she refers to herself in verse 11 three times as a maidservant, a maidservant. "Oh Lord, look on the affliction of Your maidservant, remember me, don't forget Your maidservant, give Your maidservant a son." Down in verse 18, "Let Your maidservant find favor in Your sight."

She refers to herself four or five times there as a maidservant. Interestingly enough look at verse 38, "And Mary said," this is her submission, "'Behold the bond slave of the Lord.'" Now what's the importance here? The importance here is that she uses the word bond slave, which is the word *doulē* in the Greek, which means slave, bond slave. And listen to this, it is the same word used in the Septuagint every time Hannah referred to herself as a maidservant. She used *doulē*. This is the word, the very word that is the same as the word Hannah used. It may indicate Mary's familiarity with the wonderful miracle that God gave to Hannah by which she conceived and bore Samuel. And Mary sees herself also as a slave to God's purposes as a servant, a bond slave. She is standing in the tradition of Hannah and submitting and following Hannah's example of being a willing slave to this incredible unfolding purpose of God. Submission is what characterizes this young girl. She sees herself not as somebody special, but as a bond slave.

Down in verse 48 she says it again. God in conceiving this child in her has regard for the humble state of His bond slave. She is in her own eyes a bond slave. She's just a young teen-aged girl chosen by God for a special service which she sees as service to God. She is humble, lowly, and glad to be this kind of bond slave. So she says, "Let it be done to me according to your word." She understood the implications. She shows up pregnant, chaos, confusion, how did this happen? Joseph, what's he going to think? She doesn't even ask about Joseph, she leaves that to God. She doesn't say, "Well before I say yes to this deal, who's going to explain this to Joseph? Who's going to explain this to my mother and my father? Who's going to explain this to my friends and my neighbors? Who's going to explain this to the righteous people? Who's going to explain this to the parents of Joseph? Wait a minute, there's a lot at stake here. Who's going to explain to everybody that sees me that...and knows I'm not married and sees..." She doesn't ask any of that, she says, "You just do what You want, Lord, I'm Your slave. I leave the rest to You."

And you remember what happened, Matthew 1:20 to 25 says an angel went to Joseph. As soon as Joseph realized that she was pregnant, he immediately was devastated, devastated because he thought she was as pure as the driven snow, now she's pregnant, he knows he's never known her. He assumes the worst. He has the option to stone her to death, or to divorce her. He decides to divorce her because he's merciful.

That night in a dream an angel comes to him and says, "Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. That which is conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit." Remember that? Mary left all of that to God. You can take care of all the details, I submit.

Boy, that's just pure, clean faith, isn't it? She just rested in God's purpose. And that's what you... That's what you want to know about Mary. When you want to know about Mary, think about submission, think about faith, think about believing the impossible, think about that just an incredible thing has been told and she humbly, simply believed it. Without any regard for all the implications, she rested in the purpose of God as a slave. That's the magnificence of Mary.

At this point I digress for a moment. It is bizarre, it is wrong, it is unbiblical to turn this humble servant of God into the queen of heaven, which Rome has done, the Roman Catholic Church. It is unthinkable to do such an idolatrous act. There is no queen in heaven. There's only a King. There is no queen in heaven, only the one, true, eternal King. To say that heaven has a queen is to create an idol. Worship of Mary is idolatry, nothing less. Mary is not the queen of heaven. Heaven has no queen. Heaven is occupied by a King who is a Trinity. Heaven is not a holy quartet, it is a Trinity.

Now, the Roman Catholic Church didn't invent the idea of the queen of heaven, they borrowed it from paganism. Turn to Jeremiah 7. It has nothing to do with Christianity, never has. It is a pagan concept that goes way back into Old Testament history. And this... This is very, very important information. Jeremiah, called obviously by God to be a prophet, to preach judgment to the southern kingdom, Judah and Jerusalem. And they... They were so bad. They were so sinful, verse 8 of Jeremiah 7. They trusted deceptive words. They were stealing, murdering, committing adultery, swearing falsely, offering sacrifices to Baal, walking after other gods, just totally rejecting the true God.

Verse 16 is a pronouncement of judgment, Jeremiah 7:16. "As for you, God says, don't pray for this people, Jeremiah, don't lift up cry or prayer for them and don't intercede with Me, I'm not going to listen to you. I've had it. It won't do you any good to pray for them." Verse 17, "Do you not see what they're doing? I mean, look in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. The children gather wood to make an offering, they kindle the fire. They prepare the dough to make cakes (for the what?) for the queen of heaven." What? "They're making cakes to offer to the queen of heaven and they're pouring out libations, drinks, to other gods in order to spite Me."

The queen of heaven was a false god. The queen of heaven was a pagan idol. And she was the queen of the gods. Verse 19, "'Do they spite Me?' declares the Lord. It is not themselves they... 'Is it not themselves they spite to their own shame?'" They're really bringing down divine wrath on their heads. Verse 20, "'Behold, My anger and My wrath will be poured out on this place, on man, on beast, on the trees of the field, on the fruit of the ground, it will burn and not be quenched.'"

Now they had... They had decided that they were going to worship the queen of heaven, this pagan

idol, this false god that the pagans called the queen of heaven. She was known as Ashtoreth in Baal worship and Astarte in the worship of Molech. She is the one that the feminists still worship, this famous goddess, the high priestess of false religion, Semiramis, all kinds of names, Isis. The queen of heaven, a pagan idol, and the Jews were worshipping her.

Go to chapter 44 and I'll show you how profoundly devoted to her they were. This was not casual. They had traded in the King of heaven for the queen of heaven. They had traded in the worship of the true God for the worship of this idol. Starting in verse 11 he starts pronouncing judgment on them. And down in verse 15 we'll pick it up. "Then all the men who were aware that their wives were burning sacrifices to other gods along with all the women who were standing by as a large assembly, including all the people who were living in Pathros in the land of Egypt, responded to Jeremiah saying," Jeremiah's pronouncing judgment, here's their response, "As for the message, you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we're not going to listen to you."

That's how they handled it. We're not listening to anything you say. "But rather," verse 17, "we'll certainly carry out every word that has proceeded from our mouths." We're going to listen to our own viewpoints. "We're going to burn sacrifices to the (what?) queen of heaven. We're going to pour out libations to her, not just as we, ourselves, our forefathers, our kings, and our princes did..." Did you get that? The whole nation had been worshipping this queen of heaven. We're going to do it as we've always done it. "For then," end of verse 17, "we had plenty of food and we were well off and we saw no misfortune." Boy, were they twisted? They believed that their prosperity in the past was not a result of God's mercy and God's blessing, but was a result of their worshipping the queen of heaven.

So they say, we're not going to listen to you. Things have gotten bad. They're getting worse all the time. The more you say the worse it gets. We're probably offending the queen of heaven, so we're going to crank up our worship to her.

Verse 18, "Since we stopped burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and stopped pouring out libations to her, we have lacked everything; have met our end by the sword and by famine." And, said the women, "When we were burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and were pouring out libations to her, was it without our husbands that we made for her sacrificial cakes in her image and poured out libations to her?"

Let me tell you something, folks. Their husbands got involved but this was a feminist movement. These women wanted a queen in heaven. They were tired of a patriarchal society. They wanted a matriarchal cult. And so they created a queen of heaven and their husbands just got in line and followed along. And here they were worshipping this false idol called the queen of heaven, feeling that everything that was good in their past history could be attributed to her and everything bad had happened because they had ceased the worship of the queen of heaven.

That is who the queen of heaven is. And Mary is not the queen of heaven, nor is there a queen in heaven. To postulate a queen in heaven is to blaspheme the true and living God, the holy King of heaven. Mary was a slave of God, she was a handmaid, she was a bond slave, nothing more. She is not the queen of heaven.

The Roman Catholic view of Mary is pagan, it's utterly pagan. Listen to what the Church says. This is Pope Benedict XV in 1918, "Mary suffered with Christ and nearly died with Him when He died, thus

she may rightly be said to have redeemed the human race with Christ."

Pope Pius XI in 1923 said, "The virgin of sorrows shared the work of redemption with Jesus Christ." Pope Leo XIII, 1891, "No one can approach Christ except through His mother." The catechism in the Sunday Missal, Catholic catechism says, "My salvation depends on Mary's mediation in union with Christ because of her exalted position as mediatrix of all grace." And Vatican II said, "Mary's intercession continues to win for us the gift of eternal salvation."

Let me tell you something about Mary. She is not co-redemptrix. She doesn't mediate grace. She's never heard a prayer from anybody. Mary's never heard anybody pray and Mary's never done anything for anybody. She can't hear prayers. Mary is just another one of myriad of saints who are in the presence of God. They don't hear prayers, they don't answer prayers. They don't help people. They have nothing to do with what's going on in this world. They don't know what you're thinking, what you're praying. They can't hear you speak. They're not involved. No saints are and Mary certainly is not. That is a fabrication. That is a form of idolatry that is created in Mary another member to the Trinity, who hears and answers prayer and who mediates and dispenses grace. Nothing could be more foreign to Scripture. Mary's never heard anybody pray ever anytime. And Mary has never appeared to anybody, nor has she ever assisted anybody in anything.

Now there's immense pressure, however, because this cult is so vast in Roman Catholicism on Pope John Paul II to exercise his power of papal infallibility and to affirm this as dogma. It's there and it's believed, but it's never really been nailed down as official Church dogma. And there is a huge movement to bring this about. The dogma should state this, according to Catholic experts, that, "Mary is co-redemptrix, mediatrix of all grace as an advocate for the people of God," end quote.

The Pope, by the way, has received over the last six or so years an average of 100 thousand signatures a month to do this, to make this official dogma. The idea is this: That somehow Mary mystically participated in the death of Christ and purchased redemption; that Mary participates in the work of redemption achieved by her Son by being the source of redemption for sinners.

The bottom line is this, God is a very reluctant Savior in that view, and God really isn't concerned about you. Jesus is a little more concerned about you, but He's kind of a tough guy, too, and He's not likely to save you and to give you what you want. But He can't resist His mother, so what you want to do is solicit His mother's help and she'll go to Jesus and who can resist his mother? Jesus is like all the rest of us. So that Mary participates by going to Jesus. And they would say this: That the graces that flow from the suffering of Jesus, the graces of salvation, sanctification, the graces that flow from Jesus, are granted to sinners only if and when Mary asks Him for them, only if and when Mary asks Him for them. All prayers, all petitions from the faithful on earth must flow through Mary who then brings them to Jesus.

None of that is true. Mary's never heard anybody pray. Since she went to heaven she's never heard anybody pray. No saints in heaven ever hear anybody pray. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 2:5 there is one mediator, the man Christ Jesus. Roman Catholicism is cultic in that sense, that it has postulated a false god and created a system of worship around that false god that destroys the purity and the singularity of the mediator work of Jesus Christ. This is not small stuff, this is huge.

During the twentieth century, from every continent, almost every continent, visionaries have reported

that Mary has appeared over 400 times. That's more than in the three previous centuries combined. She's appeared 400 times.

You know the truth? She's never appeared once anywhere to anybody. I've read things and I've told you about them, that she's appeared on a tortilla, she's appeared...That's true, they built a shrine in Texas and thousands...tens of thousands of people went to worship the virgin of the tortilla. They had the tortilla. I mean, you laugh at that but that...that's...then in the clouds, and you've read all of that. Mary is believed to be the maternal mediator. Mary does not mediate. Mary does not hear prayers. Mary does not make appearances. And yet tens of millions of people, literally tens of millions flood these shrines to worship what is imagined to be the appearance of the virgin.

Pope John Paul II, who is the great leader of the Catholic Church and is in many ways a monolithic, unilateral leader of the church, says this, and I'm quoting from him, 1997 he said this, "Having created man male and female, the Lord also wants to place the new Eve beside the new Adam in redemption." The new Adam, of course, is Christ, the new Eve is Mary. He goes on, "Mary, the new Eve, thus becomes the perfect icon for the Church. We can therefore turn to the Blessed Virgin, trustfully imploring her aid in the awareness of the singular role entrusted to her by God, the role of cooperator in redemption." That is blasphemous. He credits Mary...that's an end quote... He credits Mary with saving his life in 1981 during an assassination attempt. Mary didn't save his life. Mary wasn't around. Mary is a spirit in heaven with all the rest of the saints who are there, doing what they're doing and having nothing to do with what we're doing.

Perpetual virginity of Mary, that doctrine in the Catholic Church that she was a virgin till she died, the doctrine of the assumption of Mary, that she ascended into heaven without death, the doctrine of Mary as co-redemptrix and co-mediatrix, all of those have only come or will come by papal decree. They have nothing to do with the Bible.

You want to know how Mary understood herself. You find it right here in our text, don't you? She didn't say, "Behold the queen of heaven." She said, "Behold the bond slave of the Lord." She's nothing more than a bond slave. She says it again in verse 48, she's a bond slave. Verse 47 she says: "God is my Savior." She needed a Savior like everybody else. She was nothing but a servant. She was not a part of redemption. She was not sinless. She was a simple, humble little girl who was given a privilege. And as a servant she responded and said, "Let it be done to me according to your word."

With all the risks, she was willing to do it. What a story. No unnecessary details. What a story. Brief verses, no unnecessary details, simple, delicate, serious, profound, veiled, and the veil over the miraculous conception is never really fully lifted. We don't have any description of how that happened. We just know it happened and it happened without any comment from us because it's indescribable to the human mind.

And Mary surrendered, she submitted. And the story ends with this simple postscript, "And the angel departed from her." Mission accomplished, Gabriel went back to the presence of God. The God-Man was going to be born. The only begotten Son of God, Jesus, who would save His people from their sins, the divine Redeemer, the holy offspring, the divine King who would reign over a spiritual kingdom that would last forever.

And what do we learn from this that we can take with us? God's promises will be fulfilled. They were in Mary's life. God's power has no limit. It was demonstrated in her life. And God's people are always His instruments. That's what we learn from Mary. Don't worship Mary, she doesn't want worship. She would be appalled. She would be grieved if she knew it was happening. Mary tells us that God uses human instruments who are willing. That's the lesson of Mary. See her as a faithful, submissive, young girl who gave herself to whatever God wanted to do with her no matter how far beyond imagination it might be.

No matter what the risk, she believed in God's promise, in God's power, and that she as God's servant could be used in such a way. God is still doing His work, if not miraculously visibly, miraculously spiritually through His people, isn't He? Well, let's pray.

Father, thank You, for this tremendous portion of Scripture. Thank You for the gift of Your Son. Thank You for the sweet, humble, meek, submissive testimony of this young girl, Mary, who was so mightily used to carry the Savior of the world in her womb. Thank You that Your promises are fulfilled, Your power is unlimited and Your people are Your instruments. Use us, Lord, in some mighty way, for Your glory, not to give birth to the Son of God, but to bring into the world in which we live the influences of that child through the gospel. Thank You for such a privilege, in our Savior's name. Amen.

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