

The Mother of My Lord!

Mary Visits Elizabeth

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.

(The New American Bible, Luke 1:39-46)

Luke is the only evangelist who gives us the account of the Annunciation and the Visitation. Since the primary focus of the Gospels was to reveal the Good News of salvation in Jesus, these accounts are significant because they speak so clearly to the role of women as part of the *anawim*, the poor and the powerless, called to share in the mission of Jesus. Mary and Elizabeth shine forth as models of humility and faith. These accounts especially address the most exalted role, next to that of Jesus Himself, of **the Woman Mary** in the Father's plan of salvation for all mankind. Luke would have received the details of these events from Mary herself. Because of his medical background it is fitting the Spirit should use him to testify to the miraculous intervention of God in the order of nature that transformed Zachariah and Elizabeth's natural barrenness into conjugal fruitfulness with the birth of John, and to give testimony to the miraculous conception of Jesus in the order of grace by the power of the Holy Spirit, without any involvement of man, **making Mary the Ever Virgin Mother of God.**

Mary is Virgin before, during and after the birth of Jesus. Although Jesus is referred to in Scripture as the "firstborn," it is **a title that indicates the blessing bestowed upon the firstborn son in a Jewish family without reference to having other children.** And the passage that cites "the brothers of Jesus" merely indicates the Hebrew language had no word for cousins and those named are relatives clearly indicated elsewhere in Scripture as the children of "the other Mary" who was a disciple of Jesus. While virginity was not the exalted state in the Hebrew culture and the term "virgin" was often used to indicate an "unmarried woman," the term when applied to Mary was always understood in the early Church as Mary's espousal love for God and the free consecration of her entire life to the will and purpose of God.

These passages are foundational to the Church's reflection upon Mary's pre-eminent place and indispensable role in the mysteries of the life of Christ which has led to the formulation of its Marian theology and the definition of the dogmas regarding

Mary's singular privileges: the Immaculate Conception, her divine motherhood, her perpetual virginity, her glorious Assumption, and her role as co-redeemer with Christ in maternal intercession with Him, the One Mediator before the throne of God. Although the role of Mary as Mediatrix of Grace has not been defined as a **dogma of faith**, it is a belief commonly held by the faithful since the early days of the Church. Mary's maternal and intercessory mediation with her Son at Cana fulfills the Old Testament type of the Queen-Mother who pleads for the people and through whom the King mediates His favor, for he never refuses his mother. Jesus performed His first miracle at His Mother's request even though His hour had not yet come.

One might see **Mary as the first evangelist** bearing the Good News Himself to the world as she travels the route from Galilee to Judea, the same route Jesus would later travel during His public ministry. One might see **Elizabeth as the first Marian theologian** led by the Spirit to proclaim Mary "Theotokos," "mother of my Lord," as Mary bears the Indwelling God as the joy of salvation to Elizabeth and her household. Both women are of no high esteem but are exemplary in their humility and faith, for each **believed the word that was spoken to or for her through the angel Gabriel; in this lies their true greatness, even more than in their physical motherhood.** We are mindful of Jesus' words: "**Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother,**" (Mk 3:35) for the order of grace is always a higher order than the order of nature. Although Zachariah is not mentioned in this passage per se, being one with power, privilege and priesthood in the temple, his disbelief in the Word of God is a sharp contrast to the simple faith of Mary and Elizabeth, set in the ordinariness of life.

These passages showing God's special favor to Mary and Elizabeth also testify to God's deep respect for womanhood and for the role He has ordained to women throughout human and salvation history. Contrary to the claim of the feminist movement, no one has exalted women as much as God and Jesus have done, and bid Christ's Church also to do. Mary as the **Ever Virgin-Mother** is the model in faith for all virgins who are called into that spousal love relationship with the Lord, and for all mothers who develop their feminine personality by discovering that innate vocation to be mother that is larger than its biological dimension. As **Mother of God**, Mary is also **the first disciple of the Lord, schooled in His Presence**, and becomes the greatest model of faith for each and every person and for the whole Church herself.

[In the words of Blessed John Paul II,] "**Blessed Mary, Mother of God...is joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son.**
...As the liturgy and Christian piety demonstrate, the Church has always held devotion to Mary in high esteem, considering it inseparably linked to belief in Christ. It is based on the Father's plan, the Savior's will and the Paraclete's inspiration. ... Mary's place is the highest after Christ. ...

The co-presence of the gifts of virginity and maternity in the maiden of Nazareth has led Christians to call Mary simply “the virgin,” even when they celebrate her divine motherhood.

(Blessed John Paul II, THEOTOKOS, Woman, Mother, Disciple, A Catechesis on Mary, Mother of God, Pauline Books and Media, 2000.)

Many of the thoughts expressed herein are gleaned from Blessed John Paul II's magnificent catechesis on Mary, a series of his audience addresses from 1995 to 1997 which clearly enunciate the Catholic Church's theology of Marian devotion in the context of Scripture and Tradition and the ecclesial life of the Church. He states that the church, from its very beginning, acknowledged the virginal motherhood of Mary when they honored her as Mother of Jesus and that Mary herself was the source of this understanding.

As the infancy Gospels enable us to grasp, the first Christian communities themselves gathered together Mary's recollections about the mysterious circumstances of the Savior's conception and birth. In particular, the Annunciation account responds to the disciples' desire to have the deepest knowledge of the events connected with the beginnings of the risen Christ's earthly life. In the last analysis, Mary is at the origin of the revelation about the mystery of the virginal conception by the work of the Holy Spirit. (Theotokos, Pg. 22.)

The early Christians grasped the importance of this truth regarding Mary's virginal motherhood in relation to Jesus' divine origin. Although they recognized Jesus as the son of Joseph according to the law, they understood that **in His humanity Jesus was, by an extraordinary intervention of the Spirit, only the son of Mary, born without the intervention of man.** This virginal generation is the sign that Jesus has God for His Father. Hence, Mary's virginal motherhood cannot be separated from the identity of Jesus, true God and true man. The Annunciation and the Incarnation are inextricably bound together, as is the communion of Mother and Son and the involvement of the Mother in the redemptive mission of the Son. Mary is the solitary boast of our nature; the only creature conceived without original sin; the only creature redeemed, not by cleansing but by preservation from sin; the only virgin who is also mother; the only creature prior to the final coming of Jesus to know the eschatological dimension of the Church's final holiness, as seen in the resurrection of Mary's body and her Assumption, body and soul, into the glory of her Son. She shows us the glory God wills to pour out upon the Bride of Christ, His Church, all of us.

As the early Church's understanding of Mary's divine motherhood blossomed, so did its understanding of Mary as the new Eve in her spiritual and universal motherhood of the new creation brought about by the new Adam in the new covenant in His Blood. Blessed John Paul II quotes Arnold of Chartres, a friend of St. Bernard's, on the spiritual motherhood of Mary effected on Calvary.

He distinguished in the cross “two altars: one in Mary’s heart, the other in Christ’s body. Christ sacrificed his flesh, Mary her soul.” Mary sacrificed herself spiritually in deep communion with Christ, and implored the world’s salvation: “What the Mother asks, the Son approves and the Father grants.” (Theotokos, Pg. 26.)

Devotion to and veneration of Mary is not a matter of sentimentality but is, according to Blessed John Paul II, a revealed truth and is the will of Jesus evident in his dying words to the Beloved Disciple: “Behold thy Mother!” That entrustment of Mary to John was Jesus’ command to love and venerate Mary as Mother as He had done. Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical *Marialis Cultis*, defines all devotion to Mary as Christocentric, deriving its meaning precisely from Mary’s relationship to Christ; Trinitarian, understanding that Mary was fashioned by the Father to be Mother of the Son and Spouse and temple of the Holy Spirit; and ecclesial, for as Mother of Christ, Mary is Mother of the whole Christ, the Sacred Humanity and the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Mary’s unique and indispensable role in mankind’s salvation is constantly celebrated in the Church’s liturgical life of praise and worship of God. Mary is honored at the right hand of Jesus, just as Jesus is honored at the right hand of the Father. In common usage we speak of someone being indispensable to another as being his “right hand” person.

With this background of catechesis on Mary, we ponder Our Lady’s words to Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil as recorded in her Diary on the apparitions of Our Lady of America®.

“I am the Mother of the sacred humanity, and it is my special work as co-redemptrix of the human race to help souls reach the sanctity of the Father in eternal union by showing them how to put on Christ, to imbibe His Spirit, and thus become one with Him.

My heart, my Immaculate Heart, is the channel through which the graces of the Sacred Heart are given to men....But to make your hearts grow more and more like to the Heart of the Son, you must go to the Mother, whose heart is most like His. From this Pure and Immaculate Heart you will learn all that will make you more pleasing to the Divine Heart of the Son of God. The Holy Trinity looks down with infinite delight upon such souls and makes them Its heaven upon earth. ...

Has ever a mother shown more love and interest in her children’s welfare than I have done? ...I am the Immaculate One, Patroness of your land. Be my faithful children as I have been your faithful Mother.”

[Sister Mildred states:] Our Lady spoke to me about the Divine Indwelling. It was her life and she lived it perfectly, always conscious of His presence, never forgetting that all her greatness came from within, from Him Who dwelt there, working, loving, and doing good through her.

This is what Our Lady means when she speaks of reformation, renewal. It is this about which she is so concerned, namely, sanctification from within. As Our Lady spoke this, she seemed at the time to be deeply occupied. Though the serenity of her countenance never left her, she spoke with a gravity that made her words all the more solemn. She seemed anxious to impress me with some idea of the greatness of this gift of God to us, namely, His Divine Presence within our souls through sanctifying grace.

(Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil, Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA®, Fostoria, Ohio, Pg. 24, 18.16, 12.)

We capture the very essence of Mary's favor, her fullness of grace, her role as God-bearer to God's people and sharer in the Messianic mission of Jesus, her role as model of holiness and faith, humility and surrender, in the image of her appearance to Sister Mildred on November 22-23, 1957.

This vision of herself is very important, as it reveals Our Lady as she really and truly was, the Immaculate Tabernacle of the Indwelling God.

Our Lady was standing on a globe, her right foot resting on a crescent or quarter moon, the left on the snout of a rather small and very ugly looking dragon. I saw fire come out of his huge jaws, but not very much, as he could not open them wide enough because of Our Lady's foot. At times he seemed to be somewhat black, again of a shade of green. Our Lady was all in white. Her veil was so long that it seemed to envelop the globe halfway. Sometimes the veil appeared so transparent that Our Lady's hair could be seen through it, and the hair seemed to be sparkling with the light of many glittering stars. At times the edges of the veil, sleeves, and garments seemed to be outlined in light. The veil was held about her head by a wreath of white roses. Her feet were bare.

The previous day Our Lady had appeared with her hands outstretched. At this second visit she slowly raised them, then crossed them on her breast rather close to her waist. While doing so, she bent her head slightly forward, and it seemed that her eyes were closed, not just lowered. On her breast, as though through a veil, the Triangle and the Eye, which is often depicted as the symbol of the Divine Indwelling, could be visibly seen. I said that Our Lady's feet were bare, that is, devoid of any kind of footwear, but on each foot was a large white rose. The roses, both on the feet and on the crown, were of such dazzling whiteness that the outlines of the petals could barely be seen, sometimes not at all. It seemed that a strong beam of light streamed from the Divine Presence within Our Lady onto the globe at her feet. Then halfway around the figure of Our Lady above her head appeared a

scroll on which were written in letters of gold the words: “All the glory of the King’s daughter is within.”

Though it did not appear that her lips moved, yet I heard these words quite plainly; “I am Our Lady of the Divine Indwelling, handmaid of Him Who dwells within.” (Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA©, Pgs. 22-23.)

This passage speaks to Our Lady’s role in sharing Christ’s triumph over Satan by crushing the head of the ancient serpent as foretold in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve’s sin, and it speaks to that awesome gift of glory and Indwelling Grace God bestows on the humble and handmaiden heart, a Presence Elizabeth knew in her meeting with Mary.

Then the Lord God said to the snake, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head while you strike at his heel.” (Gen 3: 15.)

Inspired by Mary’s faith in the word that was spoken to her, may we likewise believe with the same expectation in the word Mary has spoken to us.

“My Immaculate Heart will win in the end, and the Spirit of Christ will dwell in the hearts of men.” (Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA©, February 11, 1958, Pg. 23.)

As a child utterly confident that the tears and prayers of a Mother for her child will never go unanswered, and that **“what the Mother asks, the Son approves and the Father grants,”** let us pray....

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

And may this be the prayer of petition to the Mother of our Lord our hearts will never cease praying!

By thy holy and Immaculate Conception, O Mary, deliver us from evil.

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