

WHAT ABOUT MARY?

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Jesus' mother has held a most varied and even controversial standing among Christian theologians, church historians and believers generally throughout the history of Christendom. The Roman Catholic Church has, nearly throughout its 1700-year history, venerated Mary to a position nearly as revered as Jesus himself. Protestants, in regarding the Roman veneration of Mary as heresy, have, for all intents and purposes, relegated her to a minor footnote in God's great redemption saga. I would be so bold as to suggest that Mary's role in His-story (and our place in that Story) is far more significant than even Catholicism has made her out to be, and certainly more important than the pitiful dustbin of God's great redemption plan in which Protestants have placed her. Let us consider the important role of the mother of Jesus through a spiritual lens, a lens that is replete throughout scripture.

MARY AS A "TYPE"

Throughout scripture—especially in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament as well—God has introduced natural phenomena to “typify” spiritual realities. When leading the children of Israel through the wilderness, for example, He came to them in the form of a cloud by day and fire by night. The cloud and the fire represented the very presence of God in their midst. God's presence is also signified by the cloud and fire in the New Testament as well. Scripture says that Jesus ascended into the cloud, signifying the very presence of God. We are also told that tongues of fire descended upon the disciples in the Upper Room at Pentecost—also a “type” or picture of God Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit

coming upon the disciples that day. Countless other “types” can be found throughout scripture.

The suggestion that Mary was a “type,” is not to diminish in any way her status as Jesus’ natural mother and all that this entailed. In the context of God’s plan for the redemption of His creation, however, Mary plays a much more significant role than simply giving birth to Jesus of Nazareth some 2,000 years ago. We will see that this young virgin, and the event of her impregnation and giving birth to the Messiah, represented the very means by which God would ultimately bring salvation to His entire creation.

Mary Prefigures the Bride of Christ

Mary was the vessel that gave birth to the Son of God. She was but a teen-ager, but she was found a worthy vessel in the eyes of the Lord. She was also a willing vessel, but we know that she also had some questions. *“How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”* (Luke 1:34) These are her words that are recorded in scripture. I can imagine that Mary struggled a great deal more with the angel than what is recorded in Luke’s gospel before she ultimately came to the point of surrender to her calling. We can only imagine the struggle that Mary must have had. *What will people think of me? I will be regarded with contempt as a loose woman! I may be banished from my community, even stoned!* This was, in the natural, an impossible and even ungodly thing that the angel was announcing to her. She had every good excuse for refusing this mission, and I suspect that the angel might have heard some of those excuses before Mary ultimately complied. Finally, after what must have been an agonizing struggle, Mary told the angel, *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word”* (Luke 1:38). Aren’t we grateful that she did ultimately agree to carry and deliver the Son of God to a dying world!

The Bride of Christ. The New Testament has much to say about the bridegroom, which we know is Jesus Christ. Jesus spoke in a parable, for example, of the ten virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom (Matthew Ch. 25). The reference to Christ as the bridegroom is made repeatedly throughout the New Testament and in the prophetic books of the Old Testament. The obvious question, then, is who is the bride? If there is a bridegroom, there must be a bride! New Testament

reference to the bride is found especially in the book of Revelation. There is that beautiful passage where John is describing the New Jerusalem coming down: *“Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”* (Revelation 21:2, NKJV). This New Jerusalem is who God has been preparing for her espousal to Christ, the bridegroom. Indeed, this is a bride whom God is even now preparing. Paul, in writing to the Corinthian church speaks of his own travail over this body for their being made ready to be joined to Christ: *“For I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. I promised you as a pure bride to one husband—Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11:2, New Living Translation). The Greek word here translated as “bride” is *parthenos*, suggesting a marriageable maiden, and more accurately being translated as a pure or chaste virgin, which is how it is translated in the King James Version. It is worth noting, however, that the Revelation passage referring to the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband, uses the word *nymphe*. This Greek term carries with it the meaning of a woman already espoused, or a recently married woman. So what we see transpiring through these New Testament passages is a process of preparation. Paul is telling the Corinthian church that he is committed to presenting them to Christ as a pure virgin (*parthenos*)—one ready to assume the role of His bride (*nymphe*). This virgin, this bride in preparation, is none other than the church without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:27). I am not referring to the organized church here, Protestant or Catholic, though there are those in these assemblies who are part of this glorious bride in preparation. The virgin (*parthenos*) constitutes those who have answered the call to surrender all, to be purged and made without spot or wrinkle and readied to become the bride (*nymphe*) of Christ.

Revelation also speaks of a woman travailing in birth (Ch. 12). It is a captivating account of a great red dragon at her side ready to devour the child that was born. After the child is born, he is caught up to God and the woman flees to the wilderness. This is a fascinating account that I will touch upon more later. What I want to establish here, however, is the connection between the woman in Chapter 12, the virgin for whom Paul is jealous, and the *nymphe*, the bride of Christ as the New Jerusalem, in Chapter 21. The three, I suggest, are one in the same at

different points in the timeline and processings of God. The virgin of Second Corinthians (parthenos) and the woman in travail are represented in type by Mary in her struggle when confronted by the angel Gabriel. The New Jerusalem bride (nymphé) is typified by Mary's ultimate submission to the Word of God as spoken by the angel.

Mary's Travail, the Woman and the Great Red Dragon.

We know the story of the birth and earliest years of Jesus quite well. He was born in a lowly stable recognized only by a few shepherds who had been visited by an angel; and then some time later by the Magi who had seen the star and came from the East to worship the infant king. They came through Jerusalem asking about the King of the Jews. Herod then instructed the wise men to bring the child to him when they found him so that he, too, could worship him. This, of course was a ruse, as Herod's intention was to kill the child, and the Magi were so warned of this in a dream. Failing in this ruse, Herod then ordered that all children in the land under two years of age were to be killed. Getting news of this order, and upon instruction from an angel of the Lord, Mary and Joseph packed up and fled with the Christ child into Egypt.

The parallel of Mary's experience to the woman in Revelation is clear and it is striking. Mary's travail in giving birth was much more than the physical travail common to any woman giving birth. She was impregnated without having been with a man. She knew that she would in all likelihood face banishment from her community at the very least. We see, of course, how God took care of this by sending an angel to Joseph instructing him to take Mary as his wife, thereby avoiding unimaginable consequences for Mary and the life which was within her. Mary did not know of the angel's appearance to Joseph, however, when she uttered those words of surrender: *"Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."* (Luke 1:38).

Mary's travail did not end there. The parallel continues. Like the woman in Revelation, she was confronted with her own red dragon who sought to kill this child she was carrying. Herod's order that all male children under two years of age is prophetic of the dragon's reaction in Revelation 12:15: *"And the serpent cast out*

of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.” And like the woman in Revelation, she was taken to the wilderness for safe haven after giving birth to the child.

Brideship to Sonship

Mary endured her nine months of pregnancy as a young teen-aged girl with the grace given her by her Heavenly Father. She gave birth to the Son of God and named him “Jesus” as instructed by the angel Gabriel. In like manner, the woman in travail in Revelation chapter 12 gave birth to a son. This is a mystery to be sure, but John is speaking prophetically of the corporate son that is even now being raised up and matured to co-reign with Jesus Christ as His Kingdom is established throughout the earth. Much has been unveiled over the past century regarding Jesus as the pattern Son—the first of many sons to follow—through the anointed pens and spoken words of faithful men and women of God. If Jesus was that pattern Son, then let me suggest that Mary is the pattern bride; and by extension, the pattern woman in travail giving birth to the man child in Chapter 12 of the book of Revelation.

LEARNING FROM MARY’S EXPERIENCE

If Mary is truly a type of the bride of Christ, it would behoove us to examine Mary’s experience with a careful eye as to the lessons that it has for us, the *parthenos* in preparation to be the bride (*nymphē*) of Christ; and ultimately as sons of God with Christ as our head and elder brother.

We might ask the question, *Why was it necessary for the Savior of the world to be born of a woman? Why couldn’t God have formed Him directly from the dust of the earth as He did Adam?* The church has contended that it was necessary for Christ to be born of a woman so as to take on the form of humanity. Only by becoming fully human could He (God in Christ) take on the sins of humanity and once and for all become the sacrifice for sin that would forever justify all of humanity before a righteous God. I whole heartedly agree with what the church has had to say in this regard. Mary was therefore the necessary vessel for God to take on human form.

Might I be so bold as to suggest, however, that Mary's role portends a greater work that God is even now doing as He is preparing His virgin bride to give birth to a son—a corporate son patterned after our elder brother Jesus. Just as Jesus was the first of many sons, so it is that Mary is the first of many brides. But just what does it mean to be a bride as exemplified in the experience of Mary?

Mary was of Humble Stature

Mary was, by nearly all accounts, but a teen-ager at the time of her conception. Not only that, she was from Nazareth which, at least one reference in scripture would suggest, was not a town of particularly good repute (see John 1:46). This lowly woman was the one whom God chose to conceive and give birth to Christ in his humanity. Mary represents as a type the nature and character of the bride that Jesus Christ is preparing for Himself. The bride of Christ is not comprised of the elite of our society. We will not see the bride of Christ broadcasting the coming manifestation of the sons of God through radio and television airwaves. I want to be clear here. I am not suggesting that well known and high profile individuals are somehow disqualified from becoming the bride of Christ. I am proclaiming, however, that neither the acclaims of man, nor reputation among men, will have any part whatsoever with the bride of Christ or of her role in the establishment of the Kingdom that God is establishing on the earth.

The bride which Christ is preparing today is undergoing a severe purging. She is being stripped of all claim to fame among men. Like that young teenager some 2,000 years ago, His bride in preparation is asking the question, *“How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”* None of one's worldly assets—wealth, fame or recognition among men, personal charisma, or any other earthly advantage—will be of any use to the bride of Christ as she is being prepared for and carries out God's Kingdom purpose. All of those personal strengths which we have come to rely on are being stripped as we are engaged in a curriculum of relying on Christ's strength alone. As Paul so eloquently stated, *“And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me”* (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Mary Submitted to Her Calling

Though it is not specifically recorded in scripture, there is not a doubt in my mind that Mary responded to the angel Gabriel with every reason why she could not conceive and bring forth the Son of the Most High. Scripture does say that she was “troubled” at the word of the angel (Luke 1:29). Mary almost certainly went through a period of resistance before she ultimately submitted to her calling. Like Mary, those who have been called apart as the bride of Christ will be troubled and prone to resist. There is nothing in our natural selves that could possibly qualify us for this assignment. And many of us have no problem whatsoever in telling the Lord just that. God is patient. He will not disqualify us because we are “troubled” at this calling. He will continue to purge, to discipline, to encourage, to reveal, and ultimately to bring us to a readiness to submit to Him.

Our submission is a rather strange path for many of us. We are prone to directing our own lives. We have plans and aspirations, many which seem very godly, but are not what God has ordained for us. When we finally work through the resistance and make that surrender to God, we are no longer the one in charge. There used to be a bumper sticker that I would see on many cars whose occupants were wearing their Christianity on their sleeve. It read: *God is my co-pilot*. Nothing could be further from the truth for the one who has been called apart and has made the same surrender that Mary made that fateful day some 2,000 years ago. Oh no! **God is our PILOT!** We are merely the co-pilot; or perhaps navigator or flight attendant or whatever role that we have been called to on this journey that we are now on.

Our surrender, and our obedient response to that surrender will often look no more virtuous than the response of a young teen-age girl getting pregnant in a harsh patriarchal Middle-Eastern society two millennia ago. We may be called to take a job in a disreputable industry for purposes of being a light in that environment. Husbands and wives have been required to let their marriages go when their spouse placed demands on them that they could not meet and stay faithful to their calling at the same time. Or, you may be called of the Lord to participate in some action that makes no sense whatsoever to you or to anybody

else around you—that seems silly, unwise and even dangerous, perhaps. The one called apart, now answering only to an audience of *One*, is almost certain to find themselves in similar situations such as these. Our response, like Mary’s must only be, *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.”*

Mary gave birth to the Son of God.

Mary’s submission to the Holy Spirit which came upon her resulted in the most consequential event in human history, except possibly the death and resurrection of that child to which she gave birth. Mary gave birth to the first born Son of God. Understanding Mary as a type of a greater spiritual reality to come, John the Revelator is given a glimpse of this reality in his vision of the woman in travail in Chapter 12 of that marvelous book:

“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered” (Revelation 12:1-2).

Spiritually understood, this woman is the same woman who gave birth to the Christ child in Bethlehem and, might I suggest, is characterized elsewhere throughout scripture as the Bride of Christ. Yes, it is the Bride of Christ, typified by Mary some 2,000 years ago, who will give birth to the man child spoken of in later in Revelation 12. It is the birth of this man child, who Paul refers to as the sons of God who will eventually be manifested and raised up to rule and reign with Christ, the first born son (see Romans 8:17-19 and Revelation 20:6).

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST AND THE SONS OF GOD

If Mary is a type of the bride of Christ (or “pattern bride”) and Jesus is the pattern son, the first born of many sons to come, the question then becomes, *Who is the bride and who are the sons in our day?* I have read and heard a great deal of speculation as to who is the bride of Christ as opposed to who are the sons of God. Some people say that they are one and the same, and use the two references interchangeably. Others insist that these are two distinct categories of people. I have come to understand that these are two distinct spiritual roles played by the

same actors. Mary, and the qualities she exhibited, represents the connection between these two roles.

The Bride Gives Birth to the Son

Among those with whom I fellowship, both personally and through media, there is much conversation about the manifestation of the sons of God. Classical Greek language distinguishes between *children* (*teknon*) and mature *sons* (*huios*). King James often uses these terms interchangeably, but the distinction is important. I would argue that we are all children (*teknon*) of God by virtue of the fact that He has created us in his own image. (I am aware that there are many, especially those who would identify as fundamentalists or evangelicals, who would disagree with this.) When Paul talks about all of creation groaning and waiting in eager expectation for the manifestation of the sons of God, however, he is referring to an unveiling of those sons who have been matured through purging and refining by fire; i.e., a manifestation of *huios*.

It is noteworthy that just prior to the verse that speaks of the eager expectation of the creature for the manifestation of the sons of God (Romans 8:19) Paul says, *“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18). Also, we read,

“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son (huios) whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not” (Hebrews 12:6-7)?

The writer to the Hebrews is proclaiming that every son (*huios*) is chastened, scourged by the loving hand of God as He is thereby bringing them into maturity.

Ironically, however, the man child spoken of in the book of Revelation—that (corporate) son for which Paul says that all of creation is waiting in eager expectation—is simply caught up into heaven when it is born so as to escape the wrath of the dragon. There is no discussion here of suffering or being chastened. Indeed, it is the *woman*, representing the bride of Christ, who is in travail when we

get to the book of Revelation. This is a profound mystery leading some to believe that the man child and the manifested sons refer to different entities entirely. I would strongly disagree with this view, suggesting instead that the woman in travail giving birth to the man child is in point of fact those whom God has preordained to become sons as they are going through the process of chastisement.

Possibly a different way of stating this is that the process of becoming a matured son involves, first, surrendering to the submissive role of a bride as part of the chastisement that is so necessary in giving birth to mature sonship. Preston Eby has articulated this thought in a most eloquent and articulate fashion. I quote from him at length:

As God becomes so many things to us, even Mother, so must we become many things to Him. When God created man male and female in His image He revealed the great truth that He is Himself male and female in His attributes and nature. In spiritual maturity we enter into relationship with God in all the facets of His nature. We may truly become the bride of Christ and the sons of the Father and many other things as well. A dear friend has expressed it so succinctly: "Sonship has a power — the power of knowledge, authority, and what might be called heroic deeds; but brideship has a power, also — the power to submit, to lay down one's will, to yield to another. Sons have the power to be strong; the bride has the power to be tender. While it was the masculine nature of Christ that gave Jesus such resolve to face the cross, to set His face as a flint toward Jerusalem, for example, it was the feminine nature of Christ which could say, 'No man can take my life from me; I lay it down willingly. I have power to lay it down (feminine), and I have power to take it up again (masculine).' Both aspects at work in the same man; both aspects at work in the same body of believers; both aspects at work to fulfill the purposes of God!"

The bride relationship bears the feminine nature whereas the son relationship bears the characteristics of the masculine.

Aggressiveness, boldness, strength, valor, authority, power, and dominion are among the traits of the masculine sex. Hence the Lord says to the overcomer, “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. To him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne” (Rev. 21:7; 2:26-27; 3:21). Clearly the full overcomers are identified as the sons of God with power and authority!

Modesty, gentleness, tenderness, love, sensitiveness, and dependence are attributes of the feminine sex. Spiritually, these are the characteristics of the bride of Christ, as the apostle says, “Wives, be subject — be submissive and adapt yourselves — to your own husbands as a service to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the church, Himself the saviour of His body. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present the church to Himself in glorious splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such things — that she might be holy and faultless. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:22-28,32).

Can we not see by this that brideship bespeaks the spiritually feminine relationship of intimate love and reverent submission to Christ, whereas sonship embodies the spiritually masculine characteristics of strength, authority, power, and dominion to rule and reign over all things. Ah, beloved, let us never become so over-balanced in our zeal to become sons of God that we circumvent the

marvelous reality of brideship! The simple yet sublime truth is just this — THE WAY TO SONSHIP IS BRIDESHIP! This is why the Spirit has given us in the Revelation the example of the glorious sun-clad woman giving birth to a remarkable manchild who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron. It is the inworking of brideship that births the realm of sonship! No woman, no son! Jesus said, "I am the way...no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Dear man of God; dear woman of God; your relationship to Christ as a bride will forerun your relationship to the Father as a son. Brideship is the harbinger of sonship! It is through intimacy of fellowship and vital union with Christ, made ONE IN HIM IN LOVE, that we are initiated into that illustrious glory of strength and dominion over all things as sons of God. This is a true and inviolable principle in God that I pray no earnest saint of God who reads these lines will miss! (Eby, n.d.)

The wonderful truth here is that as Christ does His blistering work in us as His bride-in-preparation, to be presented to him without spot or wrinkle, He is at the same time maturing us as *huios* sons, preparing us to reign with Him in the Kingdom that He is even now establishing in the earth. Our responsibility at this time is to submit to His chastening.

Mary: Our Brideship in Type

We cannot overemphasize the importance of what this humble virgin represents as she submitted to the voice of God through the angel Gabriel, and gave birth to the Son of God. In type, she gave birth to many sons of God, a corporate son, who, with Jesus Christ as its head, will draw all of creation to know and acknowledge Him as Lord. Mary represents the surrender that is required of anyone who would truly know Christ as their bridegroom. She carries that spirit, which Eby and others speak of as the *feminine spirit* which yields in humble submission to the *male spirit* of Christ which is within each of us. We must understand that this Christ spirit, with which we have been incarnated is not received as a fully matured son; it is but a seed, much like the fetus in Mary's womb was not yet the man about whom God said, "*This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.*" This seed must be

nurtured, and this is done as we learn to yield in submission to that still small voice within, much as Mary surrendered her will to the voice of the Angel Gabriel. It is only as we learn to so yield, often with great anguish and distress of mind, that the Spirit of God grows ever stronger and more dominant in our being. Or, to use the picture that John is given on the Isle of Patmos, it is only through great travail that the woman (we, the bride) will give birth to the man child (the maturation of sonship) which is being nurtured within us.

This is a glorious process which is taking place within and among those whom God has called apart for his redemptive purposes. The symbols that are used in scripture vary, but they all tell the same story. Whether describing her as the bride of Christ or the woman in travail, the figure is one who is fully yielded to her bridegroom, of one who submits in great travail to bringing forth the son of the Most High; and whether we refer to the creation that comes out of this submission and travail as the man child or as matured sons—the story line is the same. God is raising up sons in this day who are being spiritually matured and prepared to share with their elder brother Jesus Christ, in the resplendent inheritance that God has prepared. That inheritance is nothing less than being seated with Him in heavenly places as part of the governing structure of the Kingdom which He is even now bringing forth in the earth.

This entire drama is presented to us in the life and experience of Mary. Her stature as a lowly teen-aged girl in the humble town of Nazareth portends the sort of person that God is calling apart in this day to accomplish His redemptive purposes. It will not be those in high earthly positions. It will not be the silver-tongued orators. It will not be those in positions of ecclesiastical stature and power. Oh no! It will be the weakest among us. It will be those of low and even ill repute. It will be those who are humble in spirit. Mary's experience also speaks of the process that we must endure as the bride of Christ. Mary faced misunderstanding and rejection from those around her. Even Joseph her betrothed was considering putting her away until he too was confronted by an angel. But Mary ultimately yielded in full submission to her Lord despite the cost that she faced. The result of this submission was the birth of the first-born son of God. And if Jesus is the *first* born, we know that there are more sons of God to

come. They will come through the same process that is typified in the coming of that first born son. And, as there was with Mary, there will be a cost involved in bringing forth these sons of God. We are told that the great red dragon sought to devour the son, but he was taken up into heaven immediately. This son, which is being born within us is being protected as it develops into full maturity. It will not be thwarted in this process. But the woman was forced into the wilderness to find refuge from the dragon. There is an enemy that seeks to steal, kill and destroy. As much as he would so desire to do, that enemy cannot touch the male child that has been born within each of us, His bride. And so that old adversary, the devil comes after the woman. He will attack our physical being with maladies of all sorts. He will attack our minds with fear and doubt. And so it is that, like Mary, we are taken into our own wilderness of His design to protect us from the onslaught that Satan has in store for us. Our wilderness is no more pleasant for us than the Egyptian wilderness was for Mary. It is, however, God's provision. It is here that the man child within is protected and nurtured until the time of His full manifestation.

Let us move beyond the unfortunate and misplaced station to which religion has assigned Mary. Let us now recognize and embrace for ourselves the remarkable position that she holds as a *type* of what is unfolding in God's great redemptive plan for the ages.

Eby, J. Preston. n.d. *From the Candlestick to the Throne. Book Seven: The Temple, Two Witnesses and the Manchild*. Pp. 156-157. Available online:
<https://www.kingdombiblestudies.org/Revelation/rev134.htm>