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Luke 1:26-38 Fourth Advent
December 24, 2017

We spent this advent season meditating on the Magnificat from Martin Luther's perspective. Lutherans seldom talk about Virgin Mary because Mary means Catholic and we are Lutherans. We talk about Mary during advent or on Christmas, and sometimes we talk about her on Good Friday then we forget about her the rest of the year. There are lots of Lutheran churches in Wausau named after a saint such as St. Stephen, St. Andrew, St. John, St. Mark and St. Peter, but very few named St. Mary's even though Mary plays a significant role in salvation history than John or Mark or Andrew.

Today I am going to talk about Virgin Mary, Mary the mother of Jesus, or as the Orthodox Church calls her, Theotokos, the mother of God. You can call her any of these names.

Over many centuries theologians have interpreted Mary's role in the salvation history differently. "Some medieval theologians exalted Mary to a status approaching that of deity even began to speak of a Quaternity rather than a Trinity."¹ This understanding of Mary's role is very unacceptable. Others have taken her to be a model of motherhood. Some feminist theologians have considered Mary to be a role model for "feminist identification: Mary the Virgin has known no man; she is her own person, unexploited; her identity is not given to her by any male, but is her own, a gift from God."²

¹ Mark Allan Powell, "Commentary on Luke 1:26-38," *Working Preacher*, December, 2014, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2268 (accessed December 22, 2017).

² Mark Allan Powell, "Commentary on Luke 1:26-38," *Working Preacher*, December, 2014, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2268 (accessed December 22, 2017).

I am a feminist, and I do not see Mary as feminist that because she never advocated for women's right and never supported social gender equality. I prefer the evangelist Luke understanding of Mary's role in salvation history. Luke describes Mary as a role model for Christians. She responds to God in humble trust and faithful service. The evangelist Luke talks about Mary much more than Mathew, Mark, and John talk about her in their gospels. He does not exalt her as a goddess, or as a mother, or even as a feminist. He thinks she has a more essential role, as the ideal Christian. She is the one that Christians should imitate if they want to follow Jesus Christ.

Luke presents Mary as the most Christ-like human being. She responds to God's message to her with faith. She accepts God's calling for her to be the mother of Jesus without complaining. Her words to the angel "are a direct parallel to what Jesus later prays in the garden:"³ Mary says, "Let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38) and Jesus says "Not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Mary trusts in God's word without regard to its cost to her reputation and safety. She accepts to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit without being officially married to Joseph. Believing in God's will and word makes Mary very special in the gospel of Luke.

Luke identifies Mary as the "favored one" (Luke 1:28) and as one who has "found favor with God" (Luke 1:30). Later, in the verses that follow this text, Luke describes her as "blessed" among women (Luke 1:42). Why does God bless and favor Mary? What did she do to deserve such a blessing and favor?

They evangelist Luke explains to us through Mary's kinswoman Elizabeth why Mary is favored and blessed. When Mary visited Elizabeth in Jerusalem, Elizabeth says, "Blessed is she who

³ Ibid

believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken by the Lord" (1:45). "Notably, she is not blessed because she is going to be the physical mother of Jesus, but because she believed God's word."⁴ Mary is blessed on account of her faith not her deeds. We can understand that God can bless and favor us when we imitate Mary and believe God's word will be fulfilled.

Luke repeats the concept of faith and trust in chapter 8 when his mother and brothers come looking for him. "And [Jesus] he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." ²¹ But he said to them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:20-21). We are members of Jesus family because of our faith in him and because we trust in his word. Luke praises Mary because of her faith and trust in God. We are called to imitate Mary in her response to God's word.

Lastly, Luke gives us a clear example of the necessity to have faith and trust in God's word. Luke in chapter 11:28-29 describes Jesus teaching to a crowd, and suddenly a woman calls out, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that nursed you." In other words, this woman calls out: "How blessed to be your mother." This proverbial declaration indicates that Mary is blessed because she has a great son like Jesus. This expression also means that Mary did a good job in raising a man like Jesus. But Jesus surprisingly corrects this woman by saying, "Blessed rather are those who hear God's word and obey it!" In this beatitude, Jesus does not give special status to Mary because she is his mother, but he gives an open invitation to us to hear and obey God's word. Mary is blessed because she heard and obeyed God's word.

⁴ Ibid

“So Mary turns out to be not simply the mother of Jesus but an ideal role model for all followers of Jesus: a servant of God who embodies faith and faithfulness.”⁵ We are called to imitate Mary and praise her for being a faithful servant of God. We are called to act like her by obeying and trusting God’s word that is manifested in Jesus Christ.

⁵ Ibid