

December 3: 2025:
Advent Midweek 1
Introducing Mary
Text: Luke 1:26

This Advent, we are going to do something different: a sermon series about the blessed virgin Mary. Well, not exactly. The main focus will be on Mary's Son, God's Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, he who gained human flesh and blood from his mother so that he could go to the cross and sacrifice himself for us there to take away our sins. So, as we get to know Mary, we're going to learn about Jesus. And how does the Bible introduce Mary?

Who was Mary? The Bible tells us a lot about her, especially in Luke chapter 1. The first thing we see is the angel Gabriel being sent from God: **"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth"** (v 26).

You probably know that the word angel is from the Greek word that means "messenger." Gabriel has a message. He's been sent. Where is he going? Nazareth. Angels live in eternity, in the presence of God.

They don't visit us very often. When they do, it's very, very important. So, this angel leaves heaven and breaks into our world of space and time to visit a certain person. This same Gabriel had been sent to the prophet Daniel centuries before to tell him the time had come for the captives in Babylon to return home. Gabriel was on a similar mission here, for the time had come for the Messiah to appear and set free all who are in bondage to sin. It had to be this way, for the Messiah must be a flesh-and-blood human sacrifice to take away the sins of the world, of humans.

Now, Nazareth is a town way up north from the important places with important people like Jerusalem. It's in the region called Galilee. "Galilee of the Gentiles" was the derogatory phrase for it. The Jews from there were a little different. They talked with an accent. You might call them the hillbillies of their day.

But isn't this just like God, to make something out of nothing, as we sing in the little Advent hymn that goes along with this series, and change the world from one of its most obscure corners.

Like the angel himself says, ***“With God, nothing is impossible”*** (Luke 1:37). He who created the sea could change it to support the feet of Jesus and Peter! He who created the law of gravity could suspend it so Jesus could ascend into heaven. And he who imposed death upon sinful mankind could reverse it so that Lazarus could come back to life, and so that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, could rise up from the grave after dying for our sins, so that each of you who believe in him as Mary did may live in the sure hope of everlasting life. ***“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”*** (1 Corinthians 15:55).

So, Gabriel is sent to a woman named Mary. How old is she? Doesn’t say. It says she is a virgin. That would mean she is a young woman of marriageable age, presumably well brought up by her family in the religion of the Jews, and physically mature enough to bear children, and that she had not known a man in the carnal sense.

This had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah: ***“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”*** (Isaiah 7:14). She was a good Jewish girl in the sense that Abraham was the father of the Jews: ***“He believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness”*** (Genesis 15:6). That is, she believed in the promises of God, that one day he would send a Messiah, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. Paul says that a true Jew is one like Abraham, who lives by faith (Romans 2:28–29). So, we can assume this about young Mary, that she had heard the Scriptures read in the synagogue and believed them. And surely she was praying for the Messiah who was to come.

Such was the prayer of every mother in Israel, for God had promised a man born of woman to destroy the serpent. In fact, it is possible that when Cain was born, Eve may have thought that he was the promised one. How wrong she was!

It took many, many centuries and endless genealogies, in fact, this is why they were kept. Have you ever noticed how often in the Bible it's the mother that names the child?

Here is Gabriel in front of Mary. I suppose there were lots of virgins in Nazareth at that particular time, maybe even a few named Mary. But Gabriel was sent to this one particular virgin named Mary. Was there some intrinsic virtue, some quality in her to attract the attention of the Lord? The Bible doesn't say. The Bible does say that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That "all" means all, including Mary. We acknowledge her as a saint, for so she is. But like the rest of us Christians, she is at the same time a saint and a sinner." Just like the rest of us. So, her appointment as "God-bearer," was by grace alone.

People have a lot of strange ideas about Mary, especially in the Church of Rome making her out to be things that she's not, things the Bible doesn't say about her, even things the Bible rules out.

The Roman Church has this notion they call the “immaculate conception.” Not about Christ, who, of course, was born without sin. Nor applying it to Mary. It applies to Mary’s mother. This is so that the cycle of sin, which is passed from parents to children through the reproductive process, had to be broken. So, for Mary to have been holy and the mother of Christ, Rome says, she herself had to be born without sin, which meant her mother had to conceive her without sin. Thus, one story has Mary’s mother, Anne, conceiving her without sexual intercourse. No. Sorry. What about Anne’s mother before her, and so forth and so on, like a hall of mirrors right back to the Garden of Eden? Paul, himself a saint and sinner, tells us in Romans 5, **“Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”** (Rom 5:12).

The pope also presents Christ as a stern, unforgiving judge who punishes sin and sends people to hell. If you want to approach him, you go through his mother who, supposedly unlike Christ, is soft and warm and welcoming. So, you pray to Mary to get to Jesus. No again. Scripture says, ***“There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”*** (1 Timothy 2:5).

The Augsburg Confession addresses this issue. We are to remember the saints and celebrate their lives as examples of Christian behavior. Lutheran Service Book lists August 15 as the saint’s day of St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord, among “Feasts and Festivals” (LSB, p xi). We name churches after saints. Luther himself was a pastor of the Church of St. Mary in Wittenberg, Germany. We honor the saints. But we don’t pray to them.

Mary was a human being like the rest of us. But she found favor with God, the angel said to her. She found favor the same way all the saints did: by grace alone.

Take Noah, for example: “***But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord***” (Genesis 6:8). The King James Version uses the word “grace.” Same for Noah, same for Mary, same for the rest of us who are being redeemed. In the Small Catechism, Luther counsels us to pray to God as dear children ask their dear father. God loves us! He loves us so much that he sent his only-begotten Son to die for us. All by grace. Beautiful, one-sided grace that draws us to Jesus by Word and Sacrament. All glory to God alone!

And all because of that Son, who’s the reason the Bible teaches us about Mary in the first place. The angel talks about this Son to be born to her. He is to be called Jesus. That’s the Aramaic form of the Hebrew name Yeshua or Joshua. You know, lots of people cling to rules and regulations. They like Moses, who laid down the Law. Dos and don’ts! But Moses, who represents the Law, never made it into the Promised Land. It was Joshua, a clear type of Christ, who led the people of Israel across the Jordan and into Canaan.

In the same way, Jesus, whose name means “God saves,” did everything for our salvation—fulfilled all the dos and don’ts and then went to the cross for our didn’ts and dids—and gives us that salvation as a free gift.

The angel goes on to say that Jesus will be great. Both true God and true man. You can’t get any greater than that! ***“The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end”*** (Luke 1:32–33). And so it came to pass that Jesus was born of Mary, and all the angel’s words were fulfilled. Now Jesus rules and reigns over all things. His kingdom has come. You are in it! In the name of Jesus.

Amen