

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 17 December 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Mother of Immanuel

Isaiah 7:14

Two thousand years ago, in the city of Bethlehem-Ephrathah, a virgin named Mary gave birth to a Child named Jesus, and laid Him in a manger. That same night, God sent a mighty host of angels to a band of shepherds outside Bethlehem, to announce that the Saviour of the world had been born that night in the city of David. Of course, we all know the story: the shepherds ran to Bethlehem as fast as their legs could carry them, and found the Christ Child lying in a manger.

Now, can you imagine what Mary must have thought when she heard this report from the shepherds about a mighty host of angels that had appeared to them, to announce the birth of her Son? This must have been a tremendous encouragement to her! She *really* needed that boost! No doubt, she had just endured nine months of cruel reproaches from friends and neighbours who did *not* believe that God had caused her to conceive miraculously in her womb. Apart from the support of her husband Joseph, and of her cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zacharias, Mary must have felt very much alone (especially after searching all over Bethlehem for a room, and finally being given an animal feeding trough in which to place her newborn baby)!

The report about the angels was *literally* a “Godsend” for Mary and Joseph. God sent it at just the right time, to lift their spirits, and to prepare them for the next report. You see, only eight days later, when Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple to circumcise Him, God gave them yet another revelation: and this time, the news was rather troubling for Mary, on a personal level. God sent an aged man named Simeon to the Temple that day, and revealed to him that the baby boy in Mary’s arms was the Messiah; and after taking up Baby Jesus in his arms, he said, **“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”** That part of Simeon’s prophecy was encouraging; however, that wasn’t all. He went on to say, **“Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”**

Mary’s soul had *already* been pierced through with the pain of being regarded as a “whore” and an “adulteress”; but little did she know the pain that was to come in the years ahead, as people would viciously speak against her *Son*, stumble over Him in unbelief, and then nail Him to a cross. In fact, little did she know the pain that would continue to be inflicted upon people for many centuries after her death, on account of both her Son *and* her. On the one hand, multitudes of people would be murdered for *believing* in the account of the virgin birth of Jesus; and on the other hand, multitudes of people who *did* believe in the virgin birth would come to worship and pray to *her*, instead of worshipping and praying to Jesus. *This* would have broken Mary’s heart! Little did she know that there would come a day when those who *refused* to worship and pray to her would be put to death. For example, on May 20, 1527, in Rottenberg, Germany, an Anabaptist pastor named **Michael Sattler** was charged with nine counts of “heresy”; and among these charges was the charge that he “despised and reviled the Mother of God.” Sattler’s response to this charge was that he and his Anabaptist brethren had *never* reviled Mary. To the contrary, Sattler said that “The mother of Christ should be esteemed above all women: for she had the favour of giving birth to the Saviour of the world; but that she shall be an *intercessor*, is not known in Scripture.”¹ For this “crime,” Sattler had his tongue cut out; had pieces of his flesh torn from his body

with glowing hot tongs, seven times; and then was burned at the stake. Eight days later, Sattler's faithful wife Margaretha, along with other members of her congregation, was drowned in the River Neckar, for the same "crimes." Margaretha followed the example of Mary, who submitted herself to God's will, and to God's truth, no matter what the cost!

Last week, we began a series of messages entitled *Immanuel: God with Us*. In these messages, we are delving into the prophecy that God gave to Isaiah, in 742 B.C.—the prophecy that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. In last week's message, we talked about the sign itself, and the backdrop for the prophecy; but this morning, we will talk about the *human vessel* whom God used to bring His Son into the world. The title of this message is ***The Mother of Immanuel***.

Read Isaiah 7:14.

I. The virgin's role

For six thousand years, God has been using sinful men and women, whom He has redeemed, to serve Him. The overwhelming majority of God's servants have been people just like you and me—people who have never performed any miracles (in the physical sense), but who *have* experienced the miracle of salvation; and through our witness for Christ, we are able to lead others to Him, so that *they* might experience the miracle of salvation, too. Of course, some of God's servants *have* been used to perform *physical* miracles, which defy the laws of nature; and some have been used to perform *mind-blowing* miracles—such as when God parted the Red Sea through His servant Moses. However, there is one person in history through whom God performed a truly unique miracle—a miracle that is in a class of its own—a miracle that had never been done before, and will never be done again. Nothing else even *similar* to it has ever been done. The person whom God used to perform this miracle was a chaste virgin named Mary, from the town of Nazareth. The miracle that God did through Mary was foretold by Isaiah when he said, ***“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”*** This miracle was also hinted at by the prophet Jeremiah, who wrote, ***“Behold, the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.”*** That word ***“man”*** isn't an ordinary word for “man” (such as the word *adam*, or *iysh*); it is the Hebrew word *gabar*, which means *“mighty man”*! The child that was “encompassed” by Mary in her womb did not merely *become* a “mighty man”: He already *was* a “mighty man” from the moment of conception. Why? Because He is the eternal God, who took on human flesh! He is the Son of whom Isaiah prophesied, ***“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”***

Just *how* unique was Mary in her role as the mother of the Saviour? Well, a look at the Hebrew gives us a little more perspective. In **Isaiah 7:14**, the Hebrew text literally reads *ha alma* (“the virgin”). The definite article “the” in front of “virgin” shows that God had specially chosen Mary, from among all other women, to be the mother of the Messiah. Only one woman in history could fulfil this one-time task. She was truly *“the virgin.”*

Now, that having been said, it is important that we keep Mary in her proper place. God called Mary “*the virgin*” because she was specially chosen to fulfil a one-time task. However, God did *not* choose Mary because she was *worthy* of the task. She was morally chaste, and she was a humble, faithful, willing servant of God; however, she was not sinless. Like every other human being, she inherited a sinful nature from her father Adam. The privilege of bearing the Son of God in her womb was a *gift* of God’s *grace*, which was given to an undeserving sinner. When Gabriel appeared to Mary, he said, “*Kaire, kecháritoménen,*” which literally means, “Hail, (one) favoured with grace.” He didn’t address Mary as “one *full* of grace”: he addressed her as “one *favoured* with grace.” Mary isn’t a reservoir of grace. She doesn’t *bestow* divine grace to the rest of us, as though she were God. It’s just the opposite! Just like all of us, she was a sinner in *need* of God’s grace; and she understood this well. Mary doesn’t *give* favour: she was *given* favour. She herself called God her “*saviour*.” She realised that the “mighty man” in her womb would save *her* from her sins, just as Gabriel had said. When Gabriel appeared to her husband Joseph in a dream, he instructed him to call the Child’s name “**JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.**” Mary was one of God’s people, of the house of Israel, whom Jesus came to save!

Read Luke 1:26-30, 46-47.

From the beginning of the New Testament, the superiority of Jesus to His mother is carefully pointed out. In **Matthew 2:11**, we are told that when the wise men came into the house where Jesus was, they “***fell down, and worshipped him.***” They didn’t worship the Child’s *mother*: they worshipped “***him***.” In that same passage, Jesus is constantly mentioned *first*, and *then* His mother. In **verse 11**, Luke says that the wise men “***saw the young child with Mary his mother.***” In **verse 13**, Gabriel instructed Joseph to “***take the young child and his mother,***” and to go down to Egypt. In **verse 14**, we are told that Joseph “***took the young child and his mother by night,***” and went down to Egypt. In **verse 20**, we are told that sometime later, Gabriel spoke to Joseph again, and told him to “***Arise, and take the young child and his mother,***” and to go back to Israel; then, in **verse 21**, we are told that Joseph “***took the young child and his mother,***” and went back to Israel. The Bible always refers to “the young *child* and his mother”—*never* “the mother and her child.” Jesus is *always* mentioned first, because He *is* first! He is the “***firstborn of creation.***” He is the Member of God’s creation who is *preeminent*, because He is the eternal God, who condescended to become part of our creation. He is the heir of *all* things, because He is the Creator of all things; and He is *always* first. By the way, this truth has a very practical application to our lives. As you look at *your* life, can you say that Jesus is in *first* place? Or is He in second, third, fourth, or fifth place, after yourself, your wife, your children, or other family members, or after your career, your recreation, or something else? Should He be in any other position than *first* place, Christian, you need to put Him back in His rightful place!

Now, the Roman Catholic Church not only places Mary *before* Jesus, but it claims that Mary is to be “reverenced” (i.e., “worshipped”), and prayed to. Worship of Mary, they say, is warranted, since the angel Gabriel told her, “***Blessed art thou among women.***” However, there is a problem with this reasoning. If the words “***Blessed art thou among women***” mean that Mary deserves *worship*, then there is another woman in the Bible who should be even *more* deserving of worship than Mary! Her name is Jael—the woman whom God used to “nail down” Israel’s victory against the Canaanites. God used a man named Barak to defeat the *armies* of the Canaanites in battle; but Jael killed their *king*.

Read Judges 4:15-21 / 5:24-26.

If Mary should be worshipped because she was “***blessed among women,***” then surely Jael, the woman who assassinated Sisera, should be worshipped even more, since she was “***blessed above women***”! Now, obviously, I am speaking “tongue-in-cheek,” here. My point is *not* that Jael should be worshipped. The point is that *neither* Mary nor Jael should be worshipped! The terms “***blessed among women***” and “***blessed above women***” mean the same thing. It simply means that God used Mary and Jael in unique ways, which set them apart from other women of their day. Mary is called “*the virgin*” because she was given a unique task; but it means nothing more than that. Furthermore, Mary did not remain a perpetual virgin, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. After Jesus was born, she had normal marital relations with her husband Joseph; and they had four boys, and at least two girls, together.

Read Matthew 1:24-25 / 13:54-56.

Mary was a wonderful and blessed woman. However, she is *not* our mediator, and we should *not* pray to her. The Bible says, “***For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.***” Jesus, and not Mary, is the one and only Mediator between God and Man. We also should not call Mary “the mother of God.” Why not? Because the *Bible* never calls her “the mother of God”! (Not even once!) Now, of course, we know that Jesus *is* God; and we know that Mary was Jesus’ mother. However, we must remember that Jesus has *two* natures—a *human* nature, and a *divine* nature. Though Jesus’ human and divine natures are inseparably united, they are also distinct. Mary was the mother of *Jesus*, in His *human* nature; but she was *not* the mother of *God*. As *Man*, Jesus had a beginning, in Mary’s womb; but as *God*, He had *no* beginning. As *God*, Jesus is *Mary’s* Creator, and not the other way around! It’s just like what Jesus said about His relationship to King David. Remember when Jesus stumped the Pharisees with the question, “***If David then call him [the Messiah] Lord, how is he his son?***” In other words, Jesus was asking, “How can the Messiah be David’s *God*, yet be David’s *son* at the same time?” The answer is simple, yet mind-boggling: the Messiah is David’s *Creator*, because He is *God*; yet, as a *Man*, He is David’s *blood*

descendant. It's the same way with Jesus' relationship with Mary. As *God*, Jesus is Mary's Creator; but as *Man*, He is Mary's Son.

With all this in mind, what should our attitude toward Mary be? Since there are multitudes of people who wrongly *worship* Mary, and *pray* to her, should we therefore shove Mary to the side, and talk about her as little as possible, so that we don't run the risk of idolising her? Not at all! There is much that we can learn from her life! God has given us many examples, in Scripture, of godly men and women, whose faith we can imitate; and Mary is one of those godly examples. Throughout the Gospels, God gives us many glimpses of the humble character of Mary. Let's take a few moments to examine her character.

The first character trait of Mary, which clearly stands out, is that **she was humbly submissive to God's will**. Most young women would have protested against being used of God in this way. (That is precisely why God *didn't* use them!) Now, God *can*, and often *does*, use unwilling vessels (even unsaved people) to accomplish His will; but for the task of bringing His beloved Son into the world, and rearing Him, God was looking for someone who would willingly surrender to His will, and lovingly obey Him. Remember how Mary responded to Gabriel when he announced to her that she would conceive in her womb? She *did ask* how it would be possible for her to have a son, when she was not intimately involved with a man; but she didn't *complain or protest*. After Gabriel had explained that the *Holy Ghost* would bring about this miracle in her womb, she quietly accepted the Lord's will. She said, "***Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.***" She submitted to the Lord's will, even though she surely realised that for the rest of her life, people would mock her story, and regard her as an adulteress. By the way, that is exactly how she was viewed! For the rest of her life, she was viewed with suspicion and scorn. By the mid-point of Jesus' ministry, virtually *every* Jew from the southern-most part of Judaea to the northern-most tip of Galilee had heard the story of the miraculous way in which Jesus had been born in Bethlehem; but most didn't believe it. (Most people even refused to believe that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, even though this fact was well-established.) That is why the people snidely said to Jesus, "***We be not born of fornication.***"

Read John 7:25-29, 40-43 / 8:31-41.

Another character trait of Mary (which flows from the first one) is that **she was humbly submissive to Jesus as her Lord**. The natural instinct of a mother, even after her son is grown, is to continue to give him advice and counsel (sometimes rather forcefully, and interferingly)! However, Mary knew that Jesus was the *Son of God*; and she submitted to *His* authority over *her*. We see the first glimpse of this in **Luke 2**, when Jesus was 12 years old. You know the story: Mary and Joseph had to go back to Jerusalem to find Jesus, after He had

gone missing for three days; and when they found Him in the Temple, where He was astounding the rabbis with His questions, Mary at first said, **“Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.”** However, when Jesus said, **“How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?”**, Mary said no more. She didn’t *understand* what Jesus was saying (yet); but she kept Jesus’ words in her heart, and pondered them. She knew that Jesus was her Lord!

We see this same submissive attitude in **John 2**, when Jesus performed His first miracle at the wedding in Cana. At first, Mary went to Jesus to let Him know that they were out of wine. Mary (who, apparently, was in charge of the refreshments) seemed to sense that Jesus might do something miraculous, to distinguish Himself as the Messiah; and though she was *correct* in her guess, it was not her place to *tell* Him, “Now is your hour.” Jesus gently said to her, **“Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.”** Mary did not yet understand that Jesus’ true **“hour”** of glory would be the hour when He would be hung up on a cross to die for our sins; however, she didn’t *have* to understand this. She simply submitted to Jesus’ will, and told the servants, **“Whatever he saith unto you, do it.”** Mary humbly submitted to Jesus’ authority, even when it *seemed* that Jesus was slighting her, and her other children. In **Matthew 12**, we read about the time when Jesus was teaching, and someone came to Him to let Him know that His mother and His brethren were on the outskirts of the crowd, and that they desired to speak to Him. Jesus’ response was, **“Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?”** He then spread out His arms over the crowd, and said, **“Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”** Many mothers would have been miffed by Jesus’ seeming “disrespect” (which it wasn’t), and would have angrily tried to manipulate Jesus, and push herself into the limelight. Many women, if they were in Mary’s shoes, would have said, “I am the mother of the Messiah! How can Jesus say that those who do His will are His ‘mother’? *I’m* His mother!” Many mothers, after being told this, might have *stopped ministering* to Jesus, and following Him all around the country, and providing food and rations for His twelve disciples. But not Mary. She, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and the other ladies, continued to travel around with Jesus everywhere He went, and minister to Him.

Mary was humbly submissive to God’s will; and she was submissive to Jesus as her Lord. Is there any other character trait of Mary’s that stands out? Yes! (And, again, it flows from the first one.) **Mary was also willing to suffer pain and rejection for the Lord.**

Read Luke 2:25-35.

On that day in Jerusalem, when Jesus was eight days old, Simeon made it clear to Mary that she would suffer much pain in her life. She would suffer the sting of reproach as people

accused her of immorality. She would suffer great emotional distress as she saw people rejecting Jesus, and going about to kill Him. She would also suffer great pain (like a sword piercing through her very soul) as she watched Him being hung up on a cross, to die a criminal's death. Like every other true disciple of Jesus, Mary had to "bear patiently the cross of grief or pain." However, she willingly suffered all this, out of love for her Lord. When Mary said, "***Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word,***" she meant it. Christian, I would ask: "Are *you* willing to suffer for your Lord? Are *you* humbly submissive to His will—even when His will requires great inconvenience, and surrendering of *your* ambitions? Do you *trust* Him, even when you have no idea what He is doing, and when His ways don't *seem* to make any sense? God wants to use your life for His glory; but being used for His glory often requires much suffering and pain. The question isn't whether you are *able* to suffer, because in our own strength and will power, we are *not* able! The question is, "Are you *willing* to surrender to Jesus, no matter what?" God will use *anyone* who will humbly submit to His will; and *He* will give that soul the power to obey Him.

II. The virgin's lineage

God chose to use Mary to bring the Saviour into our world *not because she was sinless*, but because she was submissive and obedient to His will. However, submission to God's will wasn't the only requirement for this job. In order to be the mother of the Messiah, Mary *also* had to be from the right lineage. She had to be from the line of King David! God had promised David that *the final* King of Israel—the Messiah—the One who would rule over the house of Jacob forever—would come from *his* line.

Now, since Jesus had no human *father*, there was only one way that this prophecy could be fulfilled: *His mother* had to be a descendant of David. That was, in fact, the case. Jesus received the blood of King David *through the gene pool of Mary*.

Read Luke 3:23-31.

What we are reading in this passage is the family tree of *Mary*. Now, Mary's name isn't mentioned here; but it is *implied*. How is it implied? Well, in **verse 23**, we are told that Jesus was (as people *supposed*), the son of Joseph, who was "***the son of Heli.***" Now, in **Matthew chapter 1**, we are told that Joseph's *actual* father was named **Jacob**; thus, we know that *Heli* was not Joseph's biological father, but his *father-in-law*. Simply put, *Mary's* father's name was Heli; and what we are reading here is *Mary's* family line. **Matthew 1** gives us *Joseph's* family line (which goes back to King David, through David's son Solomon); and **Luke 3** gives us *Mary's* family line (which *also* goes back to King David, through David's son Nathan).

Read Matthew 1:6-16.

My friends, Jesus *is* the King of Israel! He has the right to the throne of David both by blood, and by law. The *blood* of David runs in Jesus' veins because He received His human nature from Mary, who was a descendant of David. However, Mary was not from the *actual royal line* of David. She was not from the line of the kings, because she was not a descendant of King Solomon. (Rather, she was a descendant of Solomon's brother, Nathan.) Joseph, on the other hand, *was* descended from the royal line of kings; **and he was Jesus' legal father.** Therefore, Jesus is a *blood* descendant of David, through Mary, but He is also the *legal* descendant of David, through His adopted father Joseph!

Now, here's where it gets wild. We know that Joseph was from the *kingly* line of David. He was a direct descendant of every king of Israel from King David (who came to the throne in 1055 B.C.), all the way down to King Jechoniah (who came to the throne in 597 B.C.). *However*, there was a problem. First of all, Jechoniah was *removed* from the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, in 597 B.C. Secondly, because of Jechoniah's wickedness, God had sworn that *none of his seed* would sit upon the throne of Israel!

Read Jeremiah 22:24-30.

How could God keep His promise that the Messiah would come from David's kingly line, if Jechoniah (the last legitimate king in David's line) had been cursed, and told that none of his descendants would sit upon the throne? It's simple (yet profound)! God arranged for Jesus to be a *blood* descendant of David through *Mary's* line, yet a *legal* descendant of David through *Joseph's* line. Just as God said, none of Jechoniah's "**seed**" (none of his actual *blood* descendants) would ever be king of Israel; yet, Jechoniah's *legal* descendant, Jesus of Nazareth, is qualified to be King, because He *is* a descendant (legally) of the royal line, without being a *blood* descendant!

My friends, only an all-powerful God could have arranged Jesus' family lineage so precisely! The very fact that Israel still existed as a distinct nation after 600 years of being scattered from the land, and having no king of their own, is a testament to God's mighty power; but the fact that these two bloodlines of David were kept intact, and brought together, so that the Messiah could receive His qualifications as the King of Israel through them, is mind-boggling! Yet, should we be surprised? With God, nothing is impossible!

Christian, take courage from this! There is no problem in your life that is too difficult for God to handle! He wants to use your life for His glory; and if you will only trust Him, He will accomplish His will through you. He is still looking for “Marys” and “Josephs.” Will *you* follow their example? Will *you* believe His word, and trust His grace?

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would also ask this question: **“Do you know Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour?”** Have you been *saved*? Have you received His gift of salvation? God wants to use your life for His glory, just as he used Mary’s life, and Joseph’s life; but you must be *saved* first! Jesus came into this world to save *sinners*. He didn’t come to call righteous people, because *none of us* is righteous. Jesus came to call *sinners* to repentance. He paid the full penalty for our sins on the cross, so that we might be saved by simply turning to Christ, from sin, and receiving the free gift that He has already provided for us. If you have not received His free gift of salvation, why not do so today? In your heart, cry out to Him; acknowledge that you are a sinner, and that you cannot save yourself by any merit of your own; and, in faith, *ask* Him to forgive you of all your sins, and make you His child. If you will do this, He will come into your heart *today*; and He will begin to use *your* life for His wonderful purpose!

¹ William Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 45.