

Full of Grace
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We're in a sermon series called Christmas with Grace. Christmas is all about grace. It was because of grace that God sent His only Son to earth so that He could be born in a manger and die on a cross for our sins!

I felt led to study the grace of God in the Christmas story. I'm preaching today a sermon called Full of Grace. Last week we defined grace as: God's unmerited favor. God's unconditional love. God's unlimited power. We see all three of these in the Christmas story.

The Christmas story starts off in Luke 1 with the story of the birth of John the Baptist. John was the cousin of Jesus and he became the prophetic voice crying in the wilderness to make a way for the Messiah.

John's parents had no children because his mother Elizabeth was barren, which was considered to be a disgrace in those days. But the grace of God was at work in the Christmas story. God's grace was the unmerited favor that chose Zachariah and Elizabeth to be John's parents. God's grace was the unlimited power that miraculously caused a barren woman to conceive a child. Luke 1:24-25 says:

Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, "This is what the Lord has done for me at the time when He has been gracious to me, to take away my disgrace among people."

What great news! Grace takes away disgrace!

We've all sinned and brought disgrace upon ourselves. But the message of Christmas is that God loved us even though we were sinners and He graciously sent His Son to die on a cross for our sins so that we can be saved from sin. Not only are we saved from sin, but we are saved from the disgrace of sin. Saved from the shame of sin.

The next place we find grace in the Christmas story is a few verses later. Luke 1:26-33 says:

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end."

Notice that the angel used the word “favor” two times. He called Mary “highly favored.” The word for favor is the same word for grace.

This verse is saying that Mary had received grace in the form of God’s unmerited favor. The Amplified Version says:

*Hail, O favored one (endued with grace)! The Lord is with you! Blessed (favored of God) are you before all other women!
Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found grace (free, spontaneous, absolute favor and loving-kindness) with God.*

The Douay-Rheims version says:

*Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.
Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.*

That’s where the Hail Mary prayer comes from – which I’ll talk about in this sermon.

The word “hail” is simply the common Greek word used for greeting someone. The phrase, “favored one,” means that Mary has found grace in God’s sight. The emphasis is not on Mary’s merit, but on God’s sovereign choice.

God singled out Mary for an important task. The phrase, “The Lord is with you” means, “God will give you His help for the task He has called you to do. Remember – another definition of grace is God’s unlimited power.

There are many wrong views about Mary – most notably those taught by the Roman Catholic Church. It was not until the 4th century that Mary began to take on a more exalted role in Catholic doctrine. The beliefs that developed about Mary are not found in the Bible.

For example –

They teach the Immaculate Conception – that Mary was conceived without any trace of original sin and she never sinned in her life. Not true – because in her own prayer Mary called Jesus her Savior. She would not need a savior if she was sinless.

They teach that Mary is a perpetual virgin and never had children. Not true because the Bible lists her children by name.

They teach the doctrine of the Assumption, which means that when Mary died, she was taken body and soul to heaven. They teach she is the Mother of God and the Queen of Heaven. But God has no mother and He has no queen in heaven.

Most notably – they pray to Mary. That prayer called the Hail Mary is composed of two verses from Luke and one line of man-made heresy.

The text of the Hail Mary prayer incorporates two Bible passages: "Hail, full of grace, Mary the Lord is with thee" and "Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb."

Those verses were the angel's message to Mary. They were never intended to be a prayer to Mary. Nowhere does the Bible tell us to pray to Mary or the saints. We pray to the Father in the name of Jesus in the power of the Spirit!

The Hail Mary prayer was developed over centuries and was not officially adopted by the Catholic Church until 1568! It was not practiced for most of church history!

The third part of the Hail Mary prayer is definitely not from the Bible. In fact, it directly contradicts Bible truth. That line is "Holy Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

Let me be clear – Mary was an amazing, faith-filled, godly woman of God! But she was born in sin like all humans are and she needed a Savior like all sinners do. The Bible never says that Mary was anyone but an ordinary human whom God chose to use in an extraordinary way.

As I previously said, Mary is not the mother of God. She was the human mother of the human part of Jesus, but she was not the mother of God because God is uncreated and had no father or mother.

Another unbiblical statement in the Hail Mary is the plea for her to "pray for us sinners." Here we see the unbiblical practice of praying to Mary to intercede with God for us.

First, we do not need another intercessor with God. Christ is the only intercessor we need. Through Jesus and Him alone, we have direct access to the Father. 1 Timothy 2:5 says:

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Prayer to anyone other than God is unbiblical. Praying to Mary or petitioning her to pray for us is against the Scriptures. Prayer is an act of worship. When we pray to God, we are admitting that we need His help. Directing our prayers to anyone other than God is robbing God of the glory that is His alone.

By the way – when people die and go to heaven – they do not attain attributes of God like omnipotence or omnipresence. No one in heaven – including Mary – has the ability to hear everyone praying on earth at the same time like God does. And no one in heaven – including Mary – has the power to answer everyone's prayers like God does!

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray – He said to pray to our Father who art in heaven – not our mother who art in heaven.

While Mary was certainly a godly young woman who was greatly blessed in that she was chosen to bear the Savior of the world, she was not in any way divine, nor was she sinless, nor is she to be worshiped, revered, venerated, or prayed to.

Yes, the Bible says that she was full of grace. She was shown grace – which means she received grace from God by faith just like we do. That grace was freely bestowed on her and freely bestowed on us.

The Bible says that Mary was full of grace and it says that Jesus was full of grace. John 1:14 says:

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So, are Mary and Jesus full of grace in the same sense? Absolutely not! In fact – the words translated full of grace in the English versions are two different words in the New Testament Greek.

The Greek words translated Jesus was “full of grace” mean “complete, lacking nothing, perfect.” Obviously, only God is complete, lacking nothing and perfect. All humans, including Mary, are incomplete, lacking and imperfect.

So – when the Bible says Jesus was full of grace – it is saying that He is the source of grace and the giver of grace. When the Bible says Mary was full of grace – it means that she is a recipient of God’s grace.

Mary is not the giver of grace! God is!
Mary needed God’s grace and received God’s grace.

The lesson for us is that is Mary – who was obviously a godly young woman – needed God’s grace – how much more do we!

And we receive that grace – not through Mary – but through Jesus.
Not by praying to Mary – but praying to the Father.

There are other lessons we can learn from Mary. Mary believed that God would do what He said He would do. So, we should pray like Mary prayed in Luke 1:38

Let it be done to me according to your word.

The lesson for us is clear: If God has spoken clearly through His Word, we must believe it without wavering.

Mary did not understand how the virgin birth could happen.

But the angel's word in verse 37 is always true:

For nothing will be impossible with God.

By the way – the original Greek says “no rhema” – no spoken word of God is impossible. This is not saying you can come up with something seemingly impossible and just because you believe it – it will happen. No! This is saying nothing that God initiates, and nothing that God says will happen is impossible. That's why the Amplified Version of Luke 1:37 says:

For with God nothing is ever impossible and no word from God shall be without power or impossible of fulfillment.

You saying something is not what makes it happen.
God must first say it and then you must believe and say what God said!

Another important lesson from the life of Mary is to submit to the will of God despite potential hardship. Mary submitted to God even though it caused hardships in her life – including Joseph wanting to separate from her.

Submitting to God is not always easy – but it is always right! It may require you to give up some things you desire. But whatever hardship we endure because of obedience to the will of God will be rewarded by God.

As a godly woman who trusted and obeyed God – Mary has much to teach us – especially about Jesus. So – our focus must be on Jesus, not on Mary. Look what that angel told Mary about Jesus in Luke 1:31-33

You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end.

We see several important truths here about Jesus.

1- Jesus is both God and man through the miracle of the virgin birth.

Jesus is not half man/half God.
He is fully human and fully divine.

The Savior had to be fully human, yet without sin of His own, to bear the sins of the human race. But He also had to be fully God so that His sacrifice had infinite merit before God. We must affirm both Jesus' humanity and His deity. Yes, He was the offspring of Mary, but He is called the Son of God!

2- Jesus is uniquely great, the Son of the Most High.

The angel said this about John the Baptist in Luke 1:15:
He will be great in the sight of the Lord.

The angel said about Jesus in Luke 1:32 *He shall be great.*
But he added, “and will be called the Son of the Most High.”

John was great – but not as great as Jesus. Jesus is uniquely God’s only begotten Son. In Matthew 11:11 Jesus said:

I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist.

By the way, that means that John was greater than Mary. But John himself said this about Jesus in Luke 3:16-17

I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John also said this when he saw Jesus in John 1:29-30

“Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for He existed long before me.’

Now wait a minute! John was born six months before Jesus, yet he said that Jesus existed before him. That’s because Jesus is eternal – with no beginning or end. No wonder John said in John 3:30

He must increase, but I must decrease.

Any elevation of Mary or John or any saint that puts them on the same level as Jesus is utter blasphemy! Jesus alone is the uniquely great Savior and Son of God.

3. Jesus will reign forever on the throne of David.

Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to David a thousand years before, that one of his descendants would reign on his throne forever.

Jesus is king over His people right now. But, when He returns, He will literally reign over Israel, as well as the whole earth, in His millennial kingdom.

The day is soon coming when every knee shall bow before Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. You can either bow voluntarily now, or be forced to bow later. Clearly, now is the time to trust in and submit to Jesus as Savior and Lord!

The bottom line for us concerning the relationship of Mary and Jesus is: While we should imitate Mary’s faith and submission to God, we should trust in and

submit to Jesus as Savior and Lord. The angel said to Joseph in Matthew 1:20-23

Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel" - which means, "God with us."

This passage shows us the two main reasons Jesus came to earth:

- Jesus came to save us from sin.
- Jesus came to be God with us.

And both of those things are made possible by the grace of God!

You may have experienced a measure of God's grace, but there is always more to experience.

James 4:6 says: *But He gives us more grace.*

God's grace saved Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego from burning in the fire. But God gave even more grace and showed up in the fire with them! The One who showed up was the one the angel spoke about – Emmanuel God with us! They got salvation and God's presence and so do we!

God's grace saves us from sin.
But He wants to give us more grace and save us from the shame of sin.

God's grace imparts the Holy Spirit to us when we are born again.
But He wants to give us more grace and baptize us in the Holy Spirit.

God's grace saves us from stinginess.
But more grace makes us generous givers!

God's grace saves us from our anxiety and fear.
But more grace causes us to be bold in our faith!

God's grace saves us from ungratefulness.
But more grace causes us to be passionate praisers and a worshipping warriors!

God's grace sets us free from addictions and strongholds.
But more grace empowers us to set others free from their strongholds!

God's grace comforts us in our troubles.
But more grace empowers us to comfort others in their troubles!
Thank God for grace and thank God for more grace!
I pray for you this Christmas that like Mary – you will be full of grace!