

**Luke 1:26** In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

How many of you flinched a little, or winced a little when we heard our gathering prayer earlier this morning? *Holy God, who chose the Virgin Mary, full of grace, to be the mother of our Lord and Savior, now fill us with your grace, that we in all things may embrace your will and rejoice with her in your salvation.* The Virgin Mary, full of grace...

My great hope would be that no one had any problem with these words. Hopefully it is not a big deal. We speak of the Virgin Mary when we recite the Apostles Creed. Hopefully no one is uneasy with that. I realize that in our modern world, many people are uncomfortable with the teaching about the Virgin Mary, because they do not for a minute accept the idea of the Virgin Birth. It is hard to believe. I have no problem with it because I figure God has the power to do anything God wants to do,

regardless of any human doubts or questions I might have. But in reality, I wasn't concerned about you flinching a little when mentioning the Virgin Mary, full of grace because you were uneasy with the virgin birth belief. I was concerned about you flinching because deep inside you were thinking "well, that sounds **pretty Catholic**, and I'm not sure what we are supposed to do with that!"

I have to shake my head a little about the things I was not taught when I was younger in my life. I had always heard about the Puritans and the Pilgrims and the Mayflower, and all that. I had always heard about people coming to the New World in search of freedom and freedom of religion. But it has only been in the last 10 years of my life that I realized the following: Roman Catholic Europeans didn't really start coming to this country until around the year 1830. Other PROTESTANT colonists had a 200-year head start! In fact, this new country was intended to be a Protestant place! It really was. When Catholics started coming in 1830 from Ireland, Germany, Italy, and Poland, they were not welcome. There was truly bad blood, there was suspicion, mistrust, all of that! If not for the brewing of our Civil War between North and South, we might have had some battles between the dominant Protestants and the new immigrant Catholics.

Due to our history, and my guess is that most of us in the room come from Protestant background families, due to our history, we tend to be suspicious of everything that we think is Catholic! OK? How many of you grew up hearing that Catholics were different? How many were told to stay away from them?

How many were told not to date them? So what about this Virgin Mary, full of grace? I cannot speak for anyone else, but I was not raised to have any interest in her at all. I was not raised to have any appreciation for anything about her. But then we look at this Bible of ours, and especially in the Gospel of Luke, we see young Mary playing an incredible role.

We know the story. The angel Gabriel, who had already stopped by to see Zechariah, the same angel comes to see Mary. And we are quite familiar with the words he says: *“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”*<sup>31</sup> *And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.*<sup>32</sup> *He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.*<sup>33</sup> *He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”*<sup>34</sup> *Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”*<sup>35</sup> *The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.”*<sup>36</sup> *And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.*<sup>37</sup> *For nothing will be impossible with God.”*<sup>38</sup> *Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”* It is possible that Mary waits until her final words here to say the most important thing of all. “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

I was not taught something in seminary. I was not taught something in church. It has only been in recent years that it hit me: Mary is actually the First Christian. She is the first believer in what she has been told God was going to do! But she is more than just the first believer; she is the first to surrender and submit. “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” First, in good Jewish fashion, and she is Jewish with her name Miriam; first of all she responds to God in the proper way by saying Hiney-ni, behold it’s me ( this is basically saying I HEAR YOU AND I HAVE HEARD WHAT YOU SAID 100% ). Message received! Then she again faithfully responds by saying that she is the servant girl of the LORD. This is the normal way you do it throughout the Bible. She acknowledges her place in the scheme of things: she is not the boss. She is the servant who will obey. And then she puts the seal on it: *let it be with me according to your word.*

This is great stuff! I know that our faith can be complicated, since we have all these different kinds of churches and all. But maybe the simplest way of all to look at this is to agree with the famous CS Lewis, the great British writer who once said “*In the end, there are only 2 kinds of people, those who say Thy will be done, and those who say My will be done.*” Which way does Mary show us? Of course, she shows us the right way, the better way, the faithful way.

Regarding our strained history with religious differences, even in our own culture and society, let’s take the time to figure out

where all these negative thoughts came from about Protestants and Catholics. But let's get over that so that we can come to appreciate what a brave thing this little girl, maybe only equal to a sophomore in high school, did so long ago. She is the Virgin Mary, full of grace. We need to follow her example. May it be so. *Let it be so for us according to your word.* AMEN.