

Mary

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[0 : 0 0] Just for a little while, I want to look at Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is the last in our series. We have not done it for quite a while, but over this last semester, we have occasionally in our evening worship been looking at better examples, and we have been looking at the examples of some of the women in the Bible for us to consider, and it is appropriate that this evening we finish with the life of Jesus' earthly mother, Mary, and look at her life and one or two things that we can take from that. The great thing about the Bible for us, I think, in many ways, is it often brings to our attention people, its people that we have in the Bible, ordinary people, people like you and people like me, and people that are there often for us as examples, and sometimes for us as warnings as well.

Mary is very much one who is an example for us, an ordinary person with great faith, a gift of faith that she acted on and responded to and remained faithful throughout her life with God's grace and God's help. I think that is very important because it helps us to relate to people, when it helps us to relate our faith to our own situations when we see people in the Bible and God revealing them to us and their lives and their struggles and their blessings. I want to look at some of her characteristics. I think that they will be useful for the parents tonight, as they think of their own Christian lives and the kind of example they want to be to their children, and for us all, as individuals, as married couples, as parents, as grandparents, whoever we are, that there are characteristics that we want to example and we want to share, and we want our children to know and to share also in their lives.

So I want to read a little bit more, just a few verses from Luke chapter 1, which is the song of Mary, very famous part of the Bible, maybe not so much in our own tradition, but it is certainly a very famous part of the Bible and a very beautiful part of the Bible. Luke's Gospel chapter 1 and from verse 46, this is her response to the amazing truth that she is blessed by God in what is happening.

And Mary said, My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the mighty one has done great things for me, holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with His arm, He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but He has sent the rich away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abram and to His descendants forever, even as He said to our fathers. So I just want to pick from this and from other parts of the New Testament, one or two very simple, very basic, very easy to apply to our own lives, characteristics about Mary and think about her. And the first thing I want to say is that she was a genuine believer. She was a genuine believer. These were not great revival days in which she lived. It was difficult to be a believer in the days in which she lived. There was a great deal of unbelief. The spiritual temperature was not warm, it was not hot, it was cold. There was a lot of religion, there was a lot of hypocrisy around Jesus called the religious leaders of the day, whitewashed tombs. They did all the right things on the outside but their hearts were rotten and far away from God. And so there wasn't many bright, shining examples of faith. There wasn't many people who believed but Mary was certainly gold in amongst the dross of the day. And there are in the New Testament and early in the New Testament shafts of light in the darkness, in the kind of story of Jesus' birth. You've got people like great people, the old people like Simeon that we mentioned last week and his prophetic insight to this baby, Jesus and who he was and what he would come to do and that he could go in peace, that he could now just die because he had seen the Redeemer and also the rejoicing of Anna the prophetess as she saw this child also and recognized who the child was. And of course there's Mary among others but Mary is a shining example of someone with genuine faith and no more so in this amazing song that she proclaims, a spirit-filled song that she declares her faith and her trust.

God is her Savior, my spirit rejoices. I mean it's amazing insight that she has. I rejoice in God my Savior because he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. God is her guide.

[6 : 02] She looks to the one that will lead her and will take her and will show her where to go. She knows of his ways, she understands his mighty acts and the deeds that he's done in the past.

She's knowledgeable about the work of God in the Old Testament. She's a genuine believer who knows that God is with her and she trusts in God even if she's had this unbelievable and remarkable and visitation and conception that again hard for us to comprehend how strange and how remarkable and miraculous and difficult the whole concept of her being pregnant at her young age out of marriage and all that that meant yet she had great faith in God revealed in this testimonial in this great song she sings and also in heaven's own declaration as to her standing.

You know you're highly, twice we're told that she's highly favoured by the angel, the angel says she's highly favoured and that is repeated and it's that reminder to us that she was known by name, she had faith in God, she trusted God, God was in relationship with her through whatever that meant in terms of the shadowy days in which she was living and the lack of insight that she had into the work of the Savior. She's still trusted in God and she was a believer through what her son would then come to do on the cross, an Old Testament believer who was sins were forgiven on the basis of what would happen on the cross of Jesus Christ. And we remind ourselves just from that very simple lesson we remind ourselves that God is never interested particularly with status or privilege.

Mary had neither, Mary wasn't significant or important in the world's eyes and nobody unseen or known, uneducated and yet she'd accepted this great gift of faith and she knew and loved the Lord, God as her Savior and she had this great relationship with the Father. And that's a great reminder to us in our ordinariness, in our plainness, in our lack of influence in the world in which we live, that what matters is our relationship with God and that our status with God comes from our understanding of Jesus Christ and our accepting of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It makes us joint heirs with Christ, it makes us sons and daughters of the living God and that's a great thing.

And we rejoice and give thanks in that this evening and we rejoice in the covenant to which we've entered by faith and one which we know is extended to our children which is revealed and expressed through baptism. And within that Mary trusted, you know, she trusted with such limited knowledge, you know, she did trust with just that old Testament light that she had and we have so much more this evening, far more than Mary had and we do have to ask the question, well what about us? You know, she makes this magnificent testimony in song of God and we see her life going through, she had so little in which to act on, we have far more, far more privileges, far more light, far more knowledge, we have the finished work of Jesus Christ, we have his death, we have his resurrection, we have his ascension, we have the history of the church, we have a completed canon of scripture, we have so many things, what is it for us with all that we have, what are we doing with what we have? Do we have that knowledge, do we have that trust and that faith that Mary had? You know, I suppose at Christmas time you think about presents and stuff like that and sometimes kids that have, maybe adults as well, maybe it's harsh just saying kids but adults as well that have all these presents, you think the more presents people have sometimes the more spoiled they become and the less grateful they are for what they get.

[10 : 33] I was at Falkirk this morning, I was telling this earlier on in the house, I was asking the kids address about presents and what they were getting and what they would really like, what they'd be really excited about and one wee boy said potatoes. So, I'm not sure if he wasn't getting much for Christmas but he seemed to be excited that they thought of getting potatoes, a bag of potatoes even and that's a good thing, he's excited about that but maybe we get so many things that we're not excited by the little things anymore and the more we get the more spoiled we can become and I think that can be true spiritually, we have absolutely so much at our fingertips, so much knowledge, so much opportunity, so much freedom, so much we can learn and understand and know and are we just like spoiled kids, are we abusing that, are we taking it for granted, are we rejecting it, are we expecting more, do we demand more of God and what more can he do for us and we learn from Mary's amazing faith with her little privilege but at the same time also from Mary we, within this example, it's good for us, we're told twice that she was highly favoured in heaven and we are to seek that same favour from heaven, not to earn our salvation, you know that's free and full in Christ but in service, as we live our lives, as you live your life as a Christian and as I live my life, we are to live our lives as holy people, living sacrifices, what does it say in Romans 2, holy and acceptable, are pleasing to God, we want God wants our lives to be pleasing to him and our lives will be pleasing to him as we are disciples and disciples are those who obey everything Jesus has commanded us to know and it is incumbent on us to seek the blessing and the favour of God, as you come to an end of years, we look forward to a new year, let us look for the blessing and favour of God in our service because we want that, because we love him, because he loves us, because discipleship is about being pleasing to God through Christ and in Christ and with Christ and that is a blessed place to be, so we recognise that she was a genuine believer, we also recognise that she submitted very fully to God's will in her life in verse 38 of that chapter in Luke chapter 1 where she's been told about the miracle that is to happen to her, she says, I am the Lord servant, may it be to me as you have said, the angel left her, that was again an amazing statement of faith, think about what has happened there, this young teenage girl who is to be pregnant, scandalous in her day, sure an angel came, yeah absolutely it was born of the spirit, of course as all the gossip and the innuendo and everything else happened and as the tension between her and Joseph rose, but she was willing and was able to say I am the Lord servant, may it be to me as you have said, there was this great submission to God's will, a submission in the heights, so she was going to know great blessing, she says later on in her song, she says from now on all generations will call me blessed, from now on all generations will call me blessed, so she knows there's a blessing involved in what is happening to her and that she is the favourite of God and has been touched by God, so there's going to be great heights for her, great heights of joy and faith and pleasure for Christ's sake,

but there's also going to be great depths for her also isn't there, great depths in her current situation and the fact that she's just to leave home, she's just to go to Egypt, that she has this weight on her shoulder, that she becomes a refugee, that probably not too far further on in her life, she becomes a widow and then her son as he grows up and the publicity of her son and what happens with him and all kind of under that umbrella of Simeon's prophecy to her that a sword would pierce her own soul, so there was the heights of blessing but there was also this great prophetic reality that there would be deep, deep depths for her in her life but she was submissive to God's will and a great example isn't it, great example for parents, great example for teenagers, great example for young, great example for old, that we as Christians we submit to God's will, that we have a servant attitude, that we are willing to go where Jesus wants us to go and what's the kind of really basic and simple thing there, we need to know where Jesus wants us to go don't we, so we need to know him and we need to know about him and we need to know his word and we need to serve him and follow him and pray to him and ask him for that servant attitude, that we have the will to follow and obey and and within this whole submission to God's will there's the recognition that there's no guarantee then of a life of ease, in fact almost the opposite is probably a guarantee for us, that when we follow Jesus Christ, if we are looking to follow Jesus Christ and simply receive a life of blessing we forget the sword that is going to pierce her own soul to because there is always that sword, there is always the opposition, there's an end, something has woken up within us when we become Christians, our conscience has been awakened and we have the spirit in us and the light of Christ and the light of Christ makes the darkness of our own soul even darker, if we are willing to recognize and see that and know that and fight against that, fight against our sin and against disobedience and against unholiness and against backsliding and against doubt and all these things as well as satanic opposition in this battle that we live in, do we recognize the spiritual battle that we face and even the discipline that God brings in at various points to our lives, so there's this recognition that we see in Mary's life as she submitted to God's will and we will know that and it's good to teach our children that, I think when our children grow up in Christian homes sometimes we forget and sometimes I think they forget the sinfulness and the battles and the struggles and the opposition that they will face when they come to Christ because they've grown up in an environment where it's normal and where their parents believe and where that's what they've known and then they hit the world and they hit opposition and their friends don't believe what they believe and their friends live in a different way and the struggles and the battles, the tensions and the difficulties of our own soul fight sin that is there, she submitted to God's will but she also in the third place she watched Christ closely, twice in this section we're told and elsewhere we're also told that she treasured up these things in her heart, things that she heard, things that she was told, things that she watched, she treasured them in her heart, she was watching Christ closely, she watched him grow up, she was his mother, mothers know their children better than anyone and she was there

as she was growing up, he probably stayed in the home right until his public ministry, 30 years, she knew him, she watched him and then she was never even far from his ministry and from his life and even as we read, not as we read sorry but as you know she was not far from him and his death also so she watched Christ closely, very simple lesson isn't there, from the life of Mary she treasured up these things in her heart, if we believers we do the same, I'm sorry I can't graduate beyond that truth, I can't give you something else other than that we watch Christ closely, that we do the same, that we know him, that we know his will, he is the word incarnate, we know the word, that we understand who he is and what he wants and we pray for his spirit in our hearts so that we are able to follow him and serve him, we can't be Christians once removed, we can't rely on the faith of other people, we are asked again and again and again to find the time, to make the time to watch Jesus Christ closely by faith through his word, in his word, that we are watching and learning, you know kids will watch grown-ups, that's very often how they learn and we are in the same way to watch and learn from our spiritual brother, our father in heaven, our God, our triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are to treasure these things in our hearts, we are to watch him closely, there's no other way, it's very simple isn't it but there is no other way and it gives you that great freedom that you're not reliant on anyone other than Jesus

Christ although of course he uses church and teaching and fellowship and books and all these things but it's to Christ that we must come and watch and if you're not a believer here this evening can I ask you to make your judgment on the gospel on Jesus Christ by examining him because it's Jesus Christ that you will face on judgment day, nobody else and it's your opinion and your response to Jesus Christ that will matter on that day, not how you acted in church, not what you understood of doctrine, not how many times you came along but what you did with Jesus Christ on that day, it'll not be an opinion, it'll be Jesus Christ, don't reject him on the basis of his followers or his people but come to know him through his message and when we're sharing the gospel as believers, it's not church we're sharing, it's not our nice characters we're sharing, it's Christ we're sharing, it's the gospel of Jesus Christ and we are sharing the gospel when we are sharing the truth and the person of Jesus. Now just a couple of things just as we close, also her whole trust was in Jesus Christ, she understood and she knew and she believed that he was the chosen

Messiah in verse 54, she says he's helped his servant Israel remembering to be merciful to Abram and his descendants forever even as he said to her father, she knew her Old Testament, she knew the truth about the Messiah and her trust from the beginning was in this Christ that was the Messiah and in his 30 years with her she never saw anything to make her change her mind.

[22 : 55] If anyone would have seen and known and not trusted it would have been a mother and I think that's even highlighted in her first, in Jesus' first miracle which we read from in John's gospel, the wedding of Cana. Now we often just overlook maybe Mary's involvement in that and we think of the and rightly so, we think of the wedding, we think of the miracle and we remember that last section which says this was done so that the disciples would put the glory of God was revealed, Christ was revealed so the disciples would put their trust in him but you remember what Mary says, do whatever he tells you and that first public miracle, Mary without going into what Jesus said about you know my time has not come she says do whatever he tells you because her trust was in him and she believed in him and that is a great example for us, a great example that we are to put our whole trust for life, for eternity, for day-to-day living in the

Lord Jesus Christ and her advice remains sound advice right through our lives, do whatever he tells you, trust in him. Come to me all your labor and heavy laden and I will give you rest, Jesus says, she says do whatever he tells you, come to me and lastly and briefly I just want to remind ourselves that she remained faithful even to Calvary, even to the cross, you know, Simeon makes that great prophecy doesn't he that a sword will pierce your own soul too, now that may have had many different applications in her life but surely one of the most poignant and sharpest applications of that in her life was to see her son nailed to the cross of Calvary, remember it was her son, it was God but it was her son and he was nailed to the cross and Calvary for her could not have been what Calvary is to us, for her there must have been great darkness, deep doubt, absolute pain and astonishing fear, was it the end of hope, was she still able to trust and maybe even later on in his resurrection as she thought back to her son in the cross the sword would have been a sort of conviction that even her sins put her son to the cross and that was required for her salvation, when all other deserted she remained faithful to the cross even though there was great darkness and great pain and great sorrow there but also amazing tenderness because remember while she is there when everyone else is deserted Jesus looks after her and in his moment of depth and darkness as he faces the wrath of God and the the darkness of hell and the grave he passes his own mother onto John for John to care and look after the tender love and care even in the most intense of suffering of the Savior and we're reminded I think for ourselves in our lives and in our characters that faithfulness to Jesus will always take us to the cross, we will always faithfulness will always be a journey that goes by the cross of Christ in fact it will never really leave the cross and it means that we will stick by Jesus Christ supposing there is not one other believer left on this earth do you think you could do that? I think I could do that there was no other believers who would be faithful by staying close to Jesus Christ seeking his grace to enable us to see the cross even when other people have deserted and maybe that's even at a lesser extent a challenge for us when there's very few believers are we able to persevere and remain with the cross and with Christ and a sword will pierce our own souls at various times in our lives whether it be conviction of sin and we need to have conviction of sin we need to be convicted of our need of a Savior otherwise we will never seek him and I fear that that is a great lack today in my life and in the life of the church there's very little sense of need very little sense of conviction of sin life is just easy and yet it's in that conviction and it's in the darkness of a Calvary event for us darkness of confusion and darkness and difficulty when we remain faithful it will be in these times that sometimes we sense the voice of Jesus and the compassion and the tenderness of Jesus most closely in our lives as Mary experienced in the cross and we look for that and we seek that in our lives his closeness in our darkness so I conclude simply by saying let's always be Calvary Christians let's stick to the cross let's remind ourselves that that is where faithfulness will take us because it reminds us of our own hearts it reminds us of our rebirth it reminds us of our transformation it reminds us of grace and it reminds us that he is no longer there because on this first day of the week he has risen and that is the great news for us it's the great news we seek to live in our families it's the great news we want our children to know and understand and accept for themselves they they receive baptism as part of the wider covenant family of God the privilege of that covenant family but we know that baptism will not save them but baptism is a reminder of the promises that by faith we know and hope that they take for themselves in confessing and accepting Jesus as their Lord and

Savior so let's bow our heads and just pray about these things before the baptism Lord God help us we ask and pray guide us teach us your ways we thank you for Mary what a wonderful person she was as she's revealed to us and we thank you for her and we thank you that she pointed to Jesus Christ that she took no glory for herself that she didn't and wasn't anything special in the human terms and in terms of the world around her but that she had this wonderful and simple and yet courageous and strong faith gifted to her that she knew and and saw and lived in her life and we thank you that she is blessed and that she's a great example to us and as parents we seek to follow the Christ likeness of her life and follow the Savior that she bore and we seek by faith to live in your strength and by your spirit as people all of us and we ask and pray Lord God that you would bless us and bless the sacrament that we participate in today and we do pray that you would remind us of the privileges but you would also encourage us with your forgiveness when we make mistakes as people as families as parents as individuals that you would we would know the joy and the freedom of not being imprisoned or enslaved by our own failures and no freshness and unison and life each day so go before us now and partner sins in Jesus name amen