

Mary, the Model of Faith

Michael Barber, Ph.D. / John Paul the Great Catholic University © 2013

www.JPCatholic.com / www.TheSacredPage.com

Mary's Example of Faith

“The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that ‘with God nothing will be impossible’ and so giving her assent: ‘Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word’ [cf. *Lk* 1:37–38; cf. *Gen* 18:14]. Elizabeth greeted her: ‘Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord’ [cf. *Lk* 1:45]. It is for this faith that all generations have called Mary blessed [cf. *Lk* 1:48].”—*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 148

“Throughout her life and until her last ordeal [cf. *Lk* 2:35] when Jesus her son died on the cross, Mary’s faith never wavered. She never ceased to believe in the fulfillment of God’s word. And so the Church venerates in Mary the purest realization of faith.”—*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 149

The Annunciation to Zechariah

“In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty,⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. . . .¹¹ And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.¹² And *Zechariah was troubled* when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.¹³ But the angel said to him, ‘*Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. . . .*¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord . . . and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.¹⁶ And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God,¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.’

¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, ‘*How shall I know this?* For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.’¹⁹ And the angel answered him, ‘I am *Gabriel*, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news.²⁰ And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.’”—*Luke* 1:5–21

The Annunciation to Mary

“In the sixth month the angel *Gabriel* was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.²⁸ And he came to her and said, ‘Hail, *full of grace* [*kecharitōmenē*], the Lord is with you!’²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be.³⁰ And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.³² 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 father David,³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.’³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, ‘*How shall this be, since I have no husband?*’³⁵ And 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 called holy, the Son of God.³⁶ And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible.’³⁸ And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; *let it be to me according to your word.*’ And the angel departed from her.”—*Luke* 1:26–37

The Annunciations Compared

Annunciation to Zechariah	Annunciation to Mary
Angel Gabriel appears (1:11, 19)	Angel Gabriel appears (1:28)
Addresses Zechariah (1:13)	Addresses “Full of grace” (1:28)
He is “troubled” (1:12)	She is “troubled” (1:29)
“Do not be afraid” (1:13)	“Do not be afraid” (1:30)
“you shall call his name John” (1:13)	“you shall call his name Jesus” (1:31)
“How shall I know this?” (1:18)	“How will this be?” (1:34)
Fails to believe	“Let it be done unto me...” (1:38)

The New Eve

“In accordance with design, Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word’ (Luke 1:38). But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin... And thus also it was that *the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith...*”—St. Irenaeus, 2nd cent. (*Against Heresies* 3.22.4)

Faith as a Grace

“Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For *flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.*’”—Matthew 16:16-17

“...no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ *except by the Holy Spirit.*”—1 Corinthians 12:3

The Faith of Unborn John the Baptist

“In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah,⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, *the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit*⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!*’⁴³ And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?⁴⁴ For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, *the babe in my womb leaped for joy.*”—Luke 1:39-44

“Elizabeth, who was filled with the Holy Spirit at that moment, received the Spirit on account of her son. The mother did not inherit the Holy Spirit first. First John, still enclosed in her womb, received the Holy Spirit. Then she too, after her son was sanctified, was filled with the Holy Spirit”—Origen, 3rd cent., *Homilies on the Gospel of Luke* 7.3

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and *before you were born I consecrated you*; I appointed you a prophet to the nations”—Jeremiah 1:5

Mary as “Full of Grace”

“And [Gabriel] came to her and said, ‘Hail, *full of grace* [*kecharitōmenē*], the Lord is with you!’”—Luke 1:28

“And Stephen, full of grace [*plērēs charitos*] and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.”—Acts 6:8

Because the angel greeted Mary with new expressions, which I have never encountered elsewhere in the Scriptures, it is necessary to comment on this. I do not, in fact, recall having read in any other place in the Sacred Scriptures these words: Rejoice, O Full of Grace. Neither of these expressions is ever addressed to a man: such a special greeting was reserved only for Mary.— Origen, 3rd cent. (*Homilies on the Gospel of Luke* 6.7)

Mary Illuminates Christ’s Power as Savior

“And Mary said, ‘*My soul magnifies the Lord,*⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in *God my Savior,*⁴⁸ for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth *all generations will call me blessed.*” —Luke 1:46–47

“What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ” —*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 487

The Immaculate Conception

1. Mary as “full of grace” —*kecharitōmenē* (Luke 1:28)(perfect passive participle)
 - a. Mary was *perfectly* full of grace
 - b. Suggests Mary had *always* been filled with grace
2. Immaculate Conception as fullest expression of Luke 1:28 and of Jesus’ power to save

Icon of the Church Forgiven by Grace

“He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ...⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace which he *freely bestowed* [*echaritōsen*] on us in the Beloved.⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, *the forgiveness of our trespasses*, according to the riches of his grace⁸ which he lavished upon us.” —Ephesians 1:5–8

“All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and *Mary the mother of Jesus*, and with his brethren.” —Acts 1:14

“By her complete adherence to the Father’s will, to his Son’s redemptive work, and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit, *the Virgin Mary is the Church’s model of faith and charity*. Thus she is a ‘preminent and ... wholly unique member of the Church’; indeed, she is the ‘*exemplary realization*’ (*typus*) of the Church.—*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 967

Mary’s Biblical Prayer

Hannah’s Prayer (1 Samuel 2)	Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 2)
“ <i>My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in the Lord</i> ” (2:1)	“ <i>My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior</i> ” (2:46–47)
“There is <i>none holy like the LORD...</i> ” (2:2)	“for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and <i>holy is his name.</i> ” (2:49)
“The bows of the mighty are broken, but <i>the feeble gird on strength...</i> ⁶ The LORD kills and brings to life; <i>he brings down</i> to Sheol and raises up. ⁷ The LORD makes poor and makes <i>rich</i> ; he brings low, <i>he also exalts.</i> ” (2:4, 6–7)	“ <i>He has shown strength</i> with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, <i>he has put down</i> the mighty from their thrones, and <i>exalted those of low degree.</i> ” (2:51–52)
“Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but <i>those who were hungry have ceased to hunger...</i> ” (2:5)	“ <i>he has filled the hungry</i> with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.” (2:53)

“The *Magnificat*—a portrait, so to speak, of her soul—is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the word of God; the word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate.” —Benedict XVI, *God is Love*, 41

Mary as the Model for Contemplation

“And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and *his mother kept all these things in her heart.*” —Luke 2:51

Mary, Mother of Sorrows

“And when the time came for their purification *according to the law of Moses*, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’)²⁴ and *to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord*, ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.’²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.²⁷ And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law,²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,²⁹ ‘Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word;³⁰ for mine eyes have seen thy salvation³¹ which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel.’³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him;³⁴ and Simeon blessed them and *said to Mary his mother*, ‘Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against³⁵ (and *a sword will pierce through your own soul also*), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.’” —Luke 2:22–35

The Wedding Feast at Cana

“On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there;² Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples.³ When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’⁴ And Jesus said to her, ‘O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.’⁵ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’⁶ Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.⁷ Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the jars with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim.⁸ He said to them, ‘Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast.’ So they took it.⁹ When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom¹⁰ and said to him, ‘Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.’¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” —John 2:1–11

The Certainty of Faith

“Faith is *certain*. It is more certain than all human knowledge because it is founded on the very word of God who cannot lie. To be sure, revealed truths can seem obscure to human reason and experience, but ‘the certainty that the divine light gives is greater than that which the light of natural reason gives.’¹ ‘Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt.’”² —*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 157

The Act of Faith

O my God, I firmly believe that you are one God in three divine persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I believe that your divine Son became man and died for our sins, and that he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths, which the holy Catholic Church teaches, because in revealing them you can neither deceive nor be deceived.

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 171, 5, obj. 3.

² John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua* (London: Longman, 1878), 239.