

The Holy Spirit and Mary
Power to be Pure
Luke 1:26-38

Today we are going to look at the Holy Spirit's involvement with Mary, Jesus' mother. The angel Gabriel made the announcement of Jesus' birth when he appeared to Mary. She was a virgin, a pure young woman who honored God. In both the Gospel and the book of Acts, Luke emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit. He also pays particular attention to women. It's no wonder that his account would have detail about Mary. God was about to fulfill His promise to Israel, being merciful to Abraham and his descendants, through Jesus, Israel's Messiah.

<READ: Luke 1:26-38>

Called to be God's vessel:

Luke writes in vs. 26, that it was the sixth month. If we look back at verse 24 we see that ***“Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion.”*** It is logical that this is now Elizabeth's sixth month that Luke is referring to. Elizabeth and Zechariah, her husband, were called to be God's vessels to be used to accomplish His will and purpose. In verse 6 we read of Elizabeth and Zechariah, that ***“Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.”*** They were people yielded to God and seeking to please Him. According to Old Testament Law, they were pure and holy, and God called each of them to be His vessels. God chose them to bring John the Baptist onto the scene. As we saw a few weeks ago, John was also called to be a vessel to be used by God to accomplish His plan. He was to announce the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, and to persuade many in the ways of the Lord. In our text, we see Mary, called to be a vessel to be used by God for a very special purpose. She was a young woman who found favor with God. In verse 28, the angel tells Mary that she is “highly favored” and that “the Lord is with her.” In verse 30 he tells her that she has “found favor with God.” Mary was pure or holy according to the Law, and she is highly favored by God. She and Joseph were also from the line of David, a necessary requirement for the Messiah. So she was called to be God's vessel, chosen to carry out His will. God calls human vessels to bring His will into being for the benefit of humanity. Do you think Mary realized that she could have been the mother of the Messiah before this event? She wasn't trying to find favor with God in order to be chosen to give birth to the Son of God. Rather God chose her because she was already devout and pure in heart. Purity, from a Scriptural perspective, goes beyond the physical, bodily framework. Mary was pure because she lived a Godly life, and just like Zechariah and Elizabeth, she was upright in the sight of God, causing His favor or GRACE to rest on her. God called her to be His vessel.

The Cost of Being God's Vessel:

Mary was a young woman who was engaged or promised in marriage to a man named Joseph. The words of the angel of God must have been of some concern to her. In verse 29 Luke tells us, ***“Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.”*** The angel comforts her by saying, ***“Don’t be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”*** She was about to fall out of favor with all of humanity, including the religious leaders, her relatives, and even her betrothed. In this culture, a girl found pregnant while engaged to a man would be stoned to death. I think she fully understood what the angel was saying to her, yet she accepted the challenge before her. As we look at the dialogue between Mary and Gabriel, we see that she is a very humble and submissive woman. I’m sure she knew the Law as it pertained to her pending condition. Even Joseph would have a problem with this. ***Matt 1:19 - Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*** Yet, the angel spoke a comforting word to her. Favor with God is a comforting thing. We call this GRACE. Grace is undeserved and unearned favor with God. Mary was obviously knowledgeable in the things of the Law, for she was highly favored and the Lord was with her. This young woman was “overshadowed” by the Holy Spirit, and she had His anointing to stand in the face of the judgment of humans and trust that God would fulfill His promise to her. She would bare the Messiah of Israel, the King and Savior of the world. There was nothing in Mary that doubted the promise made to her. She was completely trusting, and she was completely submissive to the will of God. She weighed the cost of being God’s vessel, and in spite of adversity, ridicule, and danger, chose to serve the Lord. Yes, the angel told her that the child she was to bare would be great and would be called the Son of the Most High.

The Rewards of Being God's Vessel:

Starting in verse 31, the angel unfolds the details of the plan of God for this willing vessel. ***“The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.’”*** This was a sure indication that if she would accept the call of God on her life, she would be used as an instrument of God bringing His plan of salvation to the world. When we step back and look at this whole process, we can only conclude that God’s intervention into humanity in the person of Jesus Christ was miraculous, from His conception to His resurrection and ascension. Can we accept the miraculous? Without the miraculous, certain conclusions about who Jesus really is and how He was conceived are also in question. The Christian church must accept the miraculous. From its inception, the church developed guidelines for acceptance into its membership. The most basic of these guidelines was the creed. The first creed was the simple statement, “Jesus is Lord.” This was an acknowledgement of the miracle that Jesus is God. As the concept of the Trinity gained popularity, the creed was enhanced. In the third century, during a time of bickering among Christians, Constantine ordered the council of Nicea to come up with a solution. The result was the more refined Nicene Creed, which we read today. This creed is still said because it includes the miraculous works of God that we must believe in order to be true Christians. Before anyone would be accepted in to the fellowship, they must acknowledge these basic doctrines of the Christian faith. If miracles cannot happen, then there cannot be a virgin conception or birth. Mary conceived, carried, and gave birth in a pure state. Only the Holy Spirit could cause such a miraculous condition. All who claim to be Christian must also accept that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary. This is not only a string of words recited in a statement of faith or creed, but these words are a proclamation of our belief in the miraculous supernatural work of God Almighty by the Holy Spirit. Mary was able to experience the supernatural and miraculous work of God as a result of being a vessel for His use.

We are God's Vessels:

In Mary's purity, the Holy Spirit, the creator of life itself, placed a new life within her. Mary was an ordinary person just like you and I. She wasn't perfect or sinless. She says in **Luke 1:46-47** – ***"My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ..."*** She yielded her life to the Holy Spirit, and God caused His will to be done on earth through her obedience. Mary's resolve is amazing. The final verse in our text today reveals the heart and attitude of this vessel of God. **Luke 1:38** – ***"I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May it be to me as you have said."*** We too, can be used mightily by God. Jesus was conceived in Mary's purity, eliminating the stain of the sin of humanity. Only in this way was He qualified to take our sin upon Himself at the cross. We are made pure or cleansed by accepting Jesus' sacrifice for our sin. We are then given the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of God, to give us power, power to be pure. When we sin, He lets us know and prompts us toward confession and repentance. In this way, we can constantly and instantaneously be forgiven and purified. We aren't supposed to try to be pure. We are pure because of what Jesus has done for us. The Christian life is about "being" rather than "doing." This kind of purity is not something we can accomplish in our own strength. It is only through faith in Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit that we can be holy vessels for God's use. God looks at us and sees Himself – the Holy Spirit of God in us. We are forgiven and loved. How could this be possible? Mary asked the same question, and the angel told her ... **Lk. 1:37** – ***"For nothing is impossible with God."*** Once she hears this, she yields to the will of God. We are God's vessels, set apart for Him. He works through us to reach others, and accomplish His will. Before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon particular people at particular times for particular tasks. Now, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon all who trust in Jesus. These words are still true today – *"nothing is impossible with God."* His presence indwells us, and His Holy Spirit is our power to be pure.

Holy Spirit Illustration:

David Yarborough tells the story from one of Max Lucado's books of a lady who had a small house on the seashore of Ireland at the turn of the century and was quite wealthy but also quite frugal. The people were surprised, then, when she decided to be among the first to have electricity in her home.

Several weeks after the installation, a meter reader appeared at her door. He asked if her electricity was working well, and she assured him it was. "I'm wondering if you can explain something to me," he said. "Your meter shows scarcely any usage. Are you using your power?" "Certainly," she answered. "Each evening when the sun sets, I turn on my lights just long enough to light my candles; then I turn them off." Yarborough goes on to say, "She tapped into the power but did not use it. Her house is connected but not altered. Don't we make the same mistake? We, too-with our souls saved but our hearts unchanged - are connected but not altered. Trusting Christ for salvation but resisting transformation. We occasionally flip the switch, but most of the time we settle for shadows.

While the Holy Spirit may be the power by which we can live pure and holy lives and be vessels of God, we have to allow Him to work in our lives to accomplish His purposes. If we do our part (yielding), then God will do His part through the Holy Spirit (transformation). I want to be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

True believers have to accept the miracles that God performed to make this all possible. We accept that Jesus is God; that He was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit; that He was born of the Virgin Mary; that He suffered, died and was buried for our sin; that He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven; and that He is coming again to judge the living and the dead. This is our creed, our statement of belief. The early church would not allow just anyone to participate in the full fellowship experience – which centered on the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. So they would have to be trained and show they truly believed these things, and then they were baptized in the waters of purification as a public display of their commitment, and finally they could participate in the great celebration of the church – Holy Communion.

In a few minutes we are going to recognize our First Holy Communion class as they participate officially in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. These young people have been trained for six weeks. If we were living back in the days of the early church, their training would have taken three years before they could participate in the Lord's Supper. They have each prayed to receive Jesus' forgiveness, and have written statements of testimony that you will hear. God tells us that having done this, they are filled with the Holy Spirit of promise. They stand before God and this church today pure, holy, righteous in God's sight. No matter what happens from this day forward, no matter what you may face or go through, always remember this day. Know that you always have forgiveness available if you only ask, and you have power within you by the Holy Spirit to be pure. For the rest of your lives, you will be faced with choices. You will not always choose correctly, but God promises to love you and be with you always. Welcome to the family of God. This is a time of true celebration. We celebrate what Jesus has done for us. We celebrate that these young people have chosen to follow Jesus by participating in the sacrament of Holy Communion. We celebrate that the Holy Spirit is living and active in our lives, and gives us power to be pure and live for God. We celebrate that we are vessels for God's use, so He can accomplish His will through us if we dare to yield to Him.

Communion Illustration:

"Leslie Weatherhead tells of a little boy who was admitted to an orphanage after his parents were killed. One of the first items on the agenda was to find him a new set of clothes. He was given a new pair of pants, a new shirt, and a pair of shoes that shined as he saw his face in its glow.

Lastly, he was offered a new hat. But he refused to take it. He hung on to his worse- for the-wear—hat. Finally the Sister was able to coax him into trying on the new cap. He tried it on, liked it, but then did something very funny. He reached inside his old cap and tore the lining out and placed it in his pocket.

Noticing, the Sister had a puzzled look on her face, he said, "The lining is a part of my mother's dress; it's all I've got left of her and somehow it seems to bring her back."

In the same way, when we take Holy Communion, we are remembering what Jesus did for us, and in some way it brings Him back. Through these elements, we focus on what it cost Him so we could be forgiven. This is God's grace in this sacrament. We could never be worthy of participating in our own strength, so through Jesus' sacrifice and the power of the Holy Spirit, God sees us as pure, and we receive His love, forgiveness, and grace.