

What does the Bible say about the virgin Mary?

Mary the mother of Jesus was described by God as “highly favored” (Luke 1:28). The phrase highly favored comes from a single Greek word, which essentially means “much grace.” Mary received God’s grace.

Grace is “unmerited favor”; that is, grace is a blessing we receive despite the fact that we do not deserve it. Mary needed grace from God and a Savior, just as the rest of us do. Mary herself understood this fact, as she declared in Luke 1:47, “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

The virgin Mary, by God’s grace, recognized that she needed the Savior. The Bible never says that Mary was anyone but an ordinary human whom God chose to use in an extraordinary way. Yes, Mary was a righteous woman and favored (graced) by God (Luke 1:27-28). At the same time, Mary was a sinful human being who needed Jesus Christ as her Savior, just like everyone else (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 John 1:8).

The virgin Mary did not have an “immaculate conception.” The Bible doesn’t suggest Mary’s birth was anything but a normal human birth. Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus (Luke 1:34-38), but she was not a virgin permanently. The idea of the perpetual virginity of Mary is unbiblical. Matthew 1:25, speaking of Joseph, declares, “But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus.” The word until clearly indicates that Joseph and Mary did have normal sexual relations after Jesus was born. Mary remained a virgin until the Savior’s birth, but later Joseph and Mary had several children together. Jesus had four half-brothers: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Matthew 13:55). Jesus also had half-sisters, although they are not named or numbered (Matthew 13:55-56). God blessed and graced Mary by giving

her several children, which in that culture was accepted as the clearest indication of God's blessing on a woman.

One time when Jesus was speaking, a woman in the crowd proclaimed, "Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed" (Luke 11:27). There was never a better opportunity for Jesus to declare that Mary was indeed worthy of praise and adoration. What was Jesus' response? "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it" (Luke 11:28). According to Jesus, obedience to God's Word was more important than being the woman who gave birth to the Savior.

Nowhere in Scripture does Jesus or anyone else direct any praise, glory, or adoration toward Mary. Elizabeth, Mary's relative, praised Mary in Luke 1:42-44, but her praise is based on the blessing of giving birth to the Messiah. It was not based on any inherent glory in Mary. In fact, after this Mary spoke a song of praise to the Lord, extoling His mindfulness to those of humble state and His mercy and faithfulness (Luke 1:46-55).

Many believe that Mary was one of Luke's sources for the writing of his Gospel (see Luke 1:1-4). Luke records the angel Gabriel visiting Mary and telling her that she would give birth to a son who would be the Savior. Mary was unsure how this could be since she was a virgin. When Gabriel told her that the child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit, Mary answered, "I am the Lord's servant. . . . May your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her" (Luke 1:38). Mary responded with belief and a willingness to submit to God's plan. We, too, should have such faith in God and trustingly follow Him.

In describing the events of Jesus' birth and the response of those who heard the shepherds' message about Jesus, Luke writes, "But Mary treasured up all these things,

pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). When Joseph and Mary presented Jesus at the temple, Simeon recognized that Jesus was the Savior and gave God praise. Joseph and Mary marveled at what Simeon had said. Simeon also told Mary, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35).

Another time at the temple, when Jesus was twelve, Mary was upset that Jesus had remained behind when His parents had left for Nazareth. They were distressed in looking for Him. When they found Him, still in the temple, He said He must be in His Father's house (Luke 2:49). Jesus returned to Nazareth with His earthly parents and submitted to them. We are told, again, that Mary "treasured up all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51). Raising Jesus must have been a perplexing endeavor yet also filled with precious moments, perhaps memories that became more poignant as Mary came to more fully understand who Jesus is. We, too, can treasure in our hearts the knowledge of God and the memories of His activity in our lives.

It was Mary who requested Jesus' intervention at the wedding of Cana, where He performed His first miracle and turned water into wine. Even though Jesus seemingly rebuffed her at first, Mary instructed the servants to do what He told them. She had faith in Him (John 2:1-11).

Later in Jesus' public ministry, His family grew concerned. Mark 3:20-21 records, "The crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind.'" When His family arrived, Jesus proclaimed that it is those who do the will of God who are His

family. Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him prior to the crucifixion, but at least two of them did afterward—James and Jude (Judas), the authors of the New Testament books bearing their names.

Mary did seem to believe in Jesus throughout His life. She was present at the cross when Jesus died (John 19:25), no doubt feeling the “sword” that Simeon had prophesied would pierce her soul. It was there at the cross that Jesus asked John to serve as Mary's son, and John took Mary into his home (John 19:26-27). Mary was also with the apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). However, Mary is never mentioned again after Acts chapter 1.

The apostles did not give Mary a prominent role. Mary's death is not recorded in the Bible. Nothing is said about Mary ascending to heaven or having an exalted role there. As the earthly mother of Jesus, Mary should be respected, but she is not worthy of our worship or adoration.

The Bible nowhere indicates that Mary can hear our prayers or that she can mediate for us with God. Jesus is our only advocate and mediator in heaven (1 Timothy 2:5). If offered worship, adoration, or prayers, Mary would say the same as the angels: “Worship God!” (see Revelation 19:10; 22:9.) Mary herself sets the example for us, directing her worship, adoration, and praise to God alone: “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” (Luke 1:46-49).