

*The Uniting of God and Man through Mary*

Matthew 1:18-23

Sermon

*Hobart, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012*

*Devonport, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012*

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## Scripture Reading:

### **Matthew 1:18-23**

<sup>18</sup> This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement\* quietly.

<sup>20</sup> As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,\* for he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup> All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

<sup>23</sup> “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,  
and they will call him Immanuel,\*  
which means ‘God is with us.’ ”

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\* Greek *to divorce her*.

\* *Jesus* means “The LORD saves.”

\* Isa 7:14; 8:8, 10 (Greek version).

## INTRODUCTION:

### I. MYSTERY

#### A. IN COLOSSIANS 1: PAUL TALKS ABOUT THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WORD AND THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

##### Colossians 1:25-27

<sup>25</sup> I have become its [body of Christ's] servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— <sup>26</sup> the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. <sup>1</sup>

1. These mysteries include the Trinity, the Incarnation, the virgin birth, God's unconditional love and grace, the workings of the Holy Spirit, the resurrection and ascension, and the hope of glory, the final advent when Jesus returns and heaven and earth are one and he is all in all.
2. These are mysteries, because they have to be revealed to us, as we don't have the ability to figure them out without God revealing them through his Son and his Spirit.
3. Australian theologian, Prof. Anthony Kelly writes;

all the "mysteries" of faith are aspects of the one self-giving mystery of God which, even as it communicates itself in the Word and Spirit, remains ever beyond any finite grasp.

Even in the beatific vision of God face-to-face, the inexhaustible infinities of the divine reality is not comprehended. In that final vision, the divine

<sup>1</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Col 1:25). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

mystery is not lessened in the life of the blessed, but more positively appreciated in its boundless excess.<sup>2</sup>

4. So even in the resurrection, we will still find God to be boundless in his excess of love and grace and overall wonder.
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## S.P.S:

### **B. THE MYSTERY I'D LIKE TO FOCUS ON TODAY**

1. Is the birth of Jesus as the Son of God, and the Son of Man through Mary
2. And the important part Mary plays in God revealing himself and becoming one with us
  - a) We will also look at a controversial question, "is Mary the mother of God?".

### **C. PRAYER**

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony J. Kelly, *Mary: Icon of Trinitarian Love*, Australian eJournal of Theology, p. 1-2;  
[http://aejt.com.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/140527/Kelly\\_Mary\\_Icon\\_of\\_Trinitarian\\_Love.pdf](http://aejt.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/140527/Kelly_Mary_Icon_of_Trinitarian_Love.pdf)

**BODY:****John 1:1-18***Prologue: Christ, the Eternal Word*

**1** <sup>1</sup> In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.

<sup>2</sup> He existed in the beginning with God.

<sup>3</sup> God created everything through him,  
and nothing was created except through him.

<sup>4</sup> The Word gave life to everything that was created,\*  
and his life brought light to everyone.

<sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness can never extinguish it.\*

<sup>6</sup> God sent a man, John the Baptist,\* <sup>7</sup> to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. <sup>8</sup> John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. <sup>9</sup> The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup> He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. <sup>13</sup> They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

<sup>14</sup> So the Word became human\* and made his home among us. He was full of unending love and faithfulness.\* And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

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\* Or *and nothing that was created was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything.*

\* Or *and the darkness has not understood it.*

\* Greek *a man named John.*

\* Greek *became flesh.*

\* Or *grace and truth*; also in 1:17.

<sup>15</sup> John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, “This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.’ ”

<sup>16</sup> From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another.\* <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses, but God’s unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who himself God,\* is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.

### **A. JOHN MAKES VERY CLEAR HOW JESUS, THE WORD BECAME HUMAN ONE OF US**

1. And how in and through him we see the unseen, the Glory and the heart of the Father, because Jesus has revealed God to us.

## **II. MARY**

### **A. MATTHEW TELLS US HOW THIS ACTUALLY HAPPENED;**

1. Mary being right in the middle of it all

### **B. MATTHEW 1:18-23**

<sup>18</sup> This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement\* quietly.

<sup>20</sup> As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,\* for he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup> All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

\* Or *received the grace of Christ rather than the grace of the law*; Greek reads *received grace upon grace*.

\* Some manuscripts read *But the one and only Son*.

\* Greek *to divorce her*.

\* *Jesus* means “The LORD saves.”

<sup>23</sup> “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,

and they will call him Immanuel,\*

which means ‘God is with us.’ ”

### **C. THIS SHOWS CLEARLY, HOW THAT IN A SENSE MARY WAS THE HUMAN AGENT OR MEDIUM,**

1. the entry point, or matrix through whom God entered our world and became one of us, one with us, Immanuel

a) As John puts it, in Jesus God made his home with us

#### **John 1:14**

<sup>14</sup> So the Word became human\* and made his home among us.

### **D. LUKE TALKS ABOUT IT IN DETAIL**

#### **Luke 1:26-38**

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. <sup>28</sup> Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!”

1. This being with her, is at a deeper and more profound level than what it would seem at first glance

a) Even Mary herself didn’t really understand

2. This being with her underlies and reveals the mystery of God’s plan and intention with all of mankind, to be with US

<sup>29</sup> Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. <sup>30</sup> “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of

\* Isa 7:14; 8:8, 10 (Greek version).

\* Greek *became flesh*.

\* Some manuscripts add *Blessed are you among women*.

his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> And he will reign over Israel<sup>\*</sup> forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

<sup>34</sup> Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

<sup>35</sup> The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.

## **E. SO MUCH OF THIS WAS BEYOND MARY’S COMPREHENSION**

1. And beyond ours
2. But through a divine miracle, involving the Father and the Spirit, the Son was conceived in Mary as a human baby
3. Mary was the human God joined with and participated with in order to become human, one of us, one with us
  - a) The word “koinonia” fits this, and so this joining and uniting with mankind, in the person of Mary in particular, is a profound indication and major step in the uniting, the atonement, the restoration of communion between God and man
4. Kelly;

The incarnation of the eternal Word comes about from beyond, and yet it occurs from within the realm of creation through human cooperation. Precisely because the divine power so transcends the created order, it can work so intimately within to it. Though the Son is incarnate by the power of the Spirit, he is still truly “born of the Virgin Mary”.<sup>3</sup>

## **F. THIS IS WHAT MATTHEW SPOKE ABOUT AS WELL IN QUOTING THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAH**

### **Matthew 1:22-23**

<sup>22</sup> All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

<sup>23</sup> “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,

<sup>\*</sup> Greek *over the house of Jacob*.

<sup>3</sup> Kelly, p.25



and they will call him Immanuel,\*  
which means 'God is with us.'

1. God in all his power and sovereignty still chose to reveal and bring about this vital part of his becoming one with us, through a humble young woman, of extremely limited circumstances.
  - a) He continually wants us to be aware of how much he loves us, and at the same time how much he is willing to step down and work with us, whoever we are, or whatever our circumstances
  - b) And that even, and especially, he will work with those with the least, to bring about the most glorious and amazing of his miraculous giving actions for us, and in us and through us

#### **G. FROM GOD'S WORKING WITH MARY TO ENTER OUR LIVES AND OUR WORLD**

1. We learn much about God's nature, and the desire and will and approach he has to entering our individual lives
  - a) Particularly how much he loves us, and how that love is not conditioned on our being wise and wonderful, in any way powerful or impressive
2. Our "koinonia", our life and communion and sharing in God's life is totally dependent on his love and grace
  - a) And it pleases him when we humbly and thankfully, like Mary, accept his involvement in our lives
  - b) This all stands in stark contrast to Adam and Eve, Satan and all rebellious efforts at independence that stands apart and against God, and walks separately and in opposition to him
3. The incarnation, God's entering into our world and our lives through Mary, is a vitally important, and foundational step in God's plan to bring us into his life,

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\* Isa 7:14; 8:8, 10 (Greek version).

a) To reverse and redeem mankind, after we turned away from God in the Garden of Eden

#### 4. T.F. Torrance wrote;

In order, so to speak, to get a foothold within humanity God selects one particular people, the Jews, and in that people he works within humanity, preparing for the incarnation of the beloved Son of God. Thus the story of Israel is *the prehistory of the incarnation* of the Son of God. Jesus is born through the womb of Israel and within Israel through the womb of the virgin Mary, of the seed of Israel, of the seed of man.

In his purpose to reveal himself to mankind, and to enter healingly within human existence, God refused to allow our limitations and weaknesses to inhibit his purpose of love and redemption. He condescended in incredible humility to find a way of entering within our beggarly weakness and poverty, to find a mode of divine entry into our finite and mortal existence, in order from within as creator and saviour to restore us to complete fellowship with himself. Hence God selected one race from among all the races of mankind, one of the smallest, and most beggarly and contemptible. Of all races, in order to make that race the very instrument of his redemptive purpose to reveal himself to every people and to save all humanity.<sup>4</sup>

#### 5. Torrance then talks about Mary.

And then at last in the fullness of time, when God had prepared in the heart and soul and religion of Israel a womb for the birth of Jesus, a cradle for the child of Bethlehem, the saviour of the world was born, the very Son of God—born of God right into the midst of Israel with all its suffering contradiction of God, into the midst of the Old Testament faith and all that reached out in it to fulfilment in this very hour of incarnation.<sup>5</sup>

The virgin birth tell us that Jesus was really and genuinely the son of a human mother, that he was born as other men are, of woman, and yet in a *unique way* which corresponds to his *unique person* as the Son of the eternal God who has entered into our humanity.

...It reveals God as the Creator and redeemer actually with us in our estranged human existence, and as God bringing out of our alien and sinful existence a new humanity that is holy and perfect.

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<sup>4</sup> T.F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, p.40-41

<sup>5</sup> Torrance, p.44

The virgin birth does not mean that Mary was herself immaculately conceived...but it does mean that out of Mary a sinner, by pure act of God, Jesus is born, the holy Son of God, and that his very birth sanctifies Mary, for it is through her Son that she is redeemed and given to share in the purity and holiness of God.

What Mary does is simply to receive the word, to believe, which she does not in her own strength but in the strength given her by the Lord, and she is blessed because of that, not because of her virginity.

Mary's attitude is beautifully expressed in the words: 'Behold, I am the hand maid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' [Luke 1:38]. It is an act of glad and thankful and humble submission and surrender to the will of God. And within her there takes place the incomprehensible act of God, the birth of the Son of God in human form.<sup>6</sup>

### III. *THEOTOKOS*

#### A. BEFORE WE CONCLUDE, I'D LIKE TO LOOK AT ANOTHER THEOLOGICAL TERM THAT DESCRIBES MARY'S ROLE

1. "Theotokos" is a Greek word meaning, bearer of God, or as the Roman Catholics describe her, "mother of God."

#### B. IS IT CORRECT OR NECESSARY TO DESCRIBE MARY THIS WAY?

1. The early church did, and included the term "theotokos" in one of the foundational creeds of the church, written by the Council of Chalcedon in 451AD to clarify Jesus humanity as well as his divinity.
2. This was written after much debate about the nature of Jesus.
  - a) Some had argued that Mary was only "Christotokos", bearer of Christ.
  - b) But this insinuated that Jesus was human, and not fully God.

<sup>6</sup> Torrance, p.98-101

c) Therefore the church insisted that Mary was, “Theotokos”, bearer of God, as Jesus was fully human and fully God, as the Chalcedon creed makes clear.

d) It states (in one very long sentence);

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach people to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in humanness, truly God and truly human, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance (homoousios) with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his humanity begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer (Theotokos); one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.<sup>7</sup>

### **C. ORTHODOX ARCHBISHOP LAZAR PUHALO DISCUSSES THE TITLE “THEOTOKOS” SAYING**

Let us come now, with reverence and awe, to the greatest mystery of all - the virgin birth of Him Who pre-existed all existence, of Him Who is Existence itself. We do not propose to explain the mystery, to tell how the womb of a woman born in like manner as us could "contain Him Whom the whole universe cannot contain." Rather, we hope merely to clear up some of the questions arising from the facts.

Mary is the "mother of God." The title "Theotokos" means, literally, "the one who gave birth to God." At first consideration, and without some prayerful and Scriptural thought about these titles, they may sound shocking. How can a human, born under the fallen nature, be "the mother of God." Surely we should call her only, "the mother of Jesus," or, "the mother of Christ,"

<sup>7</sup> The Definition of the Union of the Divine and Human Natures in the Person of Christ (Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 451), [Translation from *The Book of Common Prayer, 1979*]

When we ask the question, "should we call Mary 'mother of God,' or only 'mother of Christ,' we suddenly realise that this question is not about Mary, but about Jesus Christ Himself. The actual question is this:

"Is Jesus only a special, anointed, Grace-filled servant of God, or is He, in very truth, God incarnate?"

In other words, "Do we believe in the Holy Trinity or not?" If we believe in the Holy Trinity, and Christ is truly God incarnate, then, of course, Mary is the "mother of God", "the Theotokos." If we reject the dogma of the Trinity and we believe that Jesus is only a specially anointed prophet, then we would refuse to call Mary "Theotokos," or "mother of God." We cannot have it both ways without playing blasphemous word games with the nature of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

#### **D. SO UNDERSTANDING THAT MARY IS, "THEOTOKOS" THE MOTHER OF GOD IS IMPORTANT**

1. As it reminds us of who Jesus was, both fully God and fully man

#### **E. AND IT ALSO REMINDS US OF HOW GOD USED MARY AS A COUNTERPART TO EVE;**

1. To reverse what began with Eve
  - a) Which would be another sermon on its own

## **CONCLUSION:**

#### **A. JESUS BEING BORN OF MARY, A HUMAN MOTHER**

1. Means that he was a human being, born as all of are born, fully human
  - a) But he was also the Son of God, conceived of the Holy Spirit

#### **B. GOD CHOOSING MARY TO BE JESUS' MOTHER ALSO REVEALS MUCH ABOUT GOD,**

<sup>8</sup> Archbishop Lazar Puhalo, *The Ever-Virginity of Mary, The Title Theotokos, and The Veneration shown to Her*, Synaxis Press, p. 1-2 , <http://www.orthodoxchristian.info/pages/Ever.htm>

1. About his grace and love, and his desire and plan to bring us all into his family

**C. KELLY;**

While the focus of Christian hope is on Christ's death and resurrection, in Mary it has both a *reprise* and "re-presentation" in anticipation of what is to come.

In her, hope celebrates the grace of God, given, received, and working its transformation.<sup>9</sup>

**D. IN OTHER WORDS, GOD'S WORKING WITH MARY**

1. Is a wonderful revealing of his loving intention to enter our lives and be one with us
  - a) To give himself to us and be received by us
  - b) To work with us, and through us to restore, redeem and transform our lives and that of others and the world in which we live
2. Let's take time this Christmas season, to think about, to celebrate and be thankful, that through Jesus, God is truly with us, now and forever
3. And may we always be receptive to God's grace, love and blessings, his entering and participating in our lives that we might be a blessing to others, as Mary was
  - a) Letting Jesus truly live in us and through us

**E. PRAYER**

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<sup>9</sup> Kelly, p.29