

Ave Maria

Songs of the Nativity, Part One

Luke 1:26-38

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I. Swimming with Song

II. A Glorious Messenger

A. Identity (1:19 cf. Dan 8:16; 9:21, 24ff)

B. Persona (1:12 cf. Dan 8:17)

III. A Glorious Woman

A. The Angel's Greeting

The Greek behind the phrase “*highly favored one*” (v. 28, 30) is a perfect passive participle and thus conveys the idea of something done *to or for Mary* rather than something done *by her*. Gabriel recognizes her as one who *has been favored, who has been chosen* to receive a distinct honor or privilege – chosen as a *recipient* of a special blessing. *God* has selected Mary to be the recipient of an incredibly unique privilege.

B. The *Ave Maria*

Roman Catholicism *transforms this greeting into a petition* because Rome teaches that Mary is a source of blessing and benefit to all – that she by her power or ability or influence can rescue us from trials and troubles. Thomas Aquinas writes, “*in any peril you can obtain salvation from this glorious Virgin...she exceeds the angels in her purity, for the Blessed Virgin was not only pure in herself, but she also obtained purity for others.*” Whereas in the biblical text Mary is a *recipient* of God's grace, in Roman Catholic piety she has become a *reservoir* of grace.

IV. A Glorious Child

A. You shall call his name Jesus (v. 31 cf. 1:47)

Contrary to Roman teaching, Mary was a sinner in need of the forgiving grace of Jesus. Typical of Roman claims are the words of Aquinas who writes that Mary “*was most pure with respect to guilt, because neither mortal nor venial sin could be imputed to this virgin...*” Indeed one of the official Roman Catholic dogmas, proclaimed by Pope Pius IX in 1854, is the so-called Immaculate Conception – referring not to the conception of Jesus in Mary’s womb but to the conception of Mary in *her* mother’s womb during which Mary was supposedly preserved from original sin. But note Mary’s address to God in the *Magnificat*: she rejoices in *God my Savior*.

B. He will be called the Son of the Highest (vv. 32-34)

In contrasting Mary with Zacharias, the early church father Ambrose remarks, “*She merely continues the conversation; he disputes the message.*”

C. He will be called the Son of God (v. 35 cf. Rev 22:9)

The words of the angel abound with wonder and mystery – the title “Son of God” here has numerous different connotations: Son of David (_____), Eternal Son of God (_____ – same nature as God Himself), and Second _____ (cf. 3:38 where Adam is called the “son of God”). Gabriel’s words on one level only add to the wonder – they don’t dissipate it. Who is this One to be born?

Mary is a model of godly piety. She marvels at the Word of God, she is a virgin, a virtuous daughter of Zion, she receives and embraces the Word. And note that she could have posed other questions here: What will my betrothed think? What of my neighbors? Instead she receives the Word of God, embraces it, and bows before the Lord. Calvin writes, “*This is the real proof of faith, when we restrain our minds, and, as it were, hold them captive, so that they dare not reply this or that to God: for boldness in disputing, on the other hand, is the mother of unbelief.*”

V. Conclusion