

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism	Pastor/Teacher
Number:	23	Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Luke 2:25-35; John 19:25-27	
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Jesus and Mary

14. Lord's Day

Question 36. What profit dost thou receive by Christ's holy conception and nativity?

Answer: That he is our Mediator; (a) and with His innocence and perfect holiness, covers in the sight of God, my sins, wherein I was conceived and brought forth. (b)

(a) Heb. 7:26 For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Heb. 7:27 Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. Heb. 2:17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. (b) 1 Pet. 1:18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 1 Pet. 1:19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: 1 Pet. 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: 1 Cor. 1:30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: 1 Cor. 1:31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. Rom. 8:3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: Rom. 8:4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Isa. 53:11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Ps. 32:1 <<A Psalm of David, Maschil.>> Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

“Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.” Most of you, especially if you were raised Roman Catholic, recognize this as being part of the prayers that make up the rosary. Mary, not Christ, is the central focus of the rosary which concludes with the *Salve Regina* or “Hail, Holy Queen,” a prayer in praise of Mary. Protestants naturally find this system of Mariolatry not only highly offensive and repugnant but blasphemous.¹ “For many prayers have been forged full of horrible blasphemies,” wrote Calvin, “such as those which request the Virgin Mary to command her Son, and exert her authority over him – and which style her the haven of salvation, the life and hope of those who trust in her.”² Having said that, we should not hold Mary herself responsible for Rome's Mariolatry. As Alexander Whyte has told us, “We must not allow ourselves to entertain a grudge against the mother of our Lord because some enthusiasts for her have given her more than her due.”³

I. SIMEON'S PROPHECY (Luke 2:34, 35)

For the first time in the Gospel history, the coming struggle and suffering of Christ's mission are directly stated. Jesus, says Simeon, is destined to being both judgment and salvation. He will be accepted or rejected – no neutrality is possible. Mary will be overtaken by the deepest of sorrows. She will personally experience the grief of His rejection and treatment at the hands of the Jewish leaders. “She is, therefore, rightly called MATER DOLOROSA (Mother of Sorrows) and represented as such in Christian art.”⁴ But as K. Schilder has so aptly reminded us, “The moment we put Mary and her grief at the center of our thinking, we have done injustice to the Son of God, and – unfortunately! – to Mary also.”⁵

II. THE FULFILLMENT OF SIMEON'S PROPHECY (John 19:25, 26)

The piercing of Mary's heart reached its fulfillment at the cross, but as A.W. Pink has noted, she had to experience grief throughout her life. “What sorrow it must have caused her when, because there was no room in the inn, she had to lay her newly-born Babe in the manger! What anguish must have been hers when she learned of Herod's purpose to destroy her infant's life! What trouble was given her when she was forced on His account to flee into a foreign country and sojourn for several years in the land of Egypt! What piercings of soul must have been hers when she saw her Son despised and rejected of men! What grief must have wrung her heart as she beheld Him hated and persecuted by His own nation! And who can estimate what she passed through as she stood here at the cross? If Christ was the Man of Sorrows, was she not the woman of sorrows?”⁶ The text simply reads, *near the cross of Jesus stood his Mother. We are told nothing of tears of passionate grief or outbursts of wails of anguish, only that she is there in silence and in humble submission to the dark but holy will of God. The sword has been unsheathed and her soul is pierced. “It is the sorely tried mother of our Lord, in whom Simeon's prophecy is now fulfilled, ‘A sword shall pierce through thine own soul also.’ But she had scarcely the smallest presentiment that it would be accomplished in such a manner. But look up, Mary! Cast thyself with all thy grief, into the arms of the eternal Father. Dost thou see thy Son going to be crucified? He also sees His. He who is crowned with thorns is His Son as well as thine.”*⁷

III. CHRIST SPEAKING TO HIS MOTHER (John 19:26-27)

It is striking to note that the last word Christ spoke from the cross to people was to His mother (His remaining words are all about Himself). We fail to read our Bible carefully if we do not see how Christ is once again in His active obedience is fulfilling the Law. Christ addresses His mother according to the first statement of the second table of the Law (Exodus 20:12). The Law places the father and mother in the foreground of our earthly relationships (followed by our duties to our neighbor). “Thus Christ, by means of His immediate sense of the harmony of the law, directs His last statement to His mother. To Him, she stood on the boundary line between two worlds, and two worlds He had to traverse today. In a certain sense He is speaking to her *pro omnibus*. If He fulfilled the law in reference to this closest neighbor He has fulfilled it in reference to all.”⁸ Jesus now commits His mother into the hands of the Apostle John. (Contrary to the teachings of some Roman Catholics, Jesus is not here placing Mary *over* the Apostles!) It is to John, the beloved disciple, rather than to His brother, (they did not yet believe in Him, cf. John 7:5) that Jesus entrusts His mother.

CONCLUSION: Mary stood a short distance from the hill Golgotha. Her oldest child, her promised royal child, is hanging on an accursed tree. Where is the angel Gabriel who announced His supernatural birth? Where are the heavenly host that sang at His birth? The Son is about His Father's business (Luke 2:29). He is doing His royal priestly work of redeeming sinners. The next time we read of Mary (and the last time she is mentioned in Scripture), she is in the upper room with the rest of the disciples

awaiting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). Her sadness has been turned into joy. Jesus, her son according to the flesh, has conquered.

ENDNOTES

¹ Luther pointed out how the Virgin Mary had displaced her divine Son in the minds and affections of literally millions of devoted Roman Catholics – and he does not hesitate to denounce how Rome has turned her into an idol. “Mary has been turned into an idol in the papacy; and in the very Lenten season, in which men preached Christ and His suffering, they preached the Mother Mary, saying that Christ committed and gave her to us as a mother. We want to hold the dear virgin and the holy mother in all honor, as she certainly deserves to be honored; yet we do not want to honor her in such a way that we make her equal to her Son, Christ. For she was not crucified for us, not did she die for us or pray for us on the cross; but Christ was crucified for us and died and pleaded and prayed for us with tears on the cross. Therefore honor Mother Mary as you desire; but do not accord her the honor which we should accord Christ. This, too, is the reason why Christ puts His mother away from Him: He alone would be the One to whom we should cling. But the pope with his monks does the very opposite. He lets Christ, the Son, go and clings to the mother... Mary is justly to be honored. But to rely on her, to take Christ’s honor and office and give them to His mother, is to deny Christ’s suffering.” *What Luther Says III*, compiled by Ewald M. Plass (Concordia, 1959), p. 1257.

² *Select Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters II*, ed. H. Beveridge and J. Bonnet (rpt. Baker, 1983), p. 146.

³ Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters: Joseph and Mary to James* (Revell, n.d.), p. 7.

⁴ Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel Luke* (Eerdmans, 1979), p. 121.

⁵ K. Schilder, *Christ Crucified*. Translated from the Dutch by H. Zylstra (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1978), p. 340.

⁶ A.W. Pink, *The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross* (Baker, 1976), p. 48.

⁷ F.W. Krummacher, *The Suffering Saviour* (rpt. Moody, 1947), p. 327.

⁸ Schilder, op. cit., p. 345.