

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: various

"Womanhood: From the Incarnation to Pentecost"

A BLESSED MOTHER'S DAY TO ALL OUR MOMS!

On this Mother's Day I thought it appropriate to look at not just motherhood but womanhood in light of the Gospels, in light of Christ's Coming. The truth is today the differences between men and women have often become blurred if not erased. There is also a cultural war on the uniqueness of the traditional family of one father and one mother, and in some quarters there is the false accusation that the Christian faith is anti-woman. But what does God's Word have to say about such things?

Now before I continue, I would be remiss if not to add that there is an important message that God's Word has to say when it comes to the opinions, directives, and claims of society. ***"Let God be true and everyone a liar."*** (Rom. 3:4) In other words, what God has to say is always true, and no matter what we say or how we justify what we say. If it is contrary to His Word, then it is false! That is why when it comes to life, when it comes to understanding who we are, when it comes to knowing what God expects of us, I always put my faith in God, and not man.

Now this subject that I want us to reflect on is one that could indeed take up a book. Think about that for a moment. *Womanhood: from the Incarnation to Pentecost*. There is a lot of ground there. But my purpose this morning will not be to do an exhaustive analysis of this subject but to highlight a few major events in the life of Jesus' ministry that not only highlight a woman's special place in life but how God Himself affirms womanhood, and the lessons we can learn as believers in our own individual lives and the life of our church.

And so we begin where it all began in the Garden of Eden

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

It was in the garden that Satan tempted Adam and Eve. And he specifically went to the woman first. Did you ever wonder why? Traditionally, it was thought that it was because the woman is the "weaker" of the two sexes in terms of giving in to temptation. I think this is a simplistic explanation. The fact is both men and women have different strengths and weaknesses. And even within the same sex there is a different range of strengths and weaknesses. But I do know this about women in general – they are good at picking up details and analyzing a situation, but they also are very empathetic and in tune with their feelings. This can be very beneficial. We have all heard the phrase a "woman's intuition." But we also know that if an intuition is not grounded in truth, it will lead us down the wrong path. And that is what happened in Eve's case. She analyzed the situation, she took the bait of thinking that God didn't have her best interest in mind and she disobeyed and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So was she worse than Adam? In traditional Jewish thought, she was. It was one of the reasons women were often treated as second class citizens. In the temple there was the court of the woman. The women could only go so far into the Temple. And as Judaism drifted farther away from the true faith, the subjugation of women increased. But Adam is not off the hook. He actually was equally guilty because he did not intervene. He did not protect his wife. He became passive. That is the Achilles heel of many men. We are created to be leaders, servant leaders. But we either become passive

and let those who lord it over others lead, or we expect our wives to do all the work. The truth is BOTH Adam and Eve are equally guilty. Although Paul says in **I Tim. 2:14** that it was Eve who sinned first, he also puts the blame on Adam's shoulders when he wrote in **I Cor. 15:22** "*as in Adam all die, so in Christ are all made alive.*"

The first woman was given the name Eve because she was mother of all the living (**Gen. 3:20**). And yet we still have this reality that the woman sinned first. But how would God respond? He did say that men would rule over women but this would be the result of the fall. He did not command or condone such behavior. Rather God was stating a fact that if left to our fallen natures, men will continue to subjugate women. And sadly, that has been the history of mankind. We see that all too recently in the number of men in powerful positions who have sexually harassed and assaulted women. That is what happens when the sinful self rules.

But rather than relegate Eve to a life of subjugation and second class status, God promises her that her seed, the seed of the woman, would crush the very one who tempted her! **Genesis 3:15**. And this seed is undoubtedly that of the Messiah, Jesus Christ! And so if by a woman came sin, by a woman will come new life. Isn't that amazing? What we are talking about is the Virgin Birth. Now I don't know if you realize it or not, but is a man even involved in the Virgin Birth? No! It is just the woman! Do you see how God turns it all around for good. He is honoring every woman ever born by coming in the flesh through a woman!

He used Mary's DNA! She was a descendant of King David, thereby fulfilling the Covenant the Lord made with David that he would have a descendant whose throne would be forever! It would be impossible for Jesus to be fully man and fully God if Joseph's seed were involved. In fact, the miraculous nature of the Incarnation – God becoming flesh – is foretold by **Genesis 3:15** with the words "*seed of the woman.*" In all other instances the "*seed*" is used in reference to the male's contribution to life.

THE INCARNATION

And so that leads us to the call of Mary, her response, and her exaltation as the most blessed of all women.

Please turn with me now to **Luke 1:26-48**: *26Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." 34Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.*

36"And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. 37"For nothing will be impossible with God." 38And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. 39Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, 40and

entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42And she cried out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43“And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? 44“For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. 45“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.”

And then we read one of the most powerful hymns of praise to the Lord by Mary in what is called the *Magnificat*: *46And Mary said: “My soul exalts the Lord, 47And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. 48“For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.*

Notice how God directly deals with Mary. She has found favor with the Lord. So, too, has Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin, who we are told “*was filled with the Holy Spirit.*” In other words, God is moving personally and supernaturally in the hearts of two faithful women. They have received a special blessing but this special blessing is for all women! God is restoring that which was broken by the fall both spiritually in regards to sin, and relationally in regards to the status of women. In fact, one might contend that women are being honored in a special way above men by this very miracle.

Notice how Mary responds. She first says, “*may it be done according to your word.*” That is a statement of faith, of trust. Had it happened yet? No, but she believed. Everything we do in life is based on faith. We trust that something is true or will be true before we actually see it accomplished. I would never get on a plane if I did not have faith that the plane could fly and the pilot could fly it. I would not be here unless I had faith that you would be here also. No one would learn a trade or a skill if we did not put our faith in the one who teaches us and in the knowledge we receive. In fact, if we did not have faith we could not live! The believer and the unbeliever have faith. The difference between the two is the object of their faith, for faith is only as good as the object of that faith. The Christian believer has put his faith in Jesus Christ, and he bases that faith on the Word of God. Elizabeth even affirms this when she says, “*And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.*” It is why we read in **Hebrews 11:6** that “*without faith it is impossible to please God.*” Also, note how Elizabeth refers to Mary. She calls her the “*mother of my Lord.*”

So in the Incarnation, we see the power of God in restoring women to a special prominence in reversing the curse; we see a demonstration of true faith in both Mary and Elizabeth, but we also see the affirmation that the greatest privilege and responsibility a woman can have is to be a mom. Not all women are able to have children, and not all women may be socially fit to be a mom, but most can serve in a motherly role for others. Think of the strengths that a mom brings to life – compassion, perseverance, tolerance, patience, care, service - in other words the nurturing spirit.

MARTHA AND MARY

Now I want us to look at another example of womanhood in the Gospels – the account of Mary and Martha. Before we do that though note what is said in **Luke 8:1-3**: “*Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, 2and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called*

Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.”

Notice it was not just the twelve who were with Jesus, but women as well, some who were supporting the work of Christ’s ministry financially out of their private means. Jesus sought to minister to the women of Jewish society but not only Jewish society, but Samaria as well. Recall Jesus’s encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. But now let’s look at the example of Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus,

“Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word. 40But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.” 41But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

While we learn from this account the importance of spending time with the Lord first before anything else and making sure all our preparations and work are founded upon a relationship with Christ, what this example reminds us concerning womanhood is how women are servant-oriented as well as often more spiritually attuned than men. Who makes sure the kids are fed, the meals are prepared, the house picked up and in order? More often than not, the women of the house. Women generally have a servant’s heart to begin with. It is part of their being designed for motherhood. There is a reason why men are told to be servants to their wives and not the other way around. Women are called to respect and listen to their husbands, but husbands are told to love their wives as Christ loves the church – and what does that entail – to serve them! Why this admonition? Because I believe the servant attitude comes harder for men. But then there is the spiritual dimension of women. Did you know that women are always in the majority in churches? It is usually around 55/45 or even 60/40 depending on the place. It is true here. On Wednesday mornings it is particularly noticeable. This past Wednesday we had 30 in attendance and only 5 were men. Women tend to be involved in the life of the church more than men. As men we can learn a lot from both the example of Martha and that of Mary.

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

When we look at the accounts of our Lord’s death and resurrection, we see that women play a crucial role. After Joseph of Arimathea donated his own tomb for Jesus, we read in **Luke 23:55-56** *“Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. 56Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes.”* And notice who first came to the tomb on Sunday and to whom Jesus first appeared? Continuing in: **Lk. 24:1-10**: *“But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. 2And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; 5and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? 6“He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, 7saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” 8And they remembered His words, 9and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles.”*

The other three gospel accounts all mention the women being the first to see the empty tomb, the angels -, and for at least one woman, Mary Magdalene, also Jesus, Himself. This is significant for two reasons. First, how fitting that Jesus appears to a woman first! Another example of God's great love restoring what the first woman Eve lost! And second, it is testimony to the truthfulness of the Gospel accounts. If the Gospels were made-up stories, they would never have mentioned women being the first to testify to a risen Lord! A woman's testimony was not considered equal to a man's. Rather than make this appeal to its readers based on preconceived biases of the contemporary culture, it testified to the eyewitness accounts of the female disciples. It also elevates a woman's standing in society by validating their testimony as equal to that of a man's!

PENTECOST

Finally, we come to Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. The Holy Spirit did not only come upon and fill the men but also the women. In **Acts 1:14** it says that ***"These (the 12 Apostles) all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers."***

In fact, in his sermon during the Jewish Feast of Pentecost and after the tongues of fire fell upon the disciples so they could speak in languages of the many Jews who had come from around the world to Jerusalem, he quoted **Joel 2:28-28**. Let's look at what the Spirit of the Lord spoke through the prophet Joel some 500 years earlier and quoted by Peter in **Acts 2:17-18**, ***"It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29"Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days."***

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!