



Bronze German cross

# Week 1: The New Eve: Mary of Nazareth

*(Luke 1.39-49)*

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## Bible Reading

*In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said,*

*"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name."*

## Reflection

I've just finished writing a book about Mary of Nazareth, Mother of the Lord. It's called *Mary, Bearer of Life*. Mary bears the life of Christ, the life of God, the Word who is life, through the Spirit who is the giver of life. To bear the life of God, the life that God gives, Mary has to receive the life of God, to say 'yes' to this life. Mary Receiver of life, to be the Bearer of life, to be the Sharer of life. That gives us some sort of basis for these reflections on Mary, the new Eve. And we'll come back to that later.

This typology of Mary as the New Eve became really popular in the church from an early point thanks to some creative thinking by theologians and pastors of the early church from Justin Martyr in the second century onwards. Before going deeper into it there are a couple of preliminary points to make about the need to handle this imagery carefully.

There's a risk that speaking of Mary as the New Eve makes women the problem. And there's been an unfortunate strain of Christian thought that's seen Eve – the woman – as the primordial sinner, the temptress who became the downfall of the man, Adam, and the source of sin for all humanity. Let's be clear that scripture is clear: all have sinned; Adam's sin is as great a sin as Eve's; and Adam must take responsibility for his sin. Indeed, Paul roots human sin and its consequences – death and all the forces of anti-life – in Adam's disobedience

'For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.' (I Corinthians 15.1)

Paul, there, nicely deals with the other risk of speaking of Mary as the new Eve: whatever the contrast and asymmetry between Mary's yes to God's word and Eve's no to God's word, it's not Mary who reverses the effects of the Fall: it's Jesus. Mary receives the life that Jesus brings, she welcomes the salvation that comes from God, she believes God's word, she obeys God's call. Mary shows us how to be saved by the grace of God. We can step into that place where Mary stands and say, 'Here am I (for you); let be to me according to your word'. We can step out of that place where Eve stood and where she said, 'Here am I (for me); let it be to me according to my word'. 'The lost Eve', sang Gregory of Narek, the 10th century Armenian hymn writer,

The Lost Eve  
Deprived of life,  
Stood still  
Next to the Virgin.  
Her feet were aching,  
Her waist bent,  
Limping through life,  
Lost compared with the Virgin.

With her shrivelled arms,  
With tears she implored:  
'Life-giving Saviour,  
Give life to the lost'.

'Life-giving Saviour, Give life to the lost'. Eve limps through life, lost and yearning for the sort of fulness of life that she had tried to grasp from the hand of God and possess as her own right. Mary reaches out to take the hand of God, to receive the gift of life that brings life to the world, 'Blessed is she among women, and blessed is the fruit of her womb, Jesus.' No limping through life for this woman, redeemed by the grace of God, the life of Christ: there's standing tall and singing the promise of the lowly being lifted high. There's standing at the cross of her son, when others have fled, 'each to their own home' (John 16.32). There's standing in the streets of Jerusalem, filled with the Spirit of life, proclaiming that her son – the 'Author of life' (Acts 3.15) – has re-written history with the victory of life over anti-life, life over death. Another hymn writer, this time Ephrem the Syrian in the fourth century, wrote:

'Just as from the small womb of Eve's ear  
Death entered in and was poured out,  
so through a new ear, that was Mary's,  
Life entered and was poured out'.

Eve refused to believe God's word of life, and death came to her, and to us all. Mary believed God's word of life, and life came to her and to us all. 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call him Emmanuel', which means, "God is with us", foretold Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 7.14).

Eve's no to God and yes to self, caused her to hide from God and God to bar her from the garden of life. Mary's yes to God and no to self-fear, allowed her to bear God within her, to be filled with the fulness of God. Eve said to the Lord God, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate' (Genesis 3.13) Mary said, 'Let it be to me according to your word' (Luke 1.38) And she says to us, 'Do whatever he – my son – tells you' (John 2.5). 'These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name' (John 20.31), says John's Gospel at it draws to a close. 'Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord' (Luke 1.45); and blessed are we when we believe in Jesus, the life of the world.

## Questions

- How might the figure of Mary speak most effectively to Christians in our era?
- How should a healthy spirituality view Jesus and his mother?
- What might Mary teach us about true discipleship and mission?
- In what way are the wounds of Christ, the coming down of the Holy Spirit, the cup of the Eucharist, and the prayer of the Church all made one in Christ?

## Hymn

### Her virgin eyes

*(Thomas Ken)*

Her Virgin eyes saw God incarnate born,  
when she to Bethlem came that happy morn:  
how high her raptures then began to swell,  
none but her own omniscient Son can tell.

As Eve, when she her fontal sin reviewed,  
wept for herself and all she should include,  
blest Mary, with man's Saviour in embrace,  
joyed for herself and for all human race.

All saints are by her Son's dear influence blest;  
she kept the very fountain at her breast:  
the Son adored and nursed by the sweet Maid  
a thousandfold of love for love repaid.

Heaven with transcendent joys her entrance graced,  
near to his throne her Son his Mother placed;  
and here below, now she's of heaven possest,  
all generations are to call her blest.

Hymn Details: [https://hymnary.org/text/her\\_virgin\\_eyes\\_saw\\_god\\_incarnate\\_born](https://hymnary.org/text/her_virgin_eyes_saw_god_incarnate_born)

There are many recordings of this hymn available online

## Prayer

Almighty and Eternal God,  
you restored us to life through the coming of your Son  
when he took flesh of Mary and was born as Jesus Christ.  
Her obedience, enabled by your grace, reversed the sin  
of Eve;  
his obedience, even unto death, cancelled Adam's sin  
and won for us eternal life.

Through his resurrection pour out your Spirit on us.  
Grant that we may faithfully fulfil your will as disciples of  
Jesus Christ our Lord,  
the true and perfect Adam.

**Amen.**