

## **Mary, Mother of God**

### THE DOCTRINE OF MARY IS A LESSON FROM HISTORY

#### **INTRODUCTION**

You've probably all heard the expression, "the road to hell is paved with good intentions." Or maybe you've heard the expression, "All that glitters is not gold." If you haven't, you probably don't listen to much country music. At least, that's where I learned them. In any case, the idea is: something that makes good sense isn't always good or sensible in the long run. How often do historians look back on terrible disasters and say, "It seemed like a good idea at the time"?

ILLUS: Consider the war we are involved in overseas in Iraq. I don't mean your impression of how things are going on NOW, for good or bad. There are people sitting here who believe we're doing a great job, and others who think we need to get out now. Anyone who is fair and balanced should see that, at the time the decision was made there were at least SOME good reasons. Evidence of biological and chemicals weapons in Iraq. Evidence that Saddam Hussein was a generally bad dude. In retrospect we all need to admit that going to war "seemed like a good idea at the time." Both candidates running for President admit that.

That's the downfall of humanity wrapped up in one phrase: "It seemed like a good idea at the time."

#### **I. ELEVATING MARY SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME**

Today is the Feast of Mary, Virgin Mother of our Lord. What does Mary have to do with good intentions and roads to hell? Excellent question. The answer, you may have suspected, is "A LOT!"

#### ***Indulgences seemed like a Good Idea***

Let me take you into the Pastor St-Onge time machine for a few minutes. We're going to travel back 1700 years into the past, into, oh, let's say, Rome. The Church has begun to take hold in earnest. The Holy Spirit is converting hundreds of people yearly. A sizable minority of the city is now Christian, a fact which has not slipped the minds of the authorities, the main authority being the Emperor.

Emperors were fickle. Sometimes they left the Christians alone, and sometimes they went after them with a vengeance. Woe to you who were born and baptized under an anti-Christian emperor! Unfortunately, we've traveled back to the time of the Emperor Diocletian. You thought Saddam Hussein was bad. This was a royally evil dude, pun intended.

20 years into his rule, he decides he's had enough with the Christians, and begins to do them in. First, churches were burned and all Christian books destroyed. So you're sitting in worship right now, listening to your pastor, when the Imperial troops come in, march you out of St. Mark's and burn it to the ground.

Second, all pastors were required to renounce the faith. Otherwise, you faced imprisonment, torture, and death. Lastly, YOU were required to sacrifice to God. Just God – not the Trinity and to Christ, but God. Basically, the God who blesses Rome. And helps her win battles. The God your pastor had told you is a false God, not the God and Father of Jesus.

Now let's suppose you break down under pressure. You think, "It's just killing an animal and praying to God – God wouldn't want me to die for him, would he?" Later, of course, by the work of the Spirit you realize you've denied the faith. Now what?

Well, a couple of years later, when Diocletian is dead, you try and come back to church. And the first question you're asked is: Have you repented for what you've done? WELL? HAVE YOU? "Yes," you say, "I'm really sorry." HOW SORRY? Then your pastor makes a house call. And he asks that you demonstrate that you're really sorry. Help the families of the pastors and deacons who were killed. Help them rebuild their lives. Then the church'll know you've really repented.

Now tell me: who here among you wouldn't think that's PERFECTLY REASONABLE TO ASK? Who here hasn't wanted someone to SHOW that they're really sorry? Who hasn't wanted proof that someone really wants to do better after they've wronged them?

Well, this perfectly reasonable, good idea came to have a name: PENANCE. A few centuries down the road, penance will come to be sold For MONEY. So you can BUY the proof of your repentance in the form of An INDULGENCE. So what seemed like a GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME, turns into the reason for Luther's Reformation.

Those who don't know history are doomed to start us out down the same roads so many "horrible heresies" we all condemn, As "CATHOLIC" or "PAGAN," started as simple, innocent steps - good intentions - that seemed like A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME.

### **Honoring Mary Seemed like a Good Idea**

Now if we were to get back in our time machine and jump ahead another century, we would find a very different church. Christianity is now the state religion. Every Roman Citizen is "nominally" a Christian. And the Church is embroiled in a doctrinal controversy. A prominent pastor in Turkey has been preaching some odd things about Mary. He's saying she's the Mother of Christ, but only the mother of his human nature. The Son of God "took on" that nature at birth so the Son of God was not in the womb of Mary.

Okay, now it sounds like were getting into nit-picking and technicalities, but bear with me here. This is an important point. The Church is about to take a significant stand. The Church will condemn this pastor's position as unbiblical. The Church will affirm that the Son of God, divine in all the same ways as the Father and the Spirit, dwelt for 9 months in Mary's womb. Which makes Mary – and here's the kicker – the Mother of God. The creature becomes the bearer of the uncreated Son of God

Why is this important? Because Jesus is our Savior precisely because he is God and man. If you've been reading my little bulletin talks on the Creed you've heard this point being made over and over, that Jesus is fully GOD and fully man. In our catechism, Martin Luther wrote: "I believe that Jesus Christ, Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, And Son of Man, born of the Virgin Mary, Is my Lord."

In Jesus you can't separate the God from the Man. And if that's true, and as good biblical Christians we believe life starts at conception and not at birth, then the tiny baby in Mary's Womb was also the one through whom all things were created and have their being.

Now – imagine you're a pastor in the church, trying to fight back all the people who wrongly believe the baby was only human, and not God. That Mary was the bearer of Jesus the man, and not of God. How do you defeat it? You honor Mary. You preach about Mary. You preach about Mary a lot.

Perfectly reasonable, right? If you're trying to defend something, you talk about it a lot?

ILLUS: That's why we know all the details of John Kerry's service in Vietnam. The name of his boat, his crewmates, how many people he saved, how long he knew them, how long his hair was when he served, what kind of toothpaste they had on the boat, etc. etc. etc. Meantime, we're not hearing about OTHER IMPORTANT THINGS. If the election was held today, I think it'd be a referendum on what we think of Kerry's tour of duty! That's some of what happened in the church.

Mary went from being Mother of our Lord to being, rightly so, called Mary, Mother of God. Then we, well, kind of "invented" the story about her assumption into heaven until, centuries later, Mary became the blessed Mother, the mediatrix and co-redeemer with Christ.

It seemed like a good idea at the time to promote Mary to defeat a false teaching. But down the road, a little emphasis can become a disastrous heresy. In the Roman church, the Mother of our Lord is now the Savior of Mankind.

## **II. WHAT THINGS WE DO WILL SEEM LIKE "GOOD IDEAS AT THE TIME"?**

Okay, we've back in the time machine, we're back in Ridley Park, at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, in August of 2004. Now we have to ask ourselves an important question: What things WE are changing will end up being DISASTERS? What things we are doing will people of the future look back on, saying, IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME?

### **Worship**

We have to be careful about what we change in worship. We're careful about our hymns, careful about the words we use, careful about the symbols of our actions. Do you know most of what has "changed" since I've been here are actually "rollbacks"? We've changed some things back to the way they used to be, because some of those things could have led to us having to say to our great-grandchildren, "Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time."

The new hymnal the LCMS is producing is, in many ways, OLD. It contains some rollbacks, changes "back," to things the way they used to be because we've looked at some of the things we're doing NOW and see how they could lead to disaster down the road.

### **Doctrine**

The same goes for what we teach. Lots of people in the Synod say we need to stop obsessing about what we teach. "People are going to hell in our community everyday!" they say. "We need to get the message out!" they cry. "Quite obsessing about – the eight letter word – 'doctrine'!"

All fine and dandy – But what should we stop worrying about? What teachings might we drop NOW that will have disastrous consequences in the FUTURE?

Look around at the churches that stopped worrying about their teaching: Some of our countries biggest churches have NO CROSSES. Are MARRYING MEN TO MEN AND WOMEN TO WOMEN. Are singing LOVE SONGS to their buddy Jesus in church. Instead of SONGS OF PRAISE and THANKSGIVING to GOD. Are saying that the baby in Mary’s womb was a CHOICE. She could kill it or keep it, but it wasn’t really LIFE.

Do YOU want to be the one responsible for your great-grandchildren worshipping the Saints? Or Mary? Or worse yet, a False, Civil God? Of course not.

### CONCLUSION

The Feast of Mary is a time to honor and commemorate the Mother of our Lord. And, yes, the Mother of God. She was the chosen hand-maid of the Lord, and because of her obedience, our Lord Jesus Christ was born into the world and not aborted. She is the first among equals, an example for us to emulate. This Feast is an even more important time to remember her Son, What he taught and told us to teach others about himself, about his death for the sins of the world, that we might be forgiven. About his rising from the dead, that we might have eternal life.

This feast is a crucial time to remember who important good teaching and learning is the Lord desires us to keep all things he has commanded. The little changes and alterations to those commands we make now might have disastrous consequences down the road.

ILLUS: LWML Conference, woman from Christ Memorial. One woman at the conference ssighed, “You know how Lutherans hate change.” To which my wife, Deb, responded, “and that is our salvation!”

Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word  
Keep those who by deceit or sword  
Would rest the kingdom from your Son  
And bring to nought all you have done

So that we might never have to meekly apologize to the generations yet to come, saying:

**“It seemed like a good idea at the time.”**

Amen.