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Abstract

The words spoken by Elizabeth to greet Mary on the occasion of the Visitation contain lessons for the Christian regarding how to be a disciple. Each verse of Elizabeth's greeting has its own lesson. By exploring the background and context of these four verses, a disciple of Christ is to be active in combating evil spirits, evangelizing, being an instrument of sanctification, and seeking to know more about divine revelation.

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In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.' (Lk. 1:39-45)¹

Few direct references to Mary are found in the Gospels. Indeed, the four Gospels have a total of eleven distinct incidents in which she is mentioned. Among these eleven, she is referred to only by name or as Jesus' mother five times,² simply has a statement directed to her on two other occasions,³ and is a conversation partner with someone else in the four remaining texts.⁴ With whom does Mary speak in the latter four passages? She speaks with the archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation. Mary converses with her Son twice, and their exchanges take place when she finds Him as a youth teaching in the Temple and approaches Him about the lack of wine at the wedding in Cana. But the only human being recorded in the Gospels to have conversed with Mary is Elizabeth, whom Mary visits while both women are pregnant. Their dialogue has but two parts. Its entirety consists of Elizabeth's greeting, followed by Mary's song of praise to God, the Magnificat. Despite the fact that each woman speaks only once, both the greeting and song do share a remarkable characteristic; each is primarily about someone other than the one speaking. In the greeting of Elizabeth, the focus is on Mary,⁵ just as in the Magnificat, the subject is God. Taking for granted the importance of God, the person of Mary is worthy of attention because, of all the people whom Jesus chose to participate in His earthly work of salvation, she is the only one who does not misunderstand, challenge, deny, betray, or doubt Him.⁶ Mary is the model disciple. If so, then

¹ All Bible quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition, unless otherwise noted.

² Matthew's genealogy (Mt. 1:16), Matthew's nativity (Mt. 1:18-2:23), Luke's nativity (Lk. 2:1-20), Jesus' statement regarding who are His 'true brethren' (Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21), and the rejection of Jesus in Nazareth (Mt. 13:53-58; Mk. 6:1-6).

³ The Presentation in the Temple (Lk. 2:22-38) and at the foot of the Cross (Jn. 19:25-27).

⁴ The Annunciation (Lk. 1:26-38), the Visitation (Lk. 1:39-56), the discovery of Jesus teaching in the Temple (Lk. 2:41-52), and the wedding at Cana (Jn. 2:1-12). The wedding at Cana is unique in that Mary both converses with Jesus and issues a command to a servant.

⁵ I.e., 'Blessed are you among women' (v. 42); 'why [does] . . . the mother of my Lord . . . come to me?' (v. 43); 'when the voice of your greeting came' (v. 44); and 'blessed is she who believed' (v. 45).

⁶ St. John Paul II notes: 'Several early Fathers of the Church [e.g., Origen, St. Basil of Caesarea and St. Hilary of Poitiers], who were not yet convinced of her perfect holiness, attributed imperfections or moral defects to Mary. . . . However, the Gospel texts cited to justify these opinions provide no basis at all for attributing a sin or even a moral imperfection to the Mother of the Redeemer.' See St. John Paul II, 'Mary was Free from all



the words of Elizabeth's greeting, insofar as they describe Mary, can call to mind some important tasks for which any of Christ's other, less exemplary disciples could be responsible. Taking each verse of the greeting in order, these tasks include spiritual deliverance, evangelization, sanctification and the pursuit of an ever greater understanding of what has been accepted through faith.

I. Verse 42: Spiritual Deliverance

In 2012, the Pope Leo XIII Institute was established in Libertyville, Illinois, on the grounds of the seminary for the Archdiocese of Chicago, and the purpose of this Institute is to train clergy and laity for their respective roles in delivering those who suffer from demonic affliction.⁷ Part of this training involves a greater appreciation of the Blessed Virgin. 'Because of her unique role in salvation history as mother of the Word of God, Mary plays a key role in spiritual warfare,⁸ and Mary's role is especially important. Fr. Chad Ripperger, arguably the most famous contemporary exorcist in America, writes the following about her prominence in his work.

When a man or group of men is conquered or vanquished, they are weak in relationship to the conqueror. In a like manner, God has set up throughout history and by divine decree that certain individuals will become the nemeses of particular demons. This was obviously seen in the Protoevangelium when Satan was told that a woman would crush his head, and therefore, we may say that She [Mary] would be his nemesis.⁹

Thus, in virtue of being Satan's nemesis, an examination of Mary can shed light on the manner in which Christians, in modelling themselves after her, can help drive away fallen angels. To see why, it is necessary to appeal to scriptural precedents that establish a connection between the opening line of Elizabeth's greeting and Genesis 3: 15. These precedents lay the

Personal Sin,' EWTN, accessed 24 February 2025, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/mary-was-free-from-all-personal-sin-8041>.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council praised Mary 'as a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity.' *Lumen Gentium* n. 53, The Holy See, 21 November 1964, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

⁷ 'The Pope Leo XIII Institute serves bishops, priests, exorcists, deacons, and laity. Rooted in the love of the Father who defines the identity of each person, the Pope Leo XIII Institute supports the spiritual formation of priests, preparing their minds and hearts to bring the light of Christ to dispel evil and to heal the wounded and afflicted.' 'Our Purpose,' Pope Leo XIII Institute, accessed 9 May 2026, <https://popeleo13institute.org/our-mission-and-purpose>.

⁸ Dan Schneider, *The Liber Christo Method: A Field Manual for Spiritual Combat*, Gastonia, NC: TAN, 2023, 115.

⁹ Fr. Chad Ripperger, *Dominion: The Nature of Diabolical Warfare*, Keenesburg, CO: Sensus Traditionis, 2022, 107. For an explanation why Mary, not Christ, is taken to be the one who crushes the serpent's head, see note 17, below.

foundation for concluding that Mary does have a role in defeating the Devil and thus indicates the manner in which a Christian can be effective in the ministry of spiritual deliverance.

Elizabeth begins her greeting with a statement that is similar to Old Testament verses used in praise for a woman's victory over an adversary. Elizabeth says, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!' In Christian exegesis, this statement can be joined to Genesis 3:15: 'I will put enmity between you [i.e., the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.'¹⁰ The reason why Luke 1:42 and Genesis 3:15 can be read together in reference to Mary is because Jael and Judith are two other women in the Bible who are hailed as 'blessed' in conjunction with applying deadly force against the head of an enemy.¹¹

Jael is a Gentile woman responsible for killing Sisera, a general of the Canaanites. According to the first chapters in the book of Judges, the Israelites, who had only recently arrived in the Promised Land, struggled to remain faithful to God and instead 'served the Baals' (Judg. 2:11). Consequently, God had permitted foreign nations to encroach upon borders of Israel so that these nations could serve as a means of punishment for the Israelites' unfaithfulness.¹² One period of punishment was inflicted by the Canaanite general, Sisera, who oppressed Israel for twenty years (Judg. 4.3). About the year 1125 BC, the faithful judge Barak and the prophet Deborah mustered a Jewish army that defeated Sisera's forces in a battle near Mount Tabor. Sisera escaped the defeat and sought refuge in the tent of Jael, the

¹⁰ *Genesis* 3:15 has been subject to various interpretations, and many of them are silent regarding Mary. For example, when reflecting on what is meant by 'the woman's offspring,' the authors of a Reformed Bible commentary argue that this phrase refers to Eve's spiritual descendants and not merely her biological ones. They write, 'Beyond the woman, the whole family of the true humanity, becoming her spiritual seed by faith, will stand in continuing conflict with those descendants of fallen Adam who obdurately manifest spiritual sonship to the devil.' D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer, *The New Bible Commentary, Revised*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970, 85.

Another non-Marian way of interpreting the text is that 'the woman', Eve, represents all of humanity, while the snake is a symbol for nature. Therefore, *Genesis* 3:15 is 'a prediction of the enmity between the human and subhuman worlds.' James L. Mays, gen. ed., *Harper's Bible Commentary*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988, 88.

¹¹ **[Luke] 1:42 Blessed are you:** Elizabeth blesses Mary with words once spoken to Jael and Judith in the OT (Judg. 5:24-27; Jud. 13:18). These women were blessed for their heroic faith and courage in warding off enemy armies hostile to Israel. Victory was assured when both Jael and Judith assassinated the opposing military commanders with a mortal blow to the head. Mary will follow in their footsteps, yet in her case both the enemy destroyed and the victory won will be greater, for she will bear the Savior who crushes the head of sin, death, and the devil underfoot.' Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch (eds), *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, Revised Standard Version*, Second Catholic Edn, San Francisco: Ignatius, 2024, 1830; bold in original.

¹² 'Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and He delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord would be moved to pity by their groaning because of those who persecuted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they would relapse and behave worse than their ancestors, following other gods, worshipping them and bowing down to them; they would not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not obeyed my voice, I will not henceforth drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, that by them I may test Israel, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the Lord as their fathers did or not." So the Lord left those nations, not driving them out at once, and he did not give them into the power of Joshua' (Judg. 2:18-23).



wife of Heber the Kenite, a man allied with the king of Canaan. But once Sisera had fallen asleep, Jael ‘took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, till it went down into the ground... . So he died’ (Judg. 4:21). For killing Sisera, Deborah’s song features a lyric in which Jael was honored as the ‘Most blessed of women.... [, who] crushed his head’ (Judg. 5:24, 26).

In the tale of Judith, another enemy general dies at the hands of a woman who strikes at his head. The book of Judith is a fictional work¹³ with a theological message, which is the importance of trusting God.¹⁴ The story begins with King Nebuchadnezzar calling for aid from his vassal nations to support an invasion of Persia. The vassals refused. After Nebuchadnezzar was victorious over the Persians anyway, he ordered his general, Holofernes, to lead a large punitive force and exact revenge from the disobedient client kingdoms. Eventually, Holofernes and his army encamped below a Jewish hill town called Bethulia, which would have been the first Israelite settlement to be destroyed. After being surrounded for many days, the Jews of Bethulia were thirsty, starving and ready to surrender. But Judith, a faithful, intelligent, beautiful and wealthy widow, volunteered to undertake a secret mission of her own devising. She approached Holofernes’ camp, and after being captured, she promised to show the general how he could capture the town and all of Judea with ease. Four days later, Holofernes invited Judith to a private banquet in his tent. The general drank himself into a stupor, and as soon as the last person left the tent, Judith took the general’s sword, ‘struck his neck twice with all her might, and severed his head from his body’ (Judith 13:8). For this deed that eventually led to an invading army’s defeat at the hands of the Israelites, one of the chief men in Bethulia said, ‘O daughter, you are blessed by the Most High God above all other women on earth’ (Judith 13:18).

Although there is enough in common between the passages about Jael and Judith, and Luke 1:42 and Genesis 3:15 to warrant a comparison, the latter pair of texts does not perfectly match the first two. The verses about Jael and Judith are clearly about their respective women. Conversely, while Luke 1:42 is about and directed to Mary, ‘the woman’ in Genesis 3:15, taken in its literal sense, is Eve.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Genesis 3:15 can be read in a way so as

¹³ ‘Many scholars today classify Judith as a work of fiction that was given a broadly historical setting.’ Hahn and Mitch, *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*, 734.

¹⁴ ‘[T]he book has a spiritual message that is arrestingly simple: courageous faith can accomplish great things for God.’ Hahn and Mitch, *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*, 735.

¹⁵ There is also the matter of the Marian texts being found not only in different books but different Testaments. The Old Testament pairings are each found within a single book, while the two Marian verses are taken from *Genesis* and *Luke*, respectively. A concern about the textual distance between these books can be alleviated by recalling the basic, two-part structure of salvation history. The need to be saved precedes the process of salvation. But each one of the two texts in question is found at the very beginning of each part. *Genesis* 3:15 is embedded in the opening account of how the need to be saved originated, and *Luke* 1:42 is composed just as God starts to implement His plan of salvation. Thus, seen in light of Satan having placed human beings in danger and God’s starting the long-awaited means of rescue, it seems reasonable to conclude that the placement of these two verses renders them closely related theologically, even if not spatially or temporally.

to conclude that this verse does speak prophetically of Mary and her instrumental role in Satan's defeat.

The Marian interpretation of Genesis 3:15 is rooted in the promise made by God regarding 'the woman's seed.'¹⁶ The promise in Genesis 3:15 is that the woman's offspring will strike the serpent's head, and because the serpent is taken to be a symbolic representation of Satan, 'the woman,' whose offspring strikes at the snake's head, prefigures Mary. Indeed, a Reformed Bible commentary notes that the pronoun for 'he'¹⁷ is used in the place of 'the woman's seed,' and '[this] focusing on an individual . . . in connection with the eventual decisive encounter suggests that the *he* . . . is not the woman's seed collectively but their individual champion.'¹⁸ This 'individual champion' must be Jesus Christ. Furthermore, if the 'individual champion' is Christ, who is the woman's offspring, the verse should also be taken as a prophecy of Mary, who is the specific woman from whom Jesus immediately sprang.

In virtue of being chosen by God to be the woman whose offspring is the Savior, Mary is an instrumental cause of salvation. An instrumental cause is that by which a goal is accomplished; that is to say, it is a condition or means on which an efficient cause relies in order to achieve a desired effect.¹⁹ Even though God alone ultimately causes salvation and so need not have relied on anyone or anything to save the human beings, revelation clearly teaches that His salvific plan employs many persons who serve as instrumental causes, such as the Patriarchs, Prophets, Old Testament authors, the entire Jewish people, and the Romans. Mary, too, is such a cause. A prophetic interpretation of Genesis 3:15 points to the historical fact that God the Father's plan to defeat Satan involves God the Son being put into

¹⁶ Mary 'is already prophetically foreshadowed in the promise of victory over the serpent which was given to our first parents after their fall into sin.' *Lumen Gentium* n. 55.

¹⁷ There is a popular tradition in Western Christian art that depicts Mary, not Christ, as the one crushing the serpent's head. The reason for this artistic tradition has much to do with an errant Latin translation of a Hebrew word in Genesis 3:15. In the second half of the verse, a pronoun is used that refers back to the 'seed' of the woman and is usually translated as 'he.' The Hebrew spelling of the pronoun without vowel marking is הוּא. But without knowing the appropriate vowel, as indicated by the properly placed mark, these letters by themselves are not a word. If the word is spelled הוּא (*hû*), it is the pronoun 'he'; if it is spelled הִיא (*hî*), the word is 'she'.

The confusion as to which pronoun ought to be used seems to have begun when an unknown translator chose the wrong one. When St. Jerome (d. c. 420) first started translating the Bible into Latin, the system of Hebraic vowel markings had not been invented; that system began to be developed around 700 AD and was not perfected for at least another two centuries (see *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 9, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967, 411; s.v. 'Masora'). But in Jerome's commentary on Genesis (*Liber Hebraicarum quaestionum in Genesim* [c. 390]), he did translate the Hebrew word as the masculine pronoun (Latin, *ipse*), so someone else must have been responsible for using the feminine pronoun (*ipsa*) instead (see Dom Bernard Orchard, et al. (eds), *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1952, 186). The error in judgment might have been inspired by the fact that הוּא, without the vowel mark and in the sense of 'she', was used in reference to Eve in Genesis 3:20. Perhaps the translator switched the pronoun in 3:15 from 'he' to 'she' for the sake of consistency.

¹⁸ Guthrie and Motyer, *The New Bible Commentary*, 85; italics in original.

¹⁹ 'Instrumental causality ... applies to a special type of efficient cause that is itself ... elevated by the power of a principal efficient cause to produce an effect proportionate to the nature and power of the principal cause.' *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, 549; s.v. 'Instrumental Causality.'



a position for victory over the Devil through Mary. She freely agrees to participate in this plan by saying, 'let it be' (Luke 1:38); her divine Son enters the human race by means of 'a humanity drawn from her own';²⁰ and she cares for Him so that He can mature to adulthood, a condition necessary for His ministry, suffering, death and resurrection.²¹ As instrumental causes go, Mary is unarguably the most important human person whom God uses to facilitate the delivery of all men from Satan and his angels.

Deliverance from evil spirits is an essential component of Christianity. Jesus' public ministry begins with freeing people from the influence of demons,²² and when he sends the Apostles on their first missionary trip to the surrounding countryside, he confers upon them this same ability.²³ The ministry of deliverance then continues to be exercised in the Church, as evidenced by the fact that, when the Apostles frequented Solomon's Portico, people brought 'those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed' (Acts 5:16).²⁴ Today, this spiritual ministry is still practiced, especially by those Christian communities that teach belief in the reality of the Devil and his minions.²⁵ Methods of deliverance vary, such as personal 'prayer, the sacraments, sacramentals, group prayers,'²⁶ and especially in the Catholic Church, the Rite of Exorcism. But in terms of the qualities a Christian must have to be effective in delivering someone from a diabolical presence, two practical lessons can be drawn from reading Genesis 3:15 as the Marian complement to Luke 1:42. A disciple who participates in the deliverance ministry is, like Mary, nothing more than an instrumental cause in another's spiritual liberation, and therefore such disciples must adopt a Marian attitude, one in which they acknowledge that any power to expel a demon is from Christ, and see themselves as nothing more than his faithful servants.

Christians are able to deliver someone from demonic influence only because they ask that the power of Christ work through them. Christ alone has the ability to save the human

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2nd edn, 1997, #485.

²¹ In one of my World Religion classes, a woman who attended a Pentecostal church insisted that Mary was nothing more than a passive 'vessel.' My guess is that, because salvation is a matter of divine prerogative and sovereignty, God had to be the only active agent in accomplishing it. Thus, to acknowledge that Mary, or any other human being, was given an opportunity to be a participant in the process of saving humanity would entail assigning a privilege reserved for God to a creature, thereby risking idolatry. Yet Mary's position as mother, by which she does serve as a saving instrument of God, need not be reduced to pure passivity at the Annunciation. Scripture is indeed silent about Jesus' earliest years, but it would hardly be an exercise in heretical creativity to imagine that Mary's efforts to raise him must have counted for something.

²² Cf. Matthew 4:24; Mark 1:23-28; Luke 4:31-37.

²³ Matthew 10:1, 8; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1.

²⁴ In Acts, individual Apostles are given credit for exorcising demons. Philip does so in Acts 8:6-7, and Paul, too, in Acts 16:16-18.

²⁵ These communities include the Catholic Church, Orthodoxy, the Anglican and Episcopal communions, Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Charismatics. One of the characteristics that these Christian groups share is having successfully defended themselves from Enlightenment ideas. 'In this respect, as in the study and dissemination of the Bible, Catholics [as well as the groups listed above] are lagging behind some Protestant denominations... [R]ationalism and materialism have polluted a segment of theologians, and their influence on both bishops and priests has been profound. It is the people of God who pay for these errors.' Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, trans. Nicoletta V. MacKenzie, San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999, 173.

²⁶ Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist: More Stories*, trans. Nicoletta V. MacKenzie, San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002, 185.

race from evil; he is the offspring of 'the woman' in Genesis that strikes at the serpent's head. While striking the head of the serpent symbolizes the Devil's ultimate downfall, the striking is an act that can also point to all of the smaller losses Satan will suffer before the End, particularly through the expulsion of demons who spiritually have attached themselves to individual human beings. Christ exorcises many people during his public ministry, and not only did He give the Apostles a share in his divine 'authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out' (Mt. 10:1), but he also bestowed that same ability on seventy other faithful disciples.²⁷ Thus, any Christian, whether responsible for an office of Church leadership or not, may participate in spiritual deliverance by calling 'upon . . . the power granted by Christ to all believers'²⁸ and so serve as His instruments. Just as God chooses to rely on Mary to be the person through whom the Son enters the world to save it, so too God has decided that Christians should be conduits for his power to bring into the world a practical foretaste of salvation, namely, deliverance from evil spirits.

In addition to recognizing one's dependence on Christ for the power by which demons prowling about the earth are returned to Hell, a Christian in deliverance ministry should also imitate Mary's strong, personal faith. Mary's faith in God and His salvific plan made possible her assent to a position of instrumental service as the Lord's 'handmaid' (Lk. 1:38; cf. v. 48). Likewise, faith in Christ, even of the most rudimentary kind,²⁹ is the precondition for appeals to Him so that someone else might be freed from a satanic presence.³⁰ And the more a Christian's faith approaches the intensity of Mary's, the better. A strong faith both makes

²⁷ Initially sent by Jesus to proclaim the Kingdom of God, 'The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"' (Lk. 10:17).

²⁸ Amorth, *An Exorcist: More Stories*, 92. The universal scope of the Christian obligation to combat evil spirits is implied in the Commission given by Jesus: 'And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons"' (Mk. 16:15-17).

²⁹ At the time of Jesus' public ministry, it seems that even the merest confidence in His Name could produce positive spiritual effects: 'John said to him, "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak ill of me. For he that is not against us is for us"' (Mk. 9:38-40; cf. Lk. 9:49-50).

³⁰ Conversely, a lack of faith renders one's prayers of deliverance ineffective: '[A] man came up to him [i.e., Jesus] and kneeling before him said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples and they could not heal him." And Jesus answered, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from hence to yonder place,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you"' (Mt. 17:14-21; cf. Mk. 9:14-27).



prayers of deliverance more successful³¹ and is a means of protection.³²

II. Verse 43: Evangelization

Another task incumbent upon the Christian is evangelization,³³ and important techniques for meeting this obligation can be found in Elizabeth's second statement to Mary. The statement takes the form of a question. Elizabeth asks Mary, 'And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?' The occasion for this question is that Mary, who is pregnant with God's incarnate Word, brings both herself and him to her cousin. In imitation of Mary, evangelizers must also intimately possess and personally communicate the Word of God, now in the equivocal sense of the Gospel message. But the Visitation and evangelization are alike not merely by way of analogy. If a Christian disciple wants to become competent at achieving the three fundamental goals of evangelizing, the disciple should adopt the same personal qualities exhibited by Mary during her visit.

Because evangelization is the effort to communicate the Gospel in such a manner so as to motivate someone else to believe in Christ, the very nature of faith as an act indicates the three things an evangelizer must do. Regarding the inner dynamic of the act, Christian faith is a specific form of belief, which is willed assent.³⁴ Therefore, two basic goals for an

³¹ *'The Lord takes faith into account.* Therefore, the simple prayer of a lay person, even though it is private, could be more efficacious than the prayer of anyone else. Just as it is possible that the private prayer of a priest who is not an exorcist, if offered with great faith, may be more effective than the prayer of the exorcist authorized by the bishop, but who acts with lesser faith.' Amorth, *An Exorcist: More Stories*, 92; italics in original.

³² The risk of demonic retaliation for participating in the deliverance ministry is faced primarily by those whose faith is weak and who are not properly trained. This rule is illustrated by an episode in Acts: 'Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded' (Acts 19:13-16).

Conversely, Fr. Amorth warns that those who are faithful and properly trained ought not be worried about such retaliation: 'I also want to refute a popular belief that, I do not know how, has managed to convince a good portion of the clergy: that is, the conviction that the devil retaliates against exorcists. . . . I will continue to repeat this – and I beg you to believe me: the devil is already causing each one of us as much harm as he is allowed to do. It is false to believe that if I leave him alone, he will leave me alone. . . . A priest who is afraid of the devil's reprisal can be compared to a shepherd who is afraid of the wolf. It is a groundless fear.

'It would be futile to overestimate any vengeance staged by the devil to discourage exorcists. These are rare instances... .

'It is the Lord who is in charge, and he never gives us greater trials than we can endure. Woe to us, however, if we back down through cowardice and abdicate our duties.' Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, 194, 196.

³³ Although the commission to spread the Good News is formally bestowed by Christ to the Eleven (e.g. Mt. 28:16-20; Mk. 16:14-15; Lk. 24:33-34, 44-48; Acts 1:8), all Christians at the very least must, when necessary, confess being disciples of Christ by professing faith in Him (Mt. 10:32-33; Lk. 12:8-9); they should also express their discipleship through a life characterized by Christian love (Jn. 13:34-35).

³⁴ 'Now the act of believing [in Christ] is an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God.' St. Thomas Aquinas, OP, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 3; Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981 [1948], 1180; II-II, question 2, article 9; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #155.

evangelizer are engaging both the intellect and will of a non-Christian. There is also the matter of faith's object, or in other words, that to which willed assent is given. Faith has two such objects. Saint Thomas Aquinas observes: 'Now, whoever believes assents to someone's words; so that, in every form of belief, *the person* to whose words assent is given seems to hold the chief place and to be the end as it were; while *the things* by holding which one assents to that person hold a secondary place.'³⁵ So, because evangelizers themselves are objects to whom willed assent is given, even prior to the Gospel they proclaim, a third goal for Christians who are active in evangelization is to be at their personal best as disciples.

This awareness of a disciple's priority as an object of assent invites the adoption of what one might call a 'Marian method' by which all three of the most fundamental tasks in the evangelizing process are accomplished. Thus, when considering the dynamic elements that define faith as an act, it is not enough that an evangelizer attempt to make the Christian message appealing to another's intellect and will; evangelizers must first present themselves as persons who have thoroughly integrated the Gospel into their lives, and having become authentic witnesses of Christianity, they can serve as living sources from which the Gospel's intellectual and volitional appeal can be experienced. Naturally, a non-Christian being able to experience the appeal of the Christian faith in the evangelizer is best done through a direct, personal interaction. Clues as to how Christians who are committed to evangelization can implement such a method to achieve these goals can be seen in Mary during the Visitation. Evangelizers need to imitate Mary's confidence in divine revelation, enthusiasm for God, and dedication to interpersonal self-giving, three qualities whose importance was recognized by evangelizing groups such as the Catholic Evidence Guild.³⁶

During the Visitation, Mary is completely confident in God's plan for her, and an evangelizer would be well-advised to exhibit the same degree of intellectual certainty in the Gospel. Mary's response to Elizabeth's greeting is the Magnificat. Nowhere in this song of praise is there an expression of doubt. Indeed, among the fifteen subject-predicate pairings in the song, twelve subjects are either God or a divine attribute (i.e., His name [v. 49] and mercy [v. 50]) followed by definitive claims as to what He has done.³⁷ Likewise, before proclaiming the Gospel, an evangelizer ought to be just as secure in Christianity's reasonableness. For example, Francis Joseph (a.k.a., Frank) Sheed,³⁸ a Catholic Evidence Guild

³⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 3, 1218; II-II, question 11, article 1.

³⁶ The Catholic Evidence Guild (CEG) was founded in London, England by a New Zealander, Vernon Redwood, on 24 April 1918. Guild members would frequent publicly-recognized 'speakers' corners' in city parks throughout the country, attempt to draw crowds of listeners, and then explain Church teaching. The CEG was most active in the United Kingdom but did establish branch organizations in Australia and the United States. Undoubtedly, the Guild's most famous son was the Australian, Francis Joseph Sheed (20 March 1897, Sydney – 20 November 1981, Jersey City, NJ), who co-founded with his wife, Maisie Ward, the Sheed and Ward publishing company. For more information about the CEG and Sheed, see Christopher M. Carr, 'Sheed's Life as Told Through a History of His Apostolates,' chap. 1 in *Catholic Theology as a Means of Evangelization: The Witness of Francis Joseph Sheed*, Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 2005, 18-116.

³⁷ I.e., 'He has regarded . . .' (v. 48), 'He . . . has done great things for me . . .' (v. 49), 'He has shown strength . . .' (v. 51), etc.

³⁸ See note 36, above.



street corner speaker, insists that one explaining the Christian faith must **‘never offer the audience any line of thought of which one is not wholly convinced oneself.’**³⁹ Although a speaker’s intellectual confidence does not necessarily inspire assent in a listener, uncertainty is contagious. Flailing attempts to expound upon an unfamiliar or personally unconvincing line of thought erodes credibility in a speaker and, by extension, the Christian message. However, evangelizers who are certain that God’s revelation in Christ is true and so reflect Mary’s own singleness of mind will be more likely to make a positive impression upon the minds of non-Christians.

Appealing to the will of a non-Christian can be done, in part, by an evangelizer’s enthusiasm that mirrors Mary’s desire to see Elizabeth. According to Luke’s Gospel, immediately after Gabriel informs Mary that Elizabeth was expecting, ‘Mary arose and went *with haste* into the hill country’ (Lk. 1:39; emphasis added).⁴⁰ A similar sense of urgency is valuable when a Christian disciple commits to missionary work. In Frank Sheed’s book, *Theology for Beginners*, Sheed not only summarizes the theological content that he gave street corner crowds but also provides some insight as to why he was moved to evangelize outdoors.

The most obvious fact of our day is that we are surrounded by millions who are starved of food that Christ Our Lord wanted them to have – they are getting too small a ration of truth, and of the Eucharist no ration at all... . We should not take it so calmly if their starvation were bodily, for we do know the value of the bread that perishes.⁴¹

Even though physical starvation is more painfully felt, spiritual starvation, a condition based on the lack of grace, and a state often unrecognized, is in fact much worse. Thus, Sheed had a zeal for evangelizing, and if conviction in the truth of the Gospel can arouse someone’s intellectual curiosity, a disciple’s drive to communicate the faith can stimulate a willingness in another to learn why Christianity has made the disciple choose the difficult task of evangelization.

Finally, successful evangelizing depends on emulating Mary’s dedication to Elizabeth by making an interpersonal connection with those to whom the Gospel is being preached. The purpose of the Visitation is not merely for Mary to help Elizabeth until John the Baptist is

³⁹ F. J. Sheed, *Faith Comes by Hearing: Study Outlines on Speaking the Faith*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1967, 28; bold in original.

⁴⁰ Cf. ‘When the Blessed Virgin felt that the Word was made Flesh in her, she was conscious of a great desire to pay an immediate visit to her cousin Elizabeth at Juttah near Hebron, whom the angel had told her was now six months with child.’ Anne Catherine Emmerich, *Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, trans. Michael Palaret, Oxford, UK: Benediction Classics, 2009, 151.

⁴¹ F. J. Sheed, *Theology for Beginners*, Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 3rd edn, 1981, 6.

born;⁴² the two women can now share in the experience of their pregnancies.⁴³ This focus on cultivating a personal relationship conforms to a rule adopted by the Catholic Evidence Guild. When working to communicate the faith, a speaker should always strive to give of oneself to another 'with the truth adhering.' Sheed writes:

The self of the teacher has to make contact with the self of the hearer. To say that the speaker must give himself with the truth adhering may sound pretentious, especially if you have the standard picture of the soapbox orator. But it is precise. The speaker and his message reach the hearer together.⁴⁴

Only personal contact then leads to a sharing or union of minds, by which evangelization most effectively takes place.

For vital communication, what is needed is a union of minds, as a result of which a truth living in one mind becomes a truth living in the other. In a given crowd, outdoors or in, such a union of minds will be consummated with only a small number; nor are all such unions fertile. But there is no other way.⁴⁵

Evangelization is the work of transferring revealed truth in the mind of a Christian to that of a non-Christian. Just as Mary relates to Elizabeth in an intimate way, disciples need to commit much time and energy to figuring how to connect personally with their non-Christian audience for the sake of communicating the Gospel.

III. Verse 44: Sanctification

A disciple of Jesus also has an obligation to give God opportunities to sanctify others. Assenting to the Gospel initially brings the grace of salvation, yet all Christians, new or veteran, need to have that grace continuously supplied. St. Peter encourages every disciple 'to confirm your call and election . . . [so that] you will never fall (2 Pet. 1:10); St. Paul advises to 'keep alert with all perseverance' (Eph. 6:18), especially evangelizers like himself 'lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified' (1 Cor. 9:27); and St. John recommends that everyone '[look] to yourselves, that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward' (2 Jn. 8). These verses should remind every Christian not to take the grace of salvation for granted. Indeed, 'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17), and just like creation itself, God calls us 'to cultivate and care for' (Gen. 2:15; New American Bible)

⁴² Mary is told at the Annunciation that Elizabeth has already been pregnant for six months (Lk. 1:36), and Mary then stays at Elizabeth's home for an additional three (Lk. 1:56).

⁴³ Cf. 'Mary and Elizabeth were silent about it [i.e., Mary's pregnancy]; in the depths of their being, there was a secret understanding between them.' Emmerich, *Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 155.

⁴⁴ F. J. Sheed, 'My Life on the Street Corner', *Saturday Review*, 10 May 1969, 22; cf. Frank Sheed, *The Church and I*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974, 65.

⁴⁵ Sheed, 'My Life on the Street Corner', 22; cf. Sheed, *The Church and I*, 65, and F. J. Sheed, *Christ in the Classroom*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1973, 19.



what he has created. But being a good steward of one's own grace is not enough. Disciples are to safeguard the grace in others, either by not causing them to sin⁴⁶ or, as Jesus commands St. Peter, by 'strengthen[ing] your brethren' (Lk. 22:32). The general principle that Christians can assist God as He works to sanctify human beings is indirectly set forth in Elizabeth's third statement to Mary: 'For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy.' According to a primarily Catholic tradition,⁴⁷ this verse is the basis for the unofficial belief that, at that moment, St. John the Baptist was cleansed from original sin *in utero*, and so Elizabeth's experience could serve as a symbolic expression of a Christian's intermediate role in God's efforts to dispense sanctifying grace.

The notion that Jesus removed original sin from John the Baptist at the Visitation has only limited textual support. Scripture itself is vague. Gabriel the archangel promises Zechariah that the son to be born from Elizabeth 'will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb' (Lk. 1:15),⁴⁸ but there is no mention as to when exactly the Holy Spirit will be received. Possibly the earliest nonbiblical and extant statement that mentions the Baptist's pre-birth sanctification is a reflection of St. Augustine of Hippo in a sermon about St. John the Baptist's nativity.⁴⁹

A barren woman conceived, an old woman, what's more, conceived; a double obstacle to childbearing, barrenness and old age. The angel declares what sort of man he will be; what he says is duly fulfilled in his regard; and what is supremely marvellous, he is filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. Then, as holy Mary comes, he leaps in the womb, and greets with movements the one he could not greet with words.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Cf. Mt. 18.5-6; Mk. 9:42.

⁴⁷ Protestant commentators are generally silent as to what the leaping might imply regarding John the Baptist's pre-natal sanctity and its timing.

Cf. 'Two women, not only kin but now drawn by a common experience, meet in an unnamed village in the hills of Judea. The one woman is old and her son will end an old era; the other is young and virgin and her son will usher in the new. Even the unborn John knows the difference and leaps in the womb when Mary enters, recalling the struggle in Rebekah's womb (Gen. 25:22).' Mays, *Harper's Bible Commentary*, 1016.

Cf. 'She [Elizabeth] realized that Mary was to be the mother of the Messiah and was overjoyed that she should visit her; she praised Mary for accepting the angel's word. The very movements of the child in her womb were a response to Mary's arrival.' Guthrie and Motyer, *The New Bible Commentary*, 891.

⁴⁸ But when the Holy Spirit is mentioned again in the account of the Visitation, it is Elizabeth who is said to be filled with the Spirit, not John (cf. Lk. 1.41).

⁴⁹ "The solemnity of the Nativity of John the Baptist is one of the Church's oldest celebrations introduced into both the Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) liturgies to honor a saint. It was publicly observed as early as the fourth century.

'June 24 was eventually chosen as the date for the solemnity because Scripture tells us that John was conceived six months before Jesus (see Lk 1:36). Presumably, then, John was born about six months before Christ, and Christ's nativity was celebrated on Christmas Eve, Dec. 24.' D. D. Emmons, 'St. John the Baptist: What's so special about his birthday', *OSV Newsweekly*, 7 April 2009, <https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/Story/TabId/2672/ArtMID/13567/ArticleID/9001/St-John-the-Baptist.aspx>.

⁵⁰ Saint Augustine, 'Sermon 291: "On the Birthday of John the Baptist,"' in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, Volume III/8, Sermons: On the Saints, ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., Hyde Park,

Approximately eight hundred years later, in 1208, Pope Innocent III issued a profession of faith against the Waldensians that includes a proposition that repeats Gabriel's promise: 'John the Baptist, sent by him, holy and just and in the womb of his mother (was) filled with the Holy Spirit.'⁵¹ A stronger claim appears in Pope Leo XIII's 1894 encyclical 'On the Rosary,' in which he writes, 'Then St. John the Baptist, by a singular privilege, *is sanctified* in his mother's womb and favored with special graces that he might prepare the way of the Lord; and *this comes to pass by the greeting of Mary* who had been inspired to visit her cousin.'⁵² Soon afterwards, the authors of the sixteen-volume *Catholic Encyclopedia*, published between 1907 and 1914, explicitly affirm that John was indeed relieved of original sin at the time of the Visitation.⁵³

While it remains to be seen whether St. John the Baptist's sanctification in Elizabeth's womb is an example of doctrinal development or simply pious conjecture, the theological principles that make the belief plausible are not subject to dispute. First, the Holy Spirit is the divine person responsible for the forgiveness of sin⁵⁴ and most particularly original sin at baptism.⁵⁵ Secondly, Jesus, the Son of God, sends the Spirit.⁵⁶ And third, the grace by which one is sanctified 'is not . . . [one's] own doing, it is the gift of God' (Eph. 2:8). But speaking about Mary's contribution towards her Son's sanctifying of St. John the Baptist also should not be controversial. Her assisting God in His work of sanctification is due to the fact that she is the initial member of the universal priesthood of the faithful, and therefore the Visitation is indicative of the things a disciple might do to help someone else advance in holiness.

Mary is the first person to exercise the priesthood of the faithful. In a generic sense, a priest is someone who mediates between this world and the divine realm. Christians basically accept this definition by insisting that Jesus Christ is the only true Priest, 'the one mediator between God and men' (1 Tim. 2:5). But elsewhere in the New Testament, St Peter calls the entire Christian people 'a royal priesthood' (1 Pet. 2:9). If priests mediate, then a Christian functioning as a priest in the sense meant by St. Peter is not a matter of mediating

NY: New City Press, 1994, 131, n. 1, accessed 9 May 2026, <https://www.wesleyscholar.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Augustine-Sermons-273-305.pdf>.

⁵¹ Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, eds. Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash, 43rd ed., San Francisco: Ignatius, 262, n. 790.]

⁵² Leo XIII, *Lucunda semper expectatione* ('On the Rosary'), 8 September 1894, n. 2; italics added.

⁵³ "'And it came to pass, that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant" – filled, like the mother with the Holy Ghost – "leaped for joy in her womb", as if to acknowledge the presence of his Lord. Then was accomplished the prophetic utterance of the angel that the child should "be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb". Now as the presence of any sin whatever is incompatible with the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the soul, it follows that at this moment John was cleansed from the stain of original sin.' *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8, New York: Robert Appleton, 1910, s.v. 'St. John the Baptist'; <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08486b.htm>.

⁵⁴ '[Jesus] breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven' (Jn. 20:22-23).

⁵⁵ '[He] saved us ... by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit' (Tit. 3:5).

⁵⁶ Jn. 15:26, 16:7.



between God and man but acting as one who mediates the One Mediator, Jesus, to others. Thus, Mary enjoys the privilege of being the precursor to, and initial member of, the 'royal priesthood' through a form of mediation that involves actually carrying the unborn Jesus to the unborn St. John the Baptist, whom Jesus then sanctifies.

If Mary is a subordinate mediator on whom Jesus depends to affect His first, direct act of sanctification, then this precedent has turned out to be a matter of policy; Jesus relies on His disciples, who mediate Him through their actions, to create opportunities through which God's sanctifying grace might always be offered. Although the specific way in which Mary mediates the Mediator is not possible for Christians, divine revelation is clear that they still have a duty to mediate Christ in such a fashion that does give him a chance to bestow his sanctifying grace. The most obvious form of priestly service is through evangelizing. In the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes, 'So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ' (Rom. 10:17); consequently, God who 'himself is righteous . . . justifies him who has [come to] faith in Jesus' (Rom. 3:26). Other human activities through which God sanctifies others are admonishment,⁵⁷ prayer⁵⁸ and setting a good example, especially in marriage.⁵⁹

IV. Verse 45 – Theological Reflection

The last line of Elizabeth's greeting completes a contrast between Zechariah and Mary in terms of an openness to accept their respective messages from Gabriel as true. Elizabeth says, 'And blessed is she who believed that there would be fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.' This final statement harkens back to the response of her husband to the archangel Gabriel in the Temple sanctuary, and that response is a question that expresses doubt regarding the forthcoming conception of the Baptist.⁶⁰ At the Annunciation, Gabriel

⁵⁷ 'If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother' (Mt. 18:15).

"Gained" is here a technical rabbinic term for missionary conversion.' Benedict T. Viviano, O.P., 'The Gospel According to Matthew', chap. 42, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., and Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm., Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990, 661.

⁵⁸ 'If any one sees his brother committing what is not a deadly sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not deadly' (1 Jn. 5:16a).

⁵⁹ St. Peter specifically advises Christian wives that, if they are married to non-Christian husbands 'who do not obey the word, [the husbands] may be won without a word by . . . your reverent and chaste behavior' (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

⁶⁰ 'And the angel answered him, . . . "you will be silent and unable to speak until the day these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words"' (Lk. 1:19-20).

'Understandably, Zechariah has doubts, but for his unbelief he is stricken speechless.' *Harper's Bible Commentary*, 1015.

'Like Abraham before him (Gn. 15:8), Zechariah could not believe the word of God and asked for confirmation.' Guthrie and Motyer, *The New Bible Commentary*, 890.

'For doubting the word of an angel, . . . Zachary is stricken dumb, deaf too in view of 1:62.' Orchard, *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, 940. 'Elizabeth seems here [1:45] to be comparing the faith of Mary with the hesitation of Zachary.' *Ibid.*, 941.

hears Mary's question, which is taken to be a sign of her faith.⁶¹ Even so, a straightforward, literal reading of the two questions points to an additional difference in mental attitudes. His question is an expression of scepticism; hers arises from a theological curiosity that is entirely appropriate for a disciple.

The question posed by Zechariah in response to Gabriel's announcement reveals a lack of faith. Gabriel announces that Zechariah and Elizabeth will, by the usual method, conceive a son. Zechariah's reply is, 'How shall I know this?' (Lk. 1:18). Christians have traditionally pointed to this question as evidence of Zechariah's unbelief. For example, St Augustine, in his sermon on St John the Baptist quoted above, notes that between Zechariah and Mary there is a 'Similarity of words, [and a] dissimilarity of hearts.'⁶² Augustine thereby concludes 'that those words of Zachary [sic] did not express faith, but doubt and a lack of hope, [which] is something the angel saw, [and] the angel [responded] . . . by depriving him of his voice, condemning his unbelief.'⁶³ Zechariah did not react in an appropriate manner to the news that his long-standing prayer for son has finally been answered;⁶⁴ instead of offering words of gratitude born from confidence in God, he replied with a query indicating that he considered the angel's message to be implausible.

However, Mary's question is a thoughtful petition for a greater understanding of what has been revealed, and because God allowed the angel to provide an answer, He has thereby given all later disciples permission to do as she did. Gabriel tells Mary that she will give birth to the Messiah. She then asks, 'How can this be?' (Lk. 1:34). The angel replies, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you' (Lk. 1:35). So, unlike Zechariah's question, which is rooted in incredulity and subsequently punished, hers is a perfectly reasonable request that seeks clarification as to the means by which the pregnancy is to occur. Mary's goal is to increase her understanding, and Gabriel does supply new information. The lesson for Christians is twofold. First, even before Mary thinks about what her adolescent Son said when He was found immersed in scholarly dialogue in the Temple, the Annunciation is the moment when she conceives, so to speak, in her mind the specific question that serves as the seed of what will become the discipline of theology. The New Covenant and Christian theological inquiry essentially begin at the same time. Secondly, if

An opposing interpretation is found in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, which reads: '[The] silencing of Zechariah by Gabriel is not a punishment for an objection of disbelief, but is the Lucan counterpart of the silencing of Daniel by Gabriel in Dan 10:15. . . . Zechariah's question (1:18), like that of Mary in 1:34, is Luke's artistic and theological way of moving the drama to its next act and is to be seen as an "objection"' (680).

⁶¹ 'Her question indicates not doubt but belief.' Orchard, *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, 941.

The two Protestant commentaries in this article (i.e., *The New Bible Commentary, Revised* and *Harper's*) do not mention Mary's inquiry, and *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* repeats the remark that the question is merely a device to advance the narrative (681).

However, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary's* remarks on Lk. 1:45 does read, 'Mary, as model believer . . ., is praised for her trust in the fidelity of God.' (Ibid.)

⁶² Saint Augustine, 'Sermon 291,' 134, n. 5.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Cf. 'But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John"' (Lk. 1:13).



Mary is recognized as the ideal disciple, one ought to appreciate the fact that her theological question is a natural consequence of her complete trust in God. Some questions about God do reflect a crisis of belief, but among already committed disciples, the desire to learn more about Christianity is a sign of a vibrant and mature faith.

Conclusion

Little is said about or to Mary in the Bible, but much can be said about what little is there. Elizabeth's greeting is a case in point. The greeting at the Visitation consists of four, distinct statements about the Blessed Virgin Mary that are allusions to important responsibilities for a disciple. These responsibilities include assisting in spiritual deliverance, evangelizing, helping with the sanctification of others, and seeking more knowledge about the faith. Moreover, the order of a disciple's activities drawn from the greeting reflects the proper sequence among the activities themselves. Deliverance removes obstacles to having a relationship with God; evangelizing then targets the void left behind by the evil presence and fills the vacuum with God's Word; sanctification results from having accepted the Word; and the desire to draw ever closer to God is facilitated by learning more about him and what he has revealed. With this sequence in mind, there is one further similarity to note between Mary and the Christian. The role of both in God's salvific plan originates only through His grace. Her contribution is made possible because she is 'full of grace' (Lk. 1:28),⁶⁵ and regarding anything that Christ's disciples might be called to do, St. Paul teaches that it is only by grace that 'God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:13).

⁶⁵ Cf. **'full of grace'**: A rare instance in Scripture where an angel addresses someone by an epithet or title instead of a personal name (cf. Judg. 6:12). Two considerations help to clarify its meaning. **(1)** The expression *full of grace* is rooted in Catholic tradition and traced to St. Jerome's translation of this verse in the Latin Vulgate. Although fundamentally accurate, it lacks some of the depth of the Greek original. Luke could have described her with the words *full of grace* (Gk. *plērēs charitos*) as he did of Stephen in Acts 6:8, yet here he uses a different expression (Gk. *kecharitōmenē*) that is even more revealing than the traditional rendering. It indicates that God has already "graced" Mary previous to this point, making her a vessel who "has been" and "is now" filled with divine life. **(2)** Alternative translations like "favored one" or "highly favored" are possible but inadequate. Because of the unparalleled role that Mary accepts at this turning point in salvation history, the best translation is the most exalted one. For God endowed Mary with an abundance of grace to prepare her for the vocation of divine motherhood and to make her a sterling example of Christian holiness.' Hahn and Mitch, *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*, 1829; all forms of emphasis are in the original.