

BEING MINDFUL OF TRUTH AND ERROR ... part two

We make our beginning in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
"Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God." (Joshua 3:9)
Dear Lord God, Sanctify us in Your truth, Your Word is truth. (John 17:17)
We ask that Your Word would be a blessing to our lives. Amen.

When Billy Graham was a child, he had a very narrow brush with death. He had a very bad cough so his mom grabbed a bottle of what she believed to be cough syrup, but it was iodine, which is poison if taken internally. If it had not been for the knowledge and quick thinking of his Aunt Jennie, who said to give him thick cream to counteract the iodine, he might have died.

This is a perfect picture of the danger of believing something to be true when it is actually false.

Every October 30, on Reformation Day, Lutherans remember Dr. Martin Luther who exposed many errors in the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther corrected those errors with the truth of God's Word. In October and November, we will look at some errors and false doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church: Salvation can be obtained by works; Time in purgatory can be shortened by purchasing indulgences; Doctrine can be developed and decided upon by the Pope rather than being determined and set by God's Word. Luther's motto was Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fides – Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone.

Tonight's Bible study will focus on several Roman Catholic Church's false doctrines about Mary.

Did you know that there is a 'Queen of Heaven' Catholic Elementary School in Milton, Ontario? And did you know that the title 'queen of heaven' appears several times in the Bible in the book of Jeremiah, about six hundred years before Mary, the mother of Jesus, was even born?

Jeremiah 7:1, 17-18 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ... Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven. And they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger.

Entire families participated in this idolatrous worship, thereby provoking the Lord to anger. As explained in a footnote of the Concordia Self-Study Bible, the phrase 'queen of heaven' was a Babylonian title for Ishtar, an important goddess in the Babylonian pantheon of gods.

Jeremiah 44:16-19 "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you. But we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no disaster. But since we left off making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine." And the women said, "When we made offerings to the queen of heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, was it without our husbands' approval that we made cakes for her bearing her image & poured out drink offerings to her?"

Footnote: Judah was relatively prosperous during wicked King Manasseh's lengthy reign. Because of King Josiah's religious reforms, which began in 621 BC, the people had stopped making sacrifices to idols and foreign gods. Beginning with Josiah's death in 609 BC, a series of disasters, including invasion and exile, had struck Judah. The people mistakenly attributed their

misfortune to their failure to worship the queen of heaven. This queen of heaven was a Babylonian goddess of fertility, so women played a major role in her worship. To have validity, according to the Law of Moses which was given by God, a religious vow made by a married woman had to be approved by her husband, so entire families were involved in this idolatry.

Jeremiah 44:25 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: You and your wives have declared with your mouths, and have fulfilled it with your hands, saying, 'We will surely perform our vows that we have made, to make offerings to the queen of heaven and to pour out drink offerings to her.' Then confirm your vows and perform your vows! (God then pronounced their judgment.)

Deuteronomy 31:29 For I (Moses) know that after my death you will surely act corruptly and turn aside from the way that I have commanded you. And in the days to come evil will befall you, because you will do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger through the work of your hands. (Just as God knew Adam and Eve would transgress His law, so He also knew the people of Israel would fail to continue to worship and love Him with all their heart and soul.)

How did the 'queen of heaven' in Jeremiah become known as Mary, the mother of Jesus? Mary's title as Queen of Heaven was a result of the First Council of Ephesus in the fifth century, when she was proclaimed 'theotokos', a title rendered in English as the Mother of God. Doing the math, this means someone or something was already being called the 'queen of heaven' about one thousand years before it was decided that Mary was the Queen of Heaven.

In Jeremiah, the title 'queen of heaven' referred to Ishtar, an Assyrian and Babylonian goddess or idol. She was also called Ashtoreth and Astarte by various other groups and was thought to be the wife of the false god Baal who was also known as Molech. The motivation of women to worship the queen of heaven stemmed from her reputation as a fertility goddess, and, as the bearing of children was greatly desired among women of that era, worship of this false god was rampant among pagan civilizations. Sadly, it became popular among the Israelites as well.

In Jeremiah 44:17-25, Jeremiah gave the people of Israel the word of the Lord which God had spoken to him. He reminded the people that their disobedience and idolatry had caused the Lord to be very angry with them and He would therefore punish them with calamity. Jeremiah warned them that greater punishments awaited them if they did not repent. They replied that they had no intentions of giving up their worship of idols, and promised to continue pouring out drink offerings to the queen of heaven, Ashtoreth. They even gave her the credit for the peace and prosperity which they had previously enjoyed because of God's grace and mercy.

The idea that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the Queen of Heaven has absolutely no basis in God's Word. It stems from proclamations of priests and popes in the Roman Catholic Church.

While Mary was certainly a godly young woman and greatly blessed in that she was chosen to bear the Savior of the world, she was not in any way divine, nor was she sinless, nor is she to be worshipped, revered, venerated, or prayed to. God said in **Isaiah 42:8 NLT**, "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to anyone else, nor share my praise with carved idols." There is most certainly a King of Heaven, the Lord of hosts and He alone rules in heaven; He does not share His rule, His throne, His authority, or His glory with anyone else. Every true believer in God refuses to accept worship. Peter and the apostles refused to be worshipped in Acts 10:25-26 & 14:13-15. The holy angels refused to be worshipped in Revelation 19:10 & 22:9. The response is always the same: "Worship God!" To offer worship, reverence, or veneration to anyone but God is idolatry. God does not and will not share His glory, His honor or His praise with anyone else. There is not and there has never been a 'queen of heaven'. Jeremiah's mention of a queen of

heaven referred to the worship of an idol, a false god. Mary's words in the Magnificat in Luke 1:46-55 reveal that she never regarded herself as immaculate or deserving of veneration, worship or praise. On the contrary, she fully relied on the grace of God for salvation. She said in **Luke 1:47** "my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Only sinners need a Savior. Mary knew she was a sinner; Mary knew she needed salvation; Mary knew she needed a Savior from her sin.

In **Luke 11:27-28**, Jesus even issued a mild rebuke to a woman in the crowd who cried out to Him, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." Jesus replied to her, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." By saying this, Jesus curtailed any tendency to elevate Mary as an object of worship, veneration, or special honor. He could certainly have said, "Yes, blessed be the queen of heaven!" But He said nothing of the kind. He was affirming the same truth that the Bible affirms - there is no queen of heaven, and the only biblical references to a queen of heaven refer to the goddess of an idolatrous, false religion.

To emphasize the truth that Mary is NOT the queen of heaven, be mindful that many other false religions also have a queen of heaven in their lineup of false gods: Minerva is Roman; Athena is Greek; Isis, the Mother of God, is Egyptian; Inanna is Babylonian; Astarte is from Phoenicia and is identified with Aphrodite who is Greek; Ishtar is the Babylonian and Assyrian counterpart; Sophia in Greece means wisdom and is the Mother of God; the Monserrat Black Madonna is the spiritual Mother-Queen of the Middle Ages; Diana is Roman and her shrine in Ephesus was rededicated to Mary in 380 AD; Sri Laxmi is the queen of heaven in India and is worshipped by nearly one billion Hindus. All these names represent the same queen of heaven, the same false goddess. Even many great cathedrals were named in honor of Notre Dame (Our Lady).

Through the years, other erroneous doctrines were developed by the Roman Catholic Church. In 1964, my husband wrote a term paper in high school titled 'The Heresy of Mariolatry'. It was based on research from forty publications. Much of this information was taken from his work.

Webster's Dictionary defined Mariolatry as "the idolatrous worship of the Virgin Mary; rendition to the virgin of the kind of worship due to God alone." The three main aspects of Mariolatry are her Immaculate Conception, her Perpetual Virginity, and her Bodily Assumption into heaven. We will review these doctrines to see that they are biblically, historically, and logically idolatrous.

The Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary claims that the Virgin Mary, at the moment of her conception, was preserved from the guilt of original sin; that she was not subject to the law of original sin; and that she was purified while still in the womb of her own mother. This doctrine was proclaimed by Pope Pious IX in 1854, only 162 years ago. "The Immaculate Conception was truly pointed out in 1933 when Mary was formally canonized by the Roman Catholic Church." This was done only 83 years ago. But according to God's Word in **Romans 3: 22-24**, "there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." God did not say that everyone except Mary has sinned. Mary knew she needed the redemption that is available and offered to everyone in Christ Jesus. She is not an exception to the rule.

The incarnation of Jesus has interestingly, but not accurately, been linked with the question, 'Which came first, the chicken or the egg?' Because God CREATED all things, both visible and invisible, the Bible teaches, and therefore we believe, that an egg was not required for God to create the first chicken, or any other animal. He created all things by His Word. **Genesis 1:24** reveals that "God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures ... And it was so." When God created man in **Genesis 2:7**, He "formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." Gabriel announced to Mary

in **Luke 1:31-35** that "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." When Mary asked, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?", the angel Gabriel answered her by saying that "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy - the Son of God."

PLEASE NOTE that the underlined part of the next paragraph, though accepted and believed by some, is not the best understanding of the incarnation of Jesus. A better understanding, which is consistent with Lutheran doctrine, is presented in *Being Mindful of Truth and Error . . . part four*.

God did not require a pre-existing egg to create the first chicken; God did not require a pre-existing egg or sperm to create the first man; and God did not require one of Mary's pre-existing eggs to begin the human life of Jesus within her womb. It was only by "the power of the Most High" that Jesus' life was transferred into her womb. The word 'transferred' is used here because Jesus was not created; He was begotten by the Father from eternity. God said in **John 1:1-2**, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." Because Jesus already existed "in the beginning", He did not 'begin' His existence in Mary's womb. Because the Holy Spirit did not activate one of Mary's eggs, it was not necessary to use a holy and sinless egg from Mary to 'begin' the human life of the holy and sinless Son of God. Therefore it was not necessary to develop a doctrine that required Mary to be holy, sinless, and immaculately conceived. Mary's only contribution to Jesus' life was the use of her womb to carry and nurture the growing child within her. God transferred the pre-existing life of Jesus into Mary's womb without any assistance from one of her eggs. The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary in **Luke 1:37** and told her "nothing will be impossible with God." In truth, one of Mary's eggs *was* used by the Holy Spirit to begin the human life of Jesus, but Mary was not holy or sinless, therefore, her egg was not holy and sinless. By God's infinite power and grace, He used Mary's 'sinful' egg to begin the 'sinless' human life of Christ. Note how easily man's errors can be mixed with God's truth, showing our need for discernment. The idea that Mary was immaculately conceived was thought up to explain how a sinful woman could give birth to a holy child. This false doctrine is a human invention; it is not truth; it is error.

Because Mary carried Jesus in her womb and gave birth to Him, she is known as the mother of Jesus, and she, with Joseph, nurtured and cared for Him while He grew to an adult. The word 'God' encompasses the Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Mary is the 'mother of God' but this is an error. She was the human mother of Jesus. She is not the mother of the Trinity, so it is an error to say that she is the 'mother of God'.

The Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of Mary's Perpetual Virginity claims that she miraculously remained a virgin throughout her life. To support their development of this idea, they attempted to disprove God's Word as written in **Matthew 13:54-57** "and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' And they took offense at him." To deny that Mary and Joseph had other children, the Roman Catholic Church says they were Jesus' cousins.

The idea that Mary remained a virgin was based on 'apocryphal Historia', (unsubstantiated and speculative intertestamental historical writings). These writings claim that Joseph was at least ninety when he was betrothed to Mary. According to Epiphanius, Joseph was at least eighty when he married Mary and he had had other children by a previous marriage. But from the Bible, we have no reason to believe that Joseph was not a young virgin when he and Mary were married. Other sources also substantiate that Joseph was young and that Mary did

indeed have other children by him. God said in **Matthew 1:24-25** "When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus." The words "knew her not until Jesus was born", gives the definite impression that, after Jesus was born, they did have other children.

It is normal and reasonable to accept that Joseph knew his wife after Jesus was born. The names of Mary and Joseph's daughters are given in **Mark 15:40** "Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome." The Bible does not support the Perpetual Virginity of Mary.

The Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of Mary's Bodily Assumption into heaven claims that she never died, but that she immediately and miraculously passed bodily into the presence of God. This development was declared by the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church on Nov 11, 1950. God's Word mentions only two people who were taken to heaven without first experiencing death. **Genesis 5:24** "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." **2 Kings 2:11** "As Elijah and Elisha still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."

According to the tradition of the Bible, if Mary had experienced bodily assumption, God would have been sure to have it recorded. God's Word does not mention the manner, the place, or the time of Mary's death because it was not important to His plan of redemption. There is no Scriptural proof to support the Roman Catholic Church's claim that Mary was bodily assumed into heaven. The disciple John, who took care of Mary until she died as requested by Jesus as He hung on the cross, does not mention her in his three epistles or in the book of Revelation. He would surely not have neglected to relate her ascension if it had occurred. After Mary died, the apostles did not pray to her, and they gave her no special honors. The Roman Catholic Church doctrine that Mary ascended into heaven is not based on God's Word and is therefore an error. God never intended that Mary should be worshiped, adored, revered, venerated or prayed to.

The following several verses confirm that all our prayers should be addressed only to God.

Psalms 91:15 When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.

John 16:23-24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.

The Mary of the Bible is not the same as the Mary portrayed by the Roman Catholic Church. If you believe that an error is the truth, you have swallowed a lie. Poison harms a physical body, but a spiritual lie is poison that harms the soul. Poison can destroy a physical life while spiritual poison can destroy eternal life. Jesus said in **Luke 21:8**, "Take heed that you not be deceived."

Prayer: We pray in the name of the Father who created us, in the name of the Son who redeemed us, and in the name of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us. We thank You Lord for the precious gift of Your Word, for Your Word is TRUTH. Increase our knowledge and understanding of Your Word. Bless us with discernment so we are able to separate Your truth from Satan's errors and so we will not be deceived by any crafty spiritual lies of the enemy. Bless us with a hunger and thirst for the truth of Your Word. Increase our love for You so we will live according to Your Word and live according to Your will. We pray in Jesus' holy precious name. Amen.

Closing Hymn: 566 in the Lutheran Service Book **By Grace I'm Saved**

By Grace I'm Saved

By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless; My soul, believe and doubt it not.
Why stagger at this word of promise? Has Scripture ever falsehood taught?
No! Then this word must true remain: By grace you too will life obtain.

By grace! None dare lay claim to merit; Our works and conduct have no worth.
God in His love sent our Redeemer, Christ Jesus, to this sinful earth;
His death did for our sins atone, And we are saved by grace alone.

By grace God's Son, our only Savior, Came down to earth to bear our sin.
Was it because of your own merit That Jesus died your soul to win?
No, it was grace, and grace alone, That brought Him from His heav'nly throne.

By grace! This ground of faith is certain; As long as God is true, it stands.
What saints have penned by inspiration, What in His Word our God commands,
Our faith in what our God has done Depends on grace – grace through His Son.

By grace to timid hearts that tremble, In tribulations' furnace tried,
By grace, in spite of fear and trouble, The Father's heart is open wide.
Where could I help and strength secure If grace were not my anchor sure?

By grace! On this I'll rest when dying; In Jesus' promise I rejoice;
For though I know my heart's condition, I also know my Savior's voice.
My heart is glad, all grief has flown Since I am saved by grace alone.