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**BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
– FAITHFUL COMPANION TO GOD AND MAN.
LUCAN MARIAN PERSPECTIVE
[BŁOGOSŁAWIONA DZIEWICA MARYJA
– WIERNY TOWARZYSZ CZŁOWIEKA KU BOGU.
ŁUKASZOWA PERSPEKTYWA MARYJNA]**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mariological dissension down the Christian Tradition has almost disfigured her prominent position in the Mission and ministry of Jesus. Many people have not been able to learn from Mary her heroic virtues while others have missed the chance of learning from her lessons on how to follow Christ faithfully. Our response to her teaching will depend greatly on our knowledge of her special ministry in the history of salvation. This understanding includes our understanding of who she is to Christ and secondly who she is to us. For who she is to us is the concern of our article briefly examining who she was to Christ and applying it to us her spiritual sons and daughters. Mary is one with the human race, for she is totally a human person like any other, she is not a god, and she is not part of the Trinity. But she is a creature one of those to be redeemed by the redemptive works of Christ, she journeys with us praying with and for us. Bigotto writes that, “She is a woman rich in those human qualities searched for in all societies because they are part of the Kernel of what is human”¹. Human society looks for a person who can be faithful, trustworthy and

¹ G. Bigotto, *Mary the mother of Jesus; Exegesis and Spirituality*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 2000, 218.

actively engaged in making human life better. This underlines the necessity of the life and ministry of the Blessed Mother to us today in spite of our denomination or religious affiliations. She teaches us how to be human and how to do God's work without losing touch with fellow human beings. There is no better way of being companions of God's word than following the model of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The paper faithfully follows the figure of Mary from the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles. The Gospel is Christocentric for it gives an account of the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ but Mary is at the center of the Good News linking man to God and God to man in her womb and in her life. Mary is thus at the center of the proclamation and arrival of the Messianic times and she keeps us company as we seek to enter deeply into the Mystery of Christ for our salvation and the Glory of God.

2. ANNUNCIATION OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS (Lk 1:26–38)

The Gospel of St Luke is arguably a Marian Gospel, in the sense that it highlights in more details the events that puts Mary at the center of the salvation history. This event begins with the infancy narratives of Jesus. In these events the coming of the Saviour as was prophesied in the Old Testament² is made manifest through the message of the archangel Gabriel³. He announces to her a divine message which was long awaited by Israel from of old. The message had a dramatic turn of events. First of all, to Mary, and secondly to the entire humanity in reference to their salvation. The message of Gabriel to Mary required her to make a choice of accompanying the Word in becoming flesh in accordance with God's salvific plan for humanity in her own womb. Through the message of the birth of Jesus Mary was invited by God to accompany man in receiving this gift of salvation. This is a new dawn to man for in it an extra ordinary experience of God is ushered in where Mary's response to God's invitation was central in the redemption of man.

In the mystery of Incarnation⁴ Mary said *yes*⁵ to God and she was to remain positively engaged in the upbringing of the fruit of her womb. This event of annunciation to Mary did put her at the core of Man's salvation. Luke mentions Mary as the one who receives the honour from God of granting him human nature through the power

² The Old Testament prophets had fore told the coming of the Messiah as the liberator of the people of Israel. Cfr. Is. 7:14, Jer. 31:31, Is. 61:1–2, Dn. 9:24–27, Zech. 12:10, Mal. 4:5–6 Hos 11:1, among other passages in the Old Testament. This event of the Annunciation is a fulfillment of the Old Testament.

³ The Arch Angel Gabriel is known as the messenger of Good News in the Bible. In the Old Testament he appeared to prophet Daniel (Dn 8:15–26, 9:21–27) and in the New Testament he is a key person in bringing the Good News to Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph (Lk 1:11–18, 1:19–25, and Lk1:26–38).

⁴ Incarnation as a mystery here we understand it to be the climax of God's self-gift to man whereby God's word receives the human nature from the Blessed Virgin Mary.

⁵ Her *fiat* changed the course of man's history for she accepted to be the bridge which God used to reach out to man in a human form.

of the Holy Spirit. In the encounter with the arch-angel the Blessed Virgin Mary is presented as a virgin betrothed to Joseph. Our blessed mother gave birth without losing her virginity and after birth she remained a virgin throughout her life⁶. Mary was a virgin before⁷ to protect her integrity and bear testimony that her child is not a biological son of Joseph or any other man but of God. Thus she is close to God than any other being has ever or ever will be to God. No wonder she asks the Angel how it will happen since she knew no man. The Angel made it clear that it shall be God's work through the Holy Spirit. Mary and the Holy Spirit are thus close companions in effecting the Incarnation. This explains to us that Mary is in a close relationship with God. She conceived with the divine help and thus her motherhood is divine. "Jesus is God's Son conceived through the coming of the Holy Spirit"⁸. God requested Mary to give place in her life to His begotten Son by becoming his mother. In other words this pericope puts Mary at the center between God and man. Mary the Blessed Mother thus enters into the divine plan of God's salvific works. She responded positively to God's invitation. Mary obeyed God first before she conceived Him in her womb. This shows us that to be companions of God in his redemptive work begins with obeying God by listening and doing God's will. Through Incarnation Mary accepted to accompany Jesus in her womb and even on his earthly life as he seeks to reach out to man. Her response was determinant on the pace at which the fulfillment of God's promises would be achieved.

In the words of Bishop Fulton Sheen, "a creature was asked by the creator if she would freely cooperate with God's plan to take humanity out of the mire and to let him be ravished totally by God"⁹. Her companionship becomes her collaborative work in the work of salvation. This is amazing how God was bending down asking Mary to accompany Him in a very unique way as He seeks to elevate man in his rightful place which he had lost through sin¹⁰. The blessed mother by her acceptance to be the mother of Jesus became "the source and giver of life"¹¹. This is not for Mary's benefit not for God's benefit but for man's salvation in which Mary is part of the humanity to be redeemed. The blessed Virgin had her plans of being a life companion to Joseph through the natural law of marriage that is being a life partner in matrimony. But now she has to make a choice for the whole man in response

⁶ A. Buono, *The greatest Marian Titles. Their meaning and usage*, New York: St Pauls Publishers 2008, 89.

⁷ Mary conceived her son as a virgin miraculously without any man for with God nothing is impossible Cfr. Lk 1:37. This virginal birth has a theological relevance of safeguarding the Divinity of Christ Cfr. A. van Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms, Their Meaning and Background Exposed in over 300 articles*, New York: The Macmillan Company 1966, 247–248. Also Great teachers of faith spoke of Mary as having remained a virgin throughout her life some of these includes, Athanasius (Alexandria, 293–373), Epiphanius (Palestine, 315?–403), Jerome (Stridon, present day Slovenia, 345?–419), Augustine (Numidia, now Algeria, 354–430) Cyril (Alexandria, 376–444) and others.

⁸ R.E. Brown, et al eds., *Mary in the New Testament*, New York: Paulist Press 1978, 125.

⁹ F. Sheen, *The World's First Love*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2010, 33.

¹⁰ The original sin has its basis on the Book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible which tells of the fall of Man from God's grace. To understand the mission of Christ as alluded to in Gen 3:15 it is important to understand the theology behind the fall of man and the consequences there of.

¹¹ A. Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*, Saint Louis: Redemptoris Fathers 1931, 76.

to God's will. No wonder she asks the Angel how this shall be for she understood the natural way of conception while for her case she was still a virgin¹². Her calling was a special ministry to Jesus as he progresses in human growth and development. Motherhood offers a very vital role in the wellbeing of any organism. Through such a role Mary was a necessary companion to baby Jesus. On one hand the *yes* of Mary in the annunciation was a yes to accompanying Jesus in her own right freely so that He can acquire human nature from her womb. On the other hand she was giving company to humanity to approach God in their humanity. Through her yes she simply said to God I will be your mother bringing you to your creation and bringing creation to you. She is therefore a bridge between man and God. The concept of motherhood incorporates in itself the rationale of faithful accompaniment in all stages of human development. Through her motherhood as espoused in the annunciation she was invited to conceive, bore, nourish and up bring Jesus. These aspects calls for a life time commitment. This explains why motherhood is not a nine month or a one day engagement but a life time commitment. Mary aware of her calling said God's will be done and she remained faithful in her noble task of bringing God to man and man to God. Thus Mary accepting to be his mother gave him the best accompaniment ever worth the name because of her faithfulness in God's Word. She thus accepted a role which is so noble and well understood in all societies. Having been a companion to our Lord her accompaniment is now extended to all those who have become adopted sons and daughters of her son through baptism¹³. Her acceptance of Gods will in her life accords her a moral obligation to be a mother and accompany all those who through baptism will become God's children through the sacrament of baptism. Accompanying them through her mediatorial role¹⁴, and awaiting them in Heaven where she was assumed after her death¹⁵.

Through the message of angel Gabriel, Mary becomes a prominent figure out of God's grace in God's salvific plan for man through the coming of the long awaited promise, that is, the Messiah. Her motherhood is linked to the mission and the min-

¹² Didymus proclaimed Mary and addressed her as the perpetual virgin (Mary was a virgin before birth, during and after the delivery of her first born). Cfr. J. Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. III: *The Golden Age of Greek Patristics Literature from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon*, Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press. 99. St. Augustine also in his sermon 51, 18 noted that "a virgin she conceived, a virgin she gave birth, a virgin she remained" teaching on the perpetual virginity of Mary. J. Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol IV: *The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicea to the Council of Chalcedon*, Turin: Marietti 1986, 432.

¹³ Baptism makes us adopted sons of God and incorporates us into his mystical body the church, Cfr. Interdicasterial commission, *Catechism of the Catholic Church Revised edition*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 2011, No. 1267. His biological mother becomes the mother of all those who have been purified through the sacrament of baptism.

¹⁴ Mary has been understood to have a mediatorial role in the Church following her active presence and participation at the wedding in Cana of Galilee(Jn 2:2-11) from this pericope, "Mary is Christ's cooperater in the performance of the miracle she offers us in this account a full-fledged example of her intercession with her son". Juan Bastero, *Mary mother of the Redeemer*, Dublin: Four Court Press 2011, 144.

¹⁵ Pope Pius XII, in the *Munificentissimus Deus*, of 1950 declared the dogma of the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Cfr. Vatican.va>va>pius-xii> documents (Accessed: 16.12.2018).

istry of Jesus the saviour of humanity for she is the one who bore him and nourished him in all ways like any other mother would do to her child. But to accomplish this noble and divine task Luke tells us that she is “full of Grace”¹⁶ to enable her to accomplish her role effectively as she was pre-destined to become the Savior’s mother. Luke doesn’t forget to show the uniqueness of the motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary for there was no male involved. Even if the role of naming a child was a prerogative of the father the angel granted this role to Mary to name the child Jesus¹⁷. This shows that the child born of Mary biologically belongs to her alone and asserts an upper hand of the Divine in her motherhood. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the spouse of the Blessed Virgin and she is the mother of the only God’s begotten son. “Mary gave a conscious free «yes» to the human conception of the son of God”¹⁸. By her unique perfect character shown through her response to God she became an example to all people in their encounter with God¹⁹. The angel told her that she would conceive and bear a son who will fulfill the messianic prophecies. In the annunciation as a theophany²⁰ God visited Mary and entered in her heart and womb through the Holy Spirit for with God nothing is impossible²¹. Mary became God’s dwelling place, a place of encounter between man and God for God made his residence in her. Through the annunciation Mary receives her vocation of being the mother of God’s son out of her faith in God she becomes God’s companion and in turn accompanies all those who are God’s Children.

Pittenger explains that for Mary to receive such an invitation she must have been a woman of faith. “...there is no reason to doubt that from the time of her conception of Jesus, Mary was a person of faith.”²² Her role of accompanying the son of God was based on her faith in God and in his promises to humanity. We also look upon her as our companion for being a woman of faith she will help us deepen our faith in God. This will be translated into us being saved since faith is necessary for salvation.²³ Last but not the least we can see Mary being a model of faithful accompaniment in all spheres of human and spiritual aspects. An accompaniment greatly desired in our families and in the entire society may she then accompany us until we reach God’s abode. For when she said yes to God and to humanity she never looked

¹⁶ Mary was prepared by God to be the mother of her Son. He gave her the fullness of grace to enable her carry her task well. Cfr. Lk 1:28.

¹⁷ Cfr. Lk 1:31

¹⁸ Bastero, *Mary Mother of the Redeemer*, 112.

¹⁹ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 1974, No 33.

²⁰ Theophany is God’s self-Revelation and manifestation to Man. It results in vindication and right thinking among the people of God while his enemies are left confused and ashamed. See more on T. Longmann III, P. Enns (eds), *Dictionary of the Old Testament, Wisdom Poetry and Writings. A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic 2008, 817–820.

²¹ Cfr. Lk 1:37 With God nothing is impossible for Elizabeth though past the child bearing age has conceived. God works sometimes contrary to human wisdom for he is not limited as we are.

²² N. Pittenger, *Our Lady the Mother of Jesus*, London: SCM Press Ltd 1996, 28

²³ Cfr. Interdicasterial commission, *Catechism of the Catholic Church Revised edition*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 2011, No. 1816.

back even in her sorrowful moments. She remained faithful to the responsibility that her yes implied in the earthly life of Jesus. Her yes we can say is a yes that has endured down the ages. The same yes made to God and to fellow men faithfully expressed in word and deed is a responsibility of every believer and Mary moves in company with us to help us accomplish it. It is also a challenge to us that we are to conceive God in our mind and heart so as imbued with the Gospel message we may give birth to Christ through our words and deeds. May she thus guide us to receive the Word in docility and joy and be living witnesses to the Spirit who overshadowed her on the annunciation.

3. VISIT TO ELIZABETH (Lk 1:39–45)

When Mary visited Elizabeth various aspects of her role in the company of God and man are made explicit. Her greetings and conversation with Elizabeth exhibited what her vocation entailed. Mary obeyed the Word of God during the annunciation and now here she becomes a model of faith and charity²⁴. Elizabeth recognized Mary as the mother of her Lord. In this, Elizabeth guided by the Holy Spirit acknowledged Jesus who was in the womb of Mary to be her Lord and recognized the divine maternity that was on the shoulders of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In other words she recognized the fact that Mary brought to her, her Lord in her own house. Mary's motherhood is charged with a responsibility of taking Jesus to those in need of Him. Mary in her body and Spirit accompany Jesus as he seeks to reach out to our families and lives. In fact, Elizabeth acknowledged that Mary is a blessed woman for being chosen by God to be His mother²⁵ is a gratuitous gift²⁶. Her motherhood is special on account of the status of the one she is hosting in her womb. Through this visit Elizabeth makes us aware that Mary is truly a believer "happy is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of the things spoken to her by the Lord"²⁷. She is blessed because of believing in God's word spoken to her; she receives her vocation in faith trusting that what the angel told her, God would accomplish it.

Today we look for her to teach us on how to believe in God's Word as she did. So for Elizabeth Mary is in total commitment to God and she totally submits herself to God as she says, "May it be done to me according to your Word"²⁸. Elizabeth would want us to know that the source of Mary's blessedness and joy is because she is a firm believer in God's promises. To be chosen by God to accompany him in visiting his people requires faith in Him and total surrender in his promises. Her joy emanates from her obedience to God. Thus Mary is a teacher to us in faithful obedience to our Lord. We need her to accompany us in responding faithfully to God's

²⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 967.

²⁵ Cfr. Lk 1:42.

²⁶ Gratuitous gift as unmerited gifts that God out of his will bestowed on the Blessed Virgin Mary specifically by calling her to be the mother of God.

²⁷ Cfr. Lk 1:45.

²⁸ Cfr. Lk 1:38.

calling and in turn take Jesus to our relatives, friends and in deed to the entire humanity. Her motherhood doesn't only bring joy to her but to all those whom she meets and also on those who welcomes her or in other words those who are open to the richness of the mystery of Incarnation. This is why the child of Elizabeth leapt with joy after Mary's greeting to Elizabeth. Hence, "For Mary herself the coming of the one who would be her Lord was the culmination and fulfillment of the promises God made to Israel"²⁹. This is the point in her conversation with Elizabeth.

It's an encounter that fulfills the hope and the longing of all the Israelites. Mary taking Jesus to Elizabeth she participated in rejuvenating the heart of Elizabeth and assuring her that God is faithful to his promises. She helps Jesus in her womb to reach out to the poor ones of the Lord who have all along hoped for God's mercy represented here by the person of Elizabeth. Mary walks with Jesus to the Zechariah's home to introduce him to the young and old. Young in terms of meeting John the Baptist who was destined to be his fore runner in the womb of Elizabeth and old in reference to Elizabeth standing for all those who have been longing for the age old promises of God. The Blessed mother accompanied Jesus to the prophets here represented by John the Baptist to witness his arrival to fulfill their prophecies. Mary in this passage takes us to Jesus as well. Having been a relative to Elizabeth she wills to present her and her entire household to God. This encounter is what Elizabeth filled with the Holy Spirit recognizes that Mary has taken her to God and even the child in her womb is full of Joy. Mary is thus a special Gift to humanity from God. This gift concerns taking us to God for God is with her in a mother-child relationship. She is thus through this visitation introducing Jesus to his mission of meeting man in his life situation. Through this same encounter she requests man to accept Jesus who comes to knock on their lives with the message of redemption and fulfillment. No other great companionship can equal this, God being brought to men and men being taken to God through the tender hands of our blessed mother. She thus qualifies to be a bridge of Man to God and of God to man. This act of Mary has been interpreted to be a gesture of charity. This being the case then we infer that Mary's companionship to Jesus shows the magnitude of God's love to man. Mary's love to God and man is also made manifest for in this journey she moves for the love of God and neighbor³⁰. On herself she is charitable to Elizabeth who is pregnant and elderly.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months taking care of her during her pregnancy. Mary learnt of her pregnancy from the Angel and she felt duty bound to go and offer her company at such an hour of need. Mary's company to Elizabeth was providential at such an hour of her need. Hence her action is of genuine concern to the needy down to our ages we look forward for her continuous presence in our lives. In turn she exhorts men to demonstrate total love to God by accepting the one who is in her womb. Lastly Mary is offering a lesson to us to be charitable to our needy brothers and sisters. Mary's presence in the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth calls to be present in the lives

²⁹ J.D. Chrichton, *Our Lady in the Liturgy*, Dublin: The Columba Press 1997, 10.

³⁰ Mary in her life she fulfilled the greatest commandment as taught by Jesus in Mat 22:35-40 and Mk 12:28-34 and she remained obedient in all ways. Hence she can accompany us as we seek to respond faithfully to God's commands. Mary is ever obedient to God's through word and deed.

of other people being one with them in whatever they go through. Today more than ever before, our society is in dire need for another Mary who will go in haste to the elderly, terminally ill, prisoners, marginalized and all those who are suffering in one way or another and accompany them in their hour of need. However, even as we arise to go to meet such people Mary demonstrates to us that we need to carry Jesus. On our own we may not quench their inner hunger and thirst but Christ in us will go down to the depth of their longing. We have an obligation to take Jesus to others in their life situations following this example of Mary to Elizabeth.

4. MAGNIFICAT³¹ (Lk 1:46–55)

To the words of Elizabeth, Mary responded with the magnificat. In this song of joy according to Hamel, “Mary is speaking of herself as a historical individual. She contemplates her own history and that of humanity in the light of God, the Saviour, and the almighty who does wonders with our creaturely “feebleness”³². In other words we can say she stands on the place of humanity and what she did is what every man must do in response to God’s unfailing love to humanity. In this song of praise Mary is grateful and full of praise to God for her divine motherhood is God’s favour to her. She is what she is because of God’s grace, “he has done great things for me.” What she is, is a fulfillment to God’s promises to the patriarchs of Israel she is the one carrying the long awaited promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his sons for ages to come. She comes out from this song as the real Israel where both the new and the old covenant are joined together and finds completion. We deduce that this is why John the Baptist as the link of the Old and the New Testament leapt with Joy. In her song she holds that God is faithful to his promises acknowledging that she is an instrument of God’s faithfulness to His people. Teaching us not to despair for God remains faithful to his people Israel.

Mary comes to us in this song of joy to be with us as we wait to receive God’s promise. She has a prominent position in God’s plan of fulfilling His promises to His faithful servants and this is the reason she is the companion of those who look upon God. Through her calling, God reaches out to all people and this is why in her song of joy, her mission is to be recognized by all people as they proclaim her to be blessed. In her song of joy Neuner explains that, “She is the lowly handmaid of the Lord who was exalted by a merciful God to conceive and give birth to the Saviour”³³. In the drama of salvation she is acting both on her personal capacity and also on behalf of the human race acting on their behalf for their reconciliation with God and they will acclaim her blessed. She is thus the Blessed woman, the Blessed Mother of the new people of God. She thus accompanies humanity in bearing witness to God’s fidelity in his promises.

³¹ Mary’s song to glorify God during her visit to the house of Elizabeth and Zechariah, it is also referred to as a canticle of Mary or as the song of Mary.

³² E. Hamel, *Justice in the Vision of the Magnificat*, in: *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, Middegreen, Slough: The Crossroad Publishing Company 1994, 581.

³³ J. Neuner, *Mary mother of the Saviour*, Bangalore: Theological Publications India 1995, 36.

In turn she gives men the reason of waiting on God throughout their lives as she joins them in their history. She is thus worth to be chosen as the best companion to lead us to the fulfillment of promises for a new dawn. Humanity thus has Mary as their mother and in this song of joy she prophesies that all generations will call her blessed³⁴. Her blessedness is experienced as she accompanies them to receive God's blessings in their lives towards eternity. Human beings thus have recourse to her as their own mother as His holiness pope Benedict XVI tells us, "she has become the mother of believers through whom all generations and races of earth obtain blessings"³⁵. She is related to all men and women as their mother effectively being a companion to us all in our earthly pilgrimage, out of her role she will be proclaimed blessed throughout the human history.

5. NATIVITY (Lk 2:4–20)

The birth of Jesus opens a new chapter in the story of man in his relationship with God towards his redemption. It concerns the purpose of the Bible, the climax of salvation and through it we come to the climax of revelation. The letter to the Hebrews notes that Jesus "... is the reflection of God's Glory and bears the impression of God's own being"³⁶. The person who is God's true image is born by the Blessed Virgin Mary in Bethlehem at a given time in History. After she conceived Jesus on the annunciation Mary now gives birth after housing him in her womb for nine months. The close proximity of Jesus and Mary is a model of Christian calling. Mary conceived the Word and bore the Word in body and in her life. For Luke Jesus was born in Bethlehem a town linked to David so as to link her child to the David's lineage as it was prophesied from the Old Testament that a saviour would be born from David's line. Thus Mary brought Jesus in a human body in the history of Israel. "Filled with the Holy Spirit she makes the Word visible in the humility of his flesh. It is to the poor and the first representatives of the gentiles that she makes him known"³⁷. Today we look upon her to bring Jesus in our life situations.

In Luke's story of Nativity there are Angels who point to the divine presence accompanying their master who is now resting as a human baby on the arms of Mary his mother. Their presence emphasizes the miraculous birth or in other words the uniqueness of the one born. This in turn calls our attention to her who was found worth for such an extraordinary event. In other words we can see God's messengers accompanying him to his people represented here by the Virgin Mary and Joseph. Mary is thus a key witness that God comes to meet man. Mary keeps company to the infant Jesus orienting him towards being fully human. She is thus tasked with the care of the Son of the Most High God. She is expected by the Heavenly battalion

³⁴ Lk 1:48

³⁵ J. Ratzinger, H. U. von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, trans. Adrian Walker, New York: Ignatius Press, 2005, 79

³⁶ Cfr. Heb 1:3.

³⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 724 also cfr. Lk 1:15–19, Mt 2:11

to offer herself totally in the upbringing of the child she bore. The task on her shoulders is enormous and involves walking with him every day as he grows to assume his public ministry. As she accompanies him from nativity to the cross even though she is her biological mother she needs to be open to learn from Him. The company she gives to him is not to be interpreted to mean that he was lacking for He was God³⁸. And he lacked nothing though as man he was to be nurtured like any other human child. This why as we propose that we need to accompany him we are to accompany him with our eyes, mind and heart open so that He teaches us what to be human means and what is expected of us in our daily life as we look forward to our redemption.

Mary becomes necessary to us having given birth to Jesus she has what it takes to teach us how to accompany him as he works for our salvation. The presence of the shepherds during nativity is also very important. It is full of meaning and Mary brings Jesus who is the prophesied shepherd from the prophecies of the Old Testament. He comes to be the chief Shepherd and he is welcomed by the literal shepherds who here represent the poor ones who have no one to take care of them. Mary accompanies Jesus to the shepherds as one with them and as their mother instilling hope through her child. Mary accompanies Jesus on his way to the world in the human form. He will later in the Gospels be referred to as the Good Shepherd³⁹. The flock of Christ now looks upon Mary to bring her son who is their shepherd so as to fulfill their dreams. This is the task of Mary that was entrusted to her and she carried it out faithfully. By presenting the shepherds the author wants the poor ones included in the Marian responsibility as she sang in her magnificat he uplifts the lowly⁴⁰. In other words Mary brings Jesus to the shepherds to uplift them. The shepherds on the other hand come to receive the messiah as one with them. Hence the arrival of the Messiah through the nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the arrival of the liberator of humanity especially the downtrodden⁴¹. Their presence at the birth of Jesus signifies the action and communication of God by respecting his transcendence⁴². The purpose of Jesus coming has been presented in the Gospel of St Luke to show that he came to save man from oppression of all that which demeans his dignity. Mary thus stands with the poor at the nativity presenting to them their liberator and on the other hand she stands with the poor ones to receive Him. Mary

³⁸ Cfr. Jn 1:1ff.

³⁹ The notion of the shepherds in the Nation of Israel was well understood. In the Old Testament this concept was used pointing to the leaders who were not responsible to the people under them and prophets gave a promise of a faithful shepherd who will come to take care of his flock responsibly. Cfr. Ez 34:1–24, Is 40:11, Mic 5:4. Ps 23 sings of a good shepherd who is understood in the New Testament perspectives to be Jesus Christ. In the New Testament Christ is understood to be the good shepherd prophesied and in fact he refers to himself as a good shepherd C/f Jn 10:11, Mt 25:31–46. See also Heb 13:20

⁴⁰ Cfr. Lk 1:52. In the Magnificat Mary talks of how God uplifts the lowly, the humble ones. Mary as a lowly servant of the Lord has been uplifted through her ministry of being the mother of God and in turn she does accompany the poor to her son so that they can be uplifted with God's benevolence.

⁴¹ Jesus outlined His mission specifically pointing out that the poor have a central position in his work. Cfr. Lk 4:16–18

⁴² R. Laurentin, *Mary in Faith and Life in the New Age of the Church*, Ndola: Franciscan Mission Press 1983, 93.

thus plays a double role as the one who accompanies Jesus to his friends the poor ones of the Lord and as the one who together with the poor ones readily welcomes him in the human history with a joyful expectation of their redemption. This is why the event of Nativity is a joyful occasion and the Church too rejoices in her maternity. As Crichton writes, "It is the feast of the mother who brought forth the redeemer of the world. As such, she is seen to be more closely associated with him than any other human being and her relationship with him is the root and source of all her dignity, honor and grace"⁴³. The close association between Mary and Jesus becomes a model of human and divine companionship for the salvation of man and the glory of God.

More than the physical giving birth Mary was there at the manger to welcome Jesus to this world in a new way. New way in that Jesus though God had not come in the world prior to his birth in a human body. As a human baby, Jesus was warmly received in her arms and she took care of him in all the facets of human and spiritual dimensions. The nativity is always new inviting us to look on Mary as she gives birth to our saviour and as she urges us on to receive her son in our lives in faith. She brings Jesus to each one of us so that our life may be made perfect. Thus entering into communion with God in a unique way as he grows in his human form as we watch him drawing from him his divine power and benevolence. Hence Mary the blessed mother invites us to grow with her son as she brings him up. In turn she opens her arms to welcome us in her family to up bring us in faith so as to acknowledge the Lordship of her son.

6. THE PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE (Lk 2:21–51)

Mary together with Joseph her spouse in this Gospel pericope accompanied her son to the house of God. This journey was in view of fulfilling the Jewish customs of naming, circumcising⁴⁴ and presenting their firstborn in the temple⁴⁵. Mary is presented here by St Luke in company with Jesus as he comes to fulfil the Law and identify himself with the Jewish customs. Thus Mary leads him to fulfil the Law. Today Humanity look upon Mary to be their companion in fulfilling the Law of our God. She who obeyed the Word has now assumed the responsibility of taking us to the temple in order to be taught by her Son and offer us an example of fulfilling the torah⁴⁶. Those who obey God's Word have life and Mary who listened, conceived and bore the Word is in company with life itself and she exults us to imitate her. Her womb became the temple for in it the Word made flesh dwelt for nine months and she was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. Christ now presented in the temple has taken

⁴³ J.D. Crichton, *Our Lady in the Liturgy...*, *op.cit.*, 27.

⁴⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 527 where circumcision is understood to be a sign of God's people from the Abrahamic lineage where Christ is now inserted as one of them.

⁴⁵ Cfr. Lk 2:21–23.

⁴⁶ The term torah is used to refer to the first five books in the Old Testament. These books are taken to be authoritative by three religions that is Muslims, Jews and Christians. They are attributed to Moses. For the Jews these books gave them law which was life so for them torah is life.

possession of his Father's house. Being the work of his hands He comes calling us brought by Mary to take possession of our hearts which are the dwelling place of the Spirit of God⁴⁷. Hence we look upon her that she may accompany us till we reach Heaven the home of the redeemed.

Simeon was happy to see the saviour in the hands of Mary. Mary brought joy to many people by taking her son in their lives. Mary accompanied Jesus as he was inserted in the history of Israel. He would fulfil his mission through suffering and Mary would participate in equal measure in the suffering of her son. She suffered with him accompanied him in his agony. May she accompany us in our sufferings and teach us to accept our lot faithfully to Christ. Mary understands well the human suffering for as prophesied by Simeon⁴⁸ she suffered in her life in the pursuit of fulfilling God's will in her life. After the birth of Jesus His parents followed the Jewish customs of naming, circumcising and presenting their first born in the temple⁴⁹. In these events Luke presents Mary playing her role as required. These events presented the child in the customs of His Jewish heritage and similarly according him all the rights and privileges that are proper to Jewish first born sons in accordance with the law of the first born⁵⁰. In the presentation of Jesus in the temple⁵¹ the remarks of Simeon exhibits to us Marian relevance of this event. First of all, guided by the Holy Spirit we discern that the baby presented is the long awaited Messiah for all Israel. The climax of salvation points to the universalism of Christ's mission. The suffering of Mary is foretold by Simeon⁵². As a mother she was closely united in all what pertains to the joys and sorrows of her child. She accompanied her son in all his daily struggles and through her presence in the life of her son she tasted his pain in line with the prophecy of Simeon. The council fathers aware of this fact taught that our blessed mother shared in the suffering of her Son during his passion⁵³. He would be rejected since His mission is the one of challenging the status quo, she in turn will suffer as she experiences the pains and rejections of her only son.

The finding of the child Jesus in the temple after looking for him anxiously for three months brings out the parental role of Mary and Joseph clearly breaks the silence on the hidden life of the boy Jesus⁵⁴. St Luke tells us that, "When the days of the feast were over and they set off home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it"⁵⁵. As a mother the loss of her only son must have brought to her inexpressible pain and made her restless. She was concerned about the safety of Jesus. She wanted Jesus to experience motherly care and love which any genuine company would offer. On finding Him in the temple Jesus makes it

⁴⁷ Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit cfr. 1 Cor 6:19.

⁴⁸ Cfr. Lk 2:35.

⁴⁹ Cfr. Lk 2:21–23.

⁵⁰ Cfr. Ex 13:1, 11–16.

⁵¹ Cfr. Lk 2:26.

⁵² Cfr. Lk 2:35.

⁵³ Cfr. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the church *Lumen Gentium* 1964, AAS 52 (1965). No 58 and 61.

⁵⁴ Cfr. Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 533–534.

⁵⁵ Cfr. Lk 2:48.

aware that his place is in his Father's house. Mary having brought Jesus up now He has to unfold his mission to her and the entire community in Jerusalem. Hence we deduce that the company that Mary gave to Jesus was to lead him in doing His Heavenly Father's will. As she continues accompanying Christians today she desires to lead us in doing God's will for it is in God's will that we will find everlasting joy which will reach climax in Heaven. His place is in his father's house this is where he comes to lead us to and Mary is part of this mission of her Son. He wanted to be in relation with his father to commune with him. We thus look forward to her company as we seek those who are lost sin, addiction of every kind contrary to doing God's will. In turn we should feel her company as she accompanies the refugees and the sick as she stands restless in looking for her sons and daughters who are lost in the world.

From this episode Mary continues to learn from her son for she is his daughter even though his mother biologically. As she accompanied her son in his sorrows she accompanies humanity today in the struggles of life. Having experienced the pain of suffering in her life and in the sufferings of her own son Mary is one with those who suffer in one way or the other. As Nwaigbo captures it clearly, "the significance of the sufferings of Mary which are linked with the sufferings of the masses, who were made poor through social and political agencies: as manifested in the exploitation of the common people, underpayment of wages, denial of justice in the court of laws, wars, terrorism and incessant military coups"⁵⁶. Thus Mary is a worth companion leading man in his sufferings to Christ for salvation. Her company also instills hope to all those who have been subjected to various sufferings and all those who are childless, widows, widowers, and orphans.

7. THE PRAYING CHURCH (Acts 1:13–14)

Mary is mentioned the last time in the works of St Luke the evangelist as a member of the first Christian community after the ascension of Jesus. We encounter Mary in the company of the followers of Jesus at the upper room in prayer awaiting the promise⁵⁷. Her presence in this community shows the continuation of her ministry after the ascension of Jesus. The council fathers in the Vatican two reading from this script understood her to be a preeminent member in the church. She is one with those awaiting the promise and as a disciple of her son being in company with those who believe in him⁵⁸. Her role here is to accompany the young church as she prepares to receive the promise and begin the mission of evangelizing the entire world in obedience to the mandate of Christ.

⁵⁶ F. Nwaigbo, *Mary Mother of the African Church. A Theological Inculturation of Mariology*, New York: Peter Lang Gimbit, 2001, 141.

⁵⁷ Jn 14:15–17 The promise here referring to the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus to his disciples. The disciples together with other followers of Christ including His mother were in prayer immediately after his ascension awaiting Holy Spirit Cfr. Acts 1:14

⁵⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, No. 53.

With the young church she takes on her role as an intercessor and one in the mystical body of her son. The blessed mother having been overshadowed by the Spirit at the annunciation she prays that the followers of her Son may receive the same Spirit for the continuation of his mission. “She who at the start of redemption gave us her son, now by her most powerful intercession obtained for the new born church the prodigious Pentecostal outpouring of the spirit of the divine redeemer who had already been given on the cross”⁵⁹. Together with other disciples received the spirit for the post earthly life of Jesus’ mission of them as the church. Was accompanying them teaching them on how to receive and spend the outpouring of the spirit as a teacher and as a student of the church. That guided by the Holy Spirit they may discern God’s will and ways which are proper to the mission of the new born church. As she accompanied Jesus in his earthly life now she accompanies his body the Church through her presence, prayers and her maternal care.

In this book of Acts of the Apostles the community of the followers of Jesus gathers together to wait for His promise after he ascended into heaven. Mary and other women join them in prayer⁶⁰. “So at the outset Luke emphasizes that the disciples spent the time of waiting for the spirit in an attitude of continuous and united prayer... the family of Jesus were thus among those who became part of the Church”⁶¹. Our blessed mother Mary is part of a praying church⁶². Mary Journeys with her son’s disciples for she herself is the first disciple and along her upbringing of her son she became aware that her call is part of her son’s mission. She becomes part of the early community of believers (church). Her presence encourages and motivates the disciples for they are in turn by implication her sons having been the brethren of our Lord. She is at the centre of this new community, “as the mother, sister, colleague, disciple and teacher of a movement organized by her son Jesus”⁶³. She is thus a prominent member in the community of believers, as a woman of hope having believed and hoped in God’s promises.⁶⁴ Mary was given a role to play in the founding of the Church of Christ. The best way to play this role is by availing herself in this community and journeying with them in faith. This role emanates from the fact that having conceived the Word she has every reason to be an example to others who have been called by Jesus to follow him. This is the source of her joy. “Her beatitude must be based on the fact that she has heard, believed obeyed, kept and pondered the word and continued to do it (Acts 1:14)”⁶⁵.

This community was seriously in prayer waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Mary is part of those who pray and are faithfully waiting the eschatological

⁵⁹ Pius XII, Encyclical, *Mystici Corporis*, 29th June 1943, w2.vatican.va/content/pius.../hf-p-xii-enc.29061943mystici-corporis-christi.html (Accessed: 28.12.2018).

⁶⁰ Cfr. Acts 1:14.

⁶¹ I.H. Marshall, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Acts*, Leicester, England: Inter Varsity Press 1980, 62.

⁶² A note from the African Bible on Acts 1:14.

⁶³ I. Gebara, C. Maria, *Mary Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*, New York: Orbis Books, 1989, 77.

⁶⁴ Benedict XVI, Encyclical letter, *Spe Salvi Facti Sumus* [In Hope We Were Saved], Nairobi Paulines Publications Africa, 2007, No 50.

⁶⁵ E.R Brown, et al (eds.), *Mary in the New Testament...*, *op.cit.*, 172.

promise. "Mary is in the midst of those who pray and wait."⁶⁶ This scene shows Mary assuming her role as the mother of the Church just as she was close to Christ now she is close to His body the Church. For she had all along given herself totally to Christ and His works. Mary continued her maternal role with the early disciples of the resurrected Lord. She accompanies them in prayer as she was accompanying Jesus in his mission now she must accompany those to whom Jesus' mission is now entrusted. This is how she continues her mission after the ascension of Jesus. She continues to pray encourage and console the nascent church which needed a strong figure of hope and encouragement.

Mary joins the disciples to pray with them and for them she was a disciple herself and as such she needs the grace of sustenance in her ministry and she in turn understood her role in praying for the church and being together in solidarity at their fears and anxiety. May she accompany us as we seek Jesus in the prayer of the Church. Perseverance in Prayer with Mary at the heart of the praying community is a virtue that she has to teach the disciples of her son. She is thus accompanying each one of us as St John Paul II noted, "More Importantly still, Mary continues to cooperate with a maternal love in the birth and development of all of us, the brothers and sisters of her first born son"⁶⁷. Amazingly Mary plays this role even to our contemporary church. May she continue to be with us in prayer through our mission until her son comes again to takes us home.

8. CONCLUSION

Mary as presented by St Luke is an important figure in the history of salvation. Her role as a faithful companion to Jesus and to his believers is still relevant today. We see in her her total sacrifice for other people and her presence in their lives accompanying them in totality of their lives. With her on our side is a sure guarantee of victory against the allurements of this world which disorients us from listening and doing God's will in our lives. In turn we are invited to become another Mary in our communities so as to be source of encouragement to all those who are awaiting the fulfillment of God's promise in their lives. With Mary may we walk with her side by side in our pilgrimage always ready to learn from her heroic virtues in obedience to God's Word. We look forward for another Mary to come up from our communities and offer her consolations through her faithful accompaniment to all people in their respective communities.

Her companionship is based on the mystery of Incarnation which is not gender based hence both men and women regardless of their gender can be and are invited to be another Mary in our contemporary world. In Luke-acts a ground for Mary's theology and relevance down to our times has been demonstrated. We now walk with her as she looks forward to the fulfillment of her son's mission all over the world. In conclusion we pray with pope emeritus, Benedict XVI, "Holy Mary mother of

⁶⁶ J. Ratzinger, H.U. von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source...*, *op.cit.*, 74.

⁶⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, No. 6

God, our mother, teach us to believe, to hope to love with you. Show us the way to his kingdom! Star of the sea, shine upon us and guide us on our way!"⁶⁸.

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BŁOGOSŁAWIONA DZIEWICA MARYJA – WIERNY TOWARZYSZ CZŁOWIEKA KU BOGU. ŁUKASZOWA PERSPEKTYWA MARYJNA

Streszczenie

Z jednej strony osoba Błogosławionej Dziewicy Maryi dla wiernych chrześcijan, jeśli chodzi o wiarę, była w całej tradycji chrześcijańskiej źródłem inspiracji. Z drugiej strony zaś stała się źródłem kontrowersji pomiędzy katolikami i protestantami. Liczne encykliki papieskie, adhortacje apostołskie, dokumenty soborowe i posoborowe odnoszą się do Maryi Matki ze względu na Jej bliskość wobec Syna – Jezusa Chrystusa, Pana i Zbawiciela. Współczesny człowiek rozgląda się za osobą, która będzie zarówno wierna, jak i godna zaufania, by towarzyszyć mu w życiu ziemskim, a także może zapewnić go w odniesieniu do wiecznej radości. Badając rolę Maryi w pismach świętego Łukasza w Nowym Testamencie, widzimy Maryję jako tę, która wpisuje się w to pragnienie współczesnego człowieka.

⁶⁸ Benedict XVI, Encyclical letter, *Spe Salvi Facti Sumus*, No 50.

Wielu ludzi nie rozumie owego znaczenia Maryi jako wiernego towarzysza człowieka w jego drodze ku Bogu. Być może jest to spowodowane nieporozumieniem co do pozycji Maryi w historii zbawienia. Pismo Święte NT, w *Dziejach Apostolskich*, w narracji o niemowlęctwie Kościoła neofitów czyni z towarzyszenia Maryi drogę wiary dla uczniów Jezusa. W artykule prezentujemy syntetycznie owo towarzystwo Błogosławionej Dziewicy Maryi w odniesieniu do Słowa Bożego, gdy przyzywamy Jej towarzystwa dzisiaj chrześcijanom w ich pielgrzymce do ziemi obiecanej.

Słowa kluczowe: Błogosławiona Dziewica Maryja, towarzyszenie na drodze wiary, Łukaszowa perspektywa maryjna

BLESSED VIRGIN MARY – FAITHFUL COMPANION TO GOD AND MAN. LUCAN MARIAN PERSPECTIVE

Summary

The person of Blessed Virgin Mary among Christians on one hand has been throughout Christian tradition a source of inspiration as far as the Christian faith is concerned. On the other hand it has been a source of controversy between Catholics and Protestants. Many papal Encyclicals, Apostolic exhortations, conciliar and post conciliar documents have all made reference to our blessed mother due to her close proximity to her son our Lord Jesus Christ. The modern man today looks forward for a person who is both faithful and trustworthy to accompany him or her in the earthly life and offer an assurance of everlasting joy. Examining the role of Mary in the writings of St Luke in the New Testament we see Mary as the one who fits in this desire of the modern man. However many people today do not understand Mary to be a faithful companion, perhaps this is due to the misunderstanding of Mary's position in the Salvation History. Moreover the Sacred Scriptures from the infancy narratives to the neophyte church in Acts of the Apostles Mary makes a journey of faith with Jesus and his disciples. Thus in this article we examine briefly the companionship of the blessed Mary to the Word of God as we invoke her companionship to our Christians today on their pilgrimage to the Promised Land.

Key words: Blessed Virgin Mary, companionship on the way of faith, The Lucan Marian perspective

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