

A Monthly Message from Pastor Mike and Mandy

Dear Parish Family,

Roman Catholics and Lutherans agree on several central matters regarding Saint Mary, Mother of God. In Luke Gabriel announces to Mary that she would be the bearer of the incarnate Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born of the Virgin, as the ecumenical creeds attest. The Lucan text also makes the point that Mary responded obediently to the message she received. Her ready response to God's Word is a good example for every Christian.

Roman Catholics and Lutherans agree that Mary was a virgin, that she was the bearer of the Son of God, and that she responded obediently to the Word of the Lord. Both churches accept the position taken by the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) and the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) that Mary is the "Mother of God". This teaching means that she bore the one person Jesus Christ, God and man. Christ has two natures, divine and human, united in one person. Since she gave birth to that one person, she is the God-bearer (Θεοτοκος). This doctrine does not mean that God has his origin and beginning in the Mother of God. God is eternal and the Son of God is eternally begotten of the Father.

The two primary errors regarding Christ's person condemned by the Church were the views uniting the person of Christ in such a way that He has one nature (Monophysitism) and dividing the two natures of Christ so that there are two persons, not one (Nestorianism). Saint Cyril of Alexandria and Saint Leo of Rome were the greatest defenders of the orthodox teaching. Both Lutherans and Roman Catholics share this ecumenical and catholic belief, as do a vast majority of Christians.

Teachings regarding Mary are actually teachings about Christ. When we call Mary, the Mother of God, we are saying that Christ is one person, whose two natures are united in Him unconfused. We confess that the Son of God, the Second Person of the holy and blessed Trinity, has come in the flesh. He is not God only; He is not human only. He is the God/man, fully God and fully man.

Where Lutherans and Catholics disagree are on several matters. The Immaculate Conception and the Assumption represent two points of this disagreement. The Immaculate Conception is the doctrine stating that Mary was born without sin. The Assumption is the teaching that Mary was taken up directly into heaven. Lutherans believe that only Jesus was born without sin and find no biblical warrant for Mary's assumption into heaven. The doctrine that she was a perpetual virgin is not a doctrine we find in the Holy Scriptures.

Lutherans do not pray to the saints in heaven. Our only intercessor is Jesus Christ, our Lord. If the saints do pray for us, we do not know this from the New Testament. On this point, Roman Catholics and Lutherans also disagree. Roman Catholic piety includes prayer to the saints in heaven who, it is believed, pray on behalf of us to the Lord. In Roman Catholic teaching, Mary is the primary intercessor among the saints, as is expressed in the familiar devotion called the Angelus, "Hail Mary, full of grace . . ."

Luther had the greatest respect for the Mother of God, as is revealed in his beautiful commentary on the Magnificat. He calls her the Mother of God many times in this work. We too should have the greatest respect for her. We must remember though that teachings about Saint Mary are really teachings about Christ, His person and mission. The title, Mother of God, is used in

the Formula of Concord, included in the Book of Concord, which contains the Lutheran confessions of the Sixteenth Century.

The Athanasian Creed states that Jesus Christ, “. . . is God, begotten before all worlds from the being of the Father, and he is man, born in the world from the being of his mother—existing fully as God, and fully as man with a rational soul and a human body; equal to the Father in divinity, subordinate to the Father in humanity. Although he is God and man, he is not divided but is one Christ. He is united because God has taken humanity into himself; he does not transform deity into humanity. He is completely one in the unity of his person, without confusing his natures. For as the rational soul and body are one person, so the one Christ is God and man.” (Lutheran Book of Worship, p. 55). This is what we evangelical Lutherans, “. . . believe, teach, and confess.” (Words used in the Formula of Concord).

In Christ,

Pastor Michael Tavella
Pastor Amanda Grimmer