



Mary's Importance to Our Faith

With all the Catholic artwork, prayers, and feast days honoring Mary, she must be very important to our faith. After all, she is called the "Mother of the Church", and "First of the Saints." To truly understand our reverence for Mary, we must look at the real Mary—the life of a real person who lived over 2000 years ago. To do this we must look for Mary in the writings of the Gospels.

Mark's Gospel has one brief incidental reference to Mary, when Jesus says that "whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother." (3:31-35)

John's Gospel twice directly mentions Mary. First at the wedding of Cana (2:1-12), and at the cross [19:25-27]. John only refers to her as the Mother of Jesus.

Matthew's Gospel declares Mary as the Mother of the Messiah, and a virgin espoused to Joseph. Mary does not speak, and the focus on the birth story is Joseph.

Luke's Gospel tells of the Annunciation, Mary's visit to Elizabeth, the Magnificat, the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus in the temple, and Mary and Joseph searching and then finding Jesus in the temple. In Acts, Luke also writes of Mary being present at Pentecost.

So, what are the evangelists telling us about the importance of Mary?

John relating the wedding of Cana, quotes Mary as saying in reference to Jesus, "Do whatever He tells you". A simple statement that reflects our entire Christian faith. How appropriate that these are the last words of Mary in the Gospels. At the cross, John describes Jesus as presenting Mary as the spiritual Mother of the Church—and of all children of God.

Luke presents Mary as the Mother of Jesus, as a believer, who has been with Jesus from conception to his birth, through childhood to adulthood, and who experienced Pentecost. Mary is the model disciple.

Luke defines Mary's holiness as faithful listening and acting on God's word. She says to the Angel Gabriel, "May it be done to me according to your word". Mary's Magnificat is a freedom song for those marginalized by society. She is not among the world's powerful but is simply God's maidservant. She says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Mary reminds us that nothing is impossible with God.

Mary is so important to our faith, because she is an ongoing presence. She is still drawing people to her Son, and still encouraging people to say yes to God. In turning with devotion to the "real life" of Mary, in seeing how she lived by faith, we can find the courage and grace to do the same, united with her.

The angel Gabriel confirms Mary's importance and holiness. No one else in the Bible has ever been honored by an angel with such an exaltation as "full of grace". Let us always remember that sacred greeting.