**SERIES 03 (PREACHED IN 1904) - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**03. THE VIRGIN MOTHER by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*"Having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, you highly favoured one! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you amongst women!" But when she saw him, she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered what kind of salutation this might be. The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb, and give birth to a son, and will call his name 'Jesus.' He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. There will be no end to his Kingdom." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, seeing I am a virgin?" The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore also the holy one who is born from you will be called the Son of God. Behold, Elizabeth, your relative, also has conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing spoken by God is impossible." Mary said, "Behold, the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word." The angel departed from her. Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah, and entered into the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth."*

*Luke 1:26-40*

*"The third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. Jesus also was invited, with his disciples, to the wedding. When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever he says to you, do it." "*

*John 2:1-5*

*"While he was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, seeking to speak to him. One said to him, "Behold, your mother and your brothers stand outside, seeking to speak to you." But he answered him who spoke to him, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" He stretched out his hand towards his disciples, and said, "Behold, my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother." "*

*Matthew 12:46-50*

EXTREMES HAVE characterized the treatment which the mother of our Lord has received at the hands of the Christian Church; the extremes of, on the one hand, worship, and on the other, neglect. For we cannot help seeing that in the rebound of Protestantism from the worship of the Virgin, which is almost the highest thing in the great Roman Church, we have her altogether, and, as I think, have failed to render her the honor that is due to her, according to the simple and plain teaching of Holy Scripture. Being as we are, believers in the authority of Scripture, we need not discuss the question of worship as rendered to the Virgin Mary. There is absolutely no authority for it in Scripture.

Yet while there is no authority for worship, there is none for neglect. There are names in connection with Christianity that we revere almost above the names of the ordinary rank and file of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ. No man suggests that Paul can ever be put exactly upon the same level with others. After the Lord Himself, perhaps no man has more radiantly revealed the possibilities of the possessed life than the mighty missionary apostle and teacher of the Church. And as he occupies this place of honor, and we constantly refer to him and speak of him in terms of special honor, so I think that Mary of Nazareth, the mother of our Lord, should always be spoken of in terms of honor, and we cannot afford to neglect her or ever to forget the unique and remarkable and tremendous position that she occupied in connection with that supreme wonder of our holy religion, the incarnation of God the Son. She should certainly the place in our thinking that she does in Scripture.

Let me say first of all there is but one principal Figure in the New Testament, and all the rest gather their radiance from that central One. What is it that makes Paul shine and flash even today upon the Church with illumination and blessing? You have it in his own answer, "To me to live is Christ," and the radiance of all the other figures that stand out before us as we study the New Testament is a borrowed radiance, not reflected merely, but caught and embodied and repeated. So also with Mary. She is not the principal figure. All her appearances are connected with Him, and form part of the background that throws up into brighter light and more clear and vivid outline the great truths concerning our Lord Himself.

Let us look at her just as she is in the New Testament. We begin with the first chapter of Luke. There are three verses, 26, 27 and 32, that we will take in connection. "Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary." "He shall be called great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David."

Now the difficulty begins, that of getting your attention upon Mary, rather than upon this One Who is coming. Here we have the first picture of Mary, a virgin of the house of David, betrothed to Joseph, also of the house of David. There can be no doubt whatever, I think, that Joseph and Mary were first cousins, betrothed to each other. You will notice if you study the genealogies of Jesus, that both Matthew and Luke give them through Joseph, and yet both Matthew and Luke distinctly state that Jesus was not the Son of Joseph; and at first it would seem that the genealogies were out of place, which traced His history back to Abraham in one case, and in the other to Adam and to God. But there can be no doubt whatever that these genealogies are equally the genealogies of Mary, with Joseph, and that tradition is right, when it says that she was of the same line as Joseph. It is distinctly affirmed by Luke, who, when he gives the genealogy of Joseph, uses this word, "as was supposed, the son of Joseph." Yet it is also affirmed by him that Jesus was the Son of David (1:32). After the flesh, then, He was not the Son of David through Joseph, and therefore He must have been the Son of David through Mary. And it is well to remember that the legal genealogy of Jesus never was questioned by contemporary Jews, and the only way to account for it is as such things may always be accounted for, that both the mother and supposed father traced their genealogy through the same line.

She was a quiet, simple village maid living in Nazareth, of which the question was repeatedly asked for what we find in the New Testament is but a quotation of a proverb "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" The word means simply what it seems to mean. The question is not so much, Can any great thing? but, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? The probability is that the question meant in the proverb that Nazareth was one of those small towns that had the very center and hotbed of immorality, and the question means, Can anything that is moral and pure come out of Nazareth? And in the little town, situated there away up on the hillside, close to the main thoroughfare, along which the great movements of the hour were passing, dwelt this young woman in all probability about twenty years of age. And we see her there first of all, not a daughter of some well-known person, not having had the great advantages of metropolitan residence, but a simple country maiden, of the Hebrew people, dwelling in the midst of that little town with all its limitations. That is the first picture that passes before us.

Then in the same chapter of Luke (vs. 28-38) we have the next picture, as she confronts the great and marvelous mystery of the annunciation. "And he" - the angel "came in unto her, and said, Hail." And it is never recorded in the Bible that an angel so addressed a human being before or since. It is distinctively heaven's recognition of something in this woman that demands even respect. "Hail." That is the first word.

And now notice what follows in this verse, "Hail, thou that art highly favored, thou that art endued with grace." Highly favored is not incorrect, but I think we have read into these words something that is not in them. We have read them as though the angel meant, Thou art most highly favored in that thou art to be the mother of the Messiah. It is the declaration not of a favor to be bestowed, but of a high condition of character attained. "Thou art endued with grace, the Lord is with thee." There is the story of the character of this maiden of Nazareth. Pure in the midst of impurity, richly dowered in the midst of poverty, a woman of true and splendid and beautiful character in the midst of circumstances that have been antagonistic to the making of such character.

Now notice what immediately follows. From the moment that salutation has sounded in her ears, it is written, "she was greatly troubled at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be." Mary of Nazareth was undoubtedly a woman holding converse with spiritual things, and knew the history of the past of her nation, and believed in her God, and held communion with Him. And the angel visitor himself does not startle her, but she is surprised at what he says to her, "Thou art endued with grace, the Lord is with thee." There is unconscious beauty of her own character, and in that is the revelation of the of grace. For the last bloom upon the character is the unconsciousness of its beauty and purity. We see Mary in all honesty, facing a difficulty, and speaking out of the simplicity of her sweet maiden's heart, telling the angel her sense of the absolute difficulty, and then there comes to her the second part of the angel's message, in which the angel tells her that the great and mystic marvel of which he has now spoken to her shall be fulfilled by God Himself. This girl of simple beauty and unconscious grace of character, finds herself confronted by a declaration and a statement that must startle her when it falls on her, yet all the strength of character which has been described as endued with grace, asserts itself; and you have falling from the lips of this woman words that seem to be the finest and most wonderful under any circumstances. She says in the presence of the mystery and the misunderstanding of the great holy enwrapping of cloud and darkness, and a bursting into flame, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." It is a great and holy and wonderful abandonment of herself to the will of God at whatever cost.

And we next see her in verse 39, "And Mary arose in these days and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah." Read the story to verse 56, the journey to the hill country, and the salutation of Elizabeth. Have you ever thought of that journey of a hundred miles, or tried to watch Mary as she takes it? Sometimes it has been spoken of as though it was a terribly hard journey for her to undertake. I think in all probability Mary was herself of the tribe of Levi, and a daughter of a priest, and that she would have had an escort for the journey. But why that hurried visit to Elizabeth? The whole problem of human salvation has been wrought out with pain and misunderstanding, and agony. Imagine this maiden in the heart of Nazareth with this awful secret, tremendous in its glory, that cannot be explained to Nazareth, and I think you will see why she left Nazareth for those first three months, that she might tarry with Elizabeth yonder, and there in communion with someone else who knew something of the deep secret of escape the slander and the scorn that might have wrapped her round in Nazareth. It is a great mystery; one of the things which much cannot be said, but one that broods over the heart like a great sorrow; Jesus Christ could only be born through scorn and misunderstanding and suffering; and this maiden of the Hebrew line and faith had also to bear early the scorn and shame of the One Who presently was to make scorn and shame never to be and to blot out all the possibility of sin.

And then we hear that great Magnificat. Henry Burton says it is the swan song of Hebraism. And it is all Hebrew. There is no line of intelligent understanding in that song of the mystery that is to be wrought out in the One to be born. Mary sings within the limit of the light she has. This is not a woman in such perfect communion with God that she is able to interpret, even in a song, the coming thing. She does not know it, but the light is flashing back over her, and she brings out of that past of which she sings, all unconsciously it may be, yet most beautifully, the first promise of the morning that will dawn presently through the great mystery of the birth that is to be. It is all Hebrew, Hebrew poetry, Hebrew thinking, and Hebrew religion; but it is not the poetry and the thinking and the religion of the materialized and debased Hebraism in the midst of which she lives. She has gone back to the original thought and idea, and she sings out of the very heart of the holy and revealed thing of her own religion, and it is the song of a woman that is passing through misunderstanding to pain as the bondmaid of the Lord. And consequently the song in which she expresses her deepest feeling has not in it one note that speaks of a burden. It is the song that speaks of the deliverance wrought, of a victory that has come, and of a great shining of light that is to be.

It is there, during that period, that we read of the fear of Joseph, of the angel's visit, and of the resulting marriage of Mary with the one to whom she was betrothed. Now comes the story of the birth of Jesus. Here again let us be very careful to see Mary only. The edict had gone out that all the world must be taxed. There must be the going up to Jerusalem and the registration, and the taxing, and again sorrow gathers round the story. Just let us meditate in solemn stillness on the truth that this Child, so mystic and marvelous, was born away from home, away even from the home of His mother; that in the supreme hour this woman was away from all that is always so dear and precious to the heart of woman. And so in travail she is in sympathy with the great, deep suffering of the One to be born, through Whom the world is yet to be won. And yet we can see the brightness, the joy, and the gladness of it. The first sound of the voice of the Boy born, turned the discords of the wayside inn into harmonies for the mother, and the first gleam of light from the eyes of the Boy as He looked up into that mother face made the shadows of the inn merge into the infinite light of heaven.

The shepherds come in and tell how watching their flocks out yonder they heard a heavenly solo, which ended in a great heavenly chorus. Here is the first revelation of Mary's imperfect understanding. She has submitted herself to God as the bondmaid of Jehovah, and she is walking with Him along the pathway of His purpose, but she does not see all; she ponders it. The Greek word here suggests she listened to these things, and tried to lay them out in their mosaic, to arrange them in her heart. She remembered the words of the annunciation concerning Him. She listened to what the shepherds said. She tried to lay the lines and follow them out, and tried to see what these strange mysteries of the One born of her was going to become. She will make such great mistakes, and misinterpret Him presently, but it will be the misinterpretation of love; but still it will be misinterpretation, and there is the first little shadow coming across. It is radiantly beautiful, and yet a fact that she is pondering these things, and trying to lay them out, and that fact reveals to us that Mary is never to be worshiped, but always to be loved. She is finite and imperfect.

The next step is when Mary brings the Child Jesus to present Him in the temple. Forty days have passed, according to the law of the Jew, and now we see Mary bringing the Child to offer Him in the temple, according to the law of the firstborn. Jesus has been by Mary yielded to the ceremony that indicates His relation to the earthly covenant at eight days old, but now He is to be yielded according to Scripture teaching and Hebrew demands, to the absolute service of God. He is the firstborn, and after forty days He is borne by Mary to the temple, and we have the story of Simeon's reception of the Child, those wonderful words of the old man, watching on the mountains for the breaking of light: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." He looks at Mary, and tells her that a sword shall pierce through her own soul also. She marveled. It is still the same mother, loving very greatly, but not understanding it all. O the mystery of it to this woman, that first annunciation, great, overwhelming, mysterious fact, and then the messages of those angel songs o'er Bethlehem plains, and now the marvel of what this old man dwelling in the temple is saying. She marveled, she wondered, she does not understand this Child. The simplicity of her faith and the tenderness of her love mark the truth as we proceed to watch her.

And then the period of months which we may call troublous times, the visit of the Magi after the presentation at the temple. They came when He was about six weeks old, and again we see simply the mother, without any word, watching these Eastern kings as they offered to her child such costly gifts as perchance she had never seen before, gold, frankincense and myrrh. The rumor spread over the whole district, and the angel messenger comes that bids them fly, and that long journey. Imagine the true and loyal mother, clasping to her own heart and bosom the little child, and the flight into Egypt, the coming back when Herod is dead, the fear on the borders of the land of Israel because Archelaus reigns in his stead, and then the message. And now they come back to Nazareth, and all I see in the movements now is that mother pondering and marveling and wondering at the early scenes, but notwithstanding all the wonder and all the mystery that has come into her life, loving and tending the child, shielding Him, carrying Him to Egypt, coming back with Him, coming up to Nazareth, her life centered, bound up absolutely in His. And then we do not see Mary again for twelve years.

When Jesus is twelve years we see her again. She brings Him now to the temple. It is certain that she and Joseph had come every year at this time, for chronicle says so. We have no account of the coming of Jesus. It is chronicled now because it an important place in the life of Jesus. This bringing up to the temple to be presented is not casual, but in fulfillment of a Jewish ceremony which is the Jewish confirmation, what the Hebrew people still call, barmitzva (son of the law). He becomes a son of the law about twelve years of age. Then in connection with this the Hebrew boy has a duty, to submit himself for examination by the rabbis, that they may find out how he has been trained by his parents; and a right to ask now any questions he desires about the problems confronting him. Jesus was one of His people and this is exactly what every Hebrew boy had to go through. But the astonishing part was the wonderful wisdom of His answers, and the wonderful insight of His questions. I think it was not Divine insight altogether. To me it is a radiantly beautiful picture of Mary's training. We must allow something for the keen and wonderful mind of a sinless Child. How Mary has taught Him, and trained Him! When He stands amid the doctors we watch Him, in beautiful and simple boyhood, answering questions, and the fact that He asks questions is not a revelation that He wanted to puzzle them, but that He had problems. And as we watch Him in the midst of the doctors, we see the mother behind, and a light is upon those twelve years in which according to Jewish teaching and custom she has patiently trained Him in the knowledge of the law, and the prophets, and the Psalms, and the history of her people.

Over this picture comes the first tinge of manifested misunderstanding. The parents start back, miss the boy, and going back find Him lingering still among the doctors. She looks at Him, and with a tone almost of reproach in her voice, asks Him: "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I sought thee sorrowing." He looks back into her face, and I am sure Jesus did not say to her, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" But I am sure He did say to her, "Wist ye not," mother, didn't you know, "that I must be about my Father's business?" Mother, don't you really understand this deeper impulse which you have yet been training through the years? There is nothing of the tone of rebuke in the usual sense of the word, only an element of surprise. She knows, but she does not understand the mystery of her Son, or that He is more than her Son. For eighteen years we shall see neither of them, but we read she "kept all these sayings in her heart."

We see her again at the marriage of Cana (John 2:1-5). Now the whole relationship has changed. So far Jesus has been under her training. He is now no longer so. Here at Cana He has turned His back upon the home, and all its responsibility, and has moved out into that life which is severed from all that went before. He is no longer subject to her in any sense. We notice first that Mary is an invited guest at this feast, and in the second place her misunderstanding of Jesus. She goes to Him and she says, What about the failure of the wine? and then he says to her: "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." Woman, you may translate with perfect and greater accuracy, Lady. In our colloquialism, woman has become harsh, but it had no such sound when Jesus used it. It was a term of deference, and respect, and it is full of tenderness. Let us notice very carefully what He really said. "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" We might translate with equal accuracy, hast thou to do with me?" "Lady, what is there to me in thee? What have we now in common?" His meaning comes out in what He next says, "Mine hour is not yet come." People think Jesus seems to say: Don't try and hurry Me to work a miracle; I am not ready yet. Five minutes afterwards He had done it, and one commentator says that time had no place in the economy of God. Take your Gospel of John, and you will find there is a phrase running throughout. "Mine hour," "His hour." What is the hour? I do not hesitate to say it is the hour of His passion. They could not take Him, because His "hour" was not yet come, until He got into the presence of the cross, and then He begins to say, "Father, the hour is come." He says, Lady, what is there to Me in thee? At the present moment I am not under the subjection of thy will, and you do not understand Me. There is nothing to Me in thee. We have lost the thing that makes us one, and common. There is a difference. Mine hour is not yet come. Mary hoped that He was going to set up a kingdom along material lines, and manifestations, and He said, No, mother, it is not that way. And He will keep on about an hour until the cross comes. That is what Mary shrinks from, and so we see her misunderstanding brought out here. She had not known Him, or seen the mystery of the hour, and she went back to the servants. Her confidence is beautiful, even in the midst of misunderstanding. Here is tender and gracious love, even when she cannot follow Him. There we see the mother.

We find the crowning evidence of her misunderstanding in Matthew 12:46-50 and Mark 3:21, 35-35. Here there settles down upon this woman the most awful fear for Him. She thinks He is really going out of His mind, and you see her there, having taken a long journey with His brethren to persuade Him to give this thing up, and to come back home and be quiet. She is standing outside. They have come all the way from Nazareth to Capernaum, because she thinks He is losing His reason. She is outside, and one tells Him, Your mother is outside, and He said: "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother." You see the woman distracted and mystified. Again do not misunderstand her. Her great love makes her take that journey, and press Him to go back home.

Two other pictures only. We see her again when He is on the cross, and then we see her watching. "Let solemn silence meditate these sacred things." Let us look at that mother heart, all bruised and sore. The woman who yielded to the great mystery of the centuries, and worked with God to the fulfillment of the mystery of redemption, is stricken and smitten because that Son is dying. Here is a ray of sunshine. The dying Son looks at her once more, and says, "Woman, behold thy Son," John is My truest friend as earthly friendships go. "Woman, behold thy son," "Behold thy mother." And so in the dying mystery of a world's redemption this Son thinks of and provides for His mother. It is the grace of the Christ that must impress us. But how it shines about her, and bathes her in its golden light.

I see her once again in the first chapter of the Acts. She is in the upper room, waiting for Pentecost, and on her there sat a tongue of fire, and back to her came the same mysterious, brooding Spirit through which the mystery of the mystic Person came to her, now to abide with her, and to make to her more real the Son of her love than He ever had been, even though after the flesh she had been His mother.

The fact of her life is lonely, superb, never to be repeated, or imitated. Yet there are principles even here, broad and great.

Personal character counts with God as fitness for service. Highest service always involves pain, and all service is eventually for the crowning of the Christ, Who Himself increases into the radiance of the eternal noon, while those who serve decrease into the sunshine of that noon.