

## **Didn't Jesus downplay His mother's role in our salvation?**

In the Gospels we do encounter a few passages that seem to diminish Mary's role. For example, we encounter this passage from the Gospel according to Luke:

“A woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to [Jesus], ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!’ But he said, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it’” (Lk. 11:27-28).

At first glance, this passage can be a little troubling for us as Catholics. Is Our Lord denigrating Our Lady's pivotal role in salvation history? After all, His emphasis seems to be on listening to the Word of God, not dwelling on Mary's maternity. What is this enigmatic passage actually teaching us?

It should be noted that the woman in the crowd is, perhaps unwittingly, the first to fulfill Mary's prophecy in her Magnificat, recorded earlier in St. Luke's Gospel, that “all generations” would call her “blessed” (Lk. 1:48)--a prophecy we also fulfill every time we pray the Hail Mary. Further, in the account of the Visitation, Scripture explicitly notes that Elizabeth is “filled with the Holy Spirit” when she declares that Mary is “blessed” among women (Lk. 1:41-42). The issue, then, isn't *whether* Mary is blessed, but understanding *how* and *why* Mary is blessed. Jesus addresses the basis of Mary's blessedness in Luke 11:27-28. He reveals that her blessedness is more profound than her biological relationship to Jesus. Surely His taking on human nature in the womb of Mary is not being slighted here.

Further, we have no reason to believe that Our Lord failed to live out perfectly the Fourth Commandment's requirement to honor one's parents. In the Finding in the Temple, for example, we read that Jesus returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and was obedient to them (cf. Lk. 2:51).

Yet Jesus, the light to the nations, the One who could raise up biological descendants from stones according to John the Baptist (cf. Lk. 3:8), was intent on His Father's business: establishing the new covenant family of God. This family goes beyond our flesh and blood relationships, and is rooted in our faith in Christ and fidelity to His holy will.

On this score, Mary not only gave birth to Jesus and nursed Him, but even more she heard the Word of God and kept it. Elizabeth also said at the Visitation that Mary was blessed precisely because she believed what the Lord told her would come to pass (cf. Lk. 1:45). She not only heard the Word, but kept it, pondering it in her Immaculate Heart (cf. Lk. 2:19, 51).

The "Blessed" Virgin Mary is not only Jesus' mother according to the flesh, but also His first and greatest disciple.

For more on the role of Mary in the life of Christ and His Church, we recommend Hahn and Suprenant, eds., [\*Catholic for a Reason II: Scripture and the Mystery of the Mother of God\*](#).