

Mary Sunday

Advent 4

- I. Who was James the Just? – so-called by Clement of Alexandria because James had that reputation.
 1. James the Just was a prominent leader in the early church, and he was a brother of Jesus. A half-brother, to be sure.
 - a. Matt 13:55-56: “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary and are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?”
 - b. Mark 6:3-4: “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?”
 - c. Acts 12:2: “He killed James, the brother of John with the sword.”
 - d. Acts 15:13: “After they finished speaking, James replied, ‘Brethren, listen to me.’”
 - e. Gal 1:19: “But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother.”
 - f. I Cor 15:7: “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.”
 - g. Two James: James, the brother. James, the apostle. Why do we pay so little attention to this one, James the brother, James the Just? After all, he was a prominent leader and brother of Jesus?
 - h. More importantly, we must also ask: What kind of attention do we pay to Mary? Do we use Mark 3:31-35 as our excuse for not paying attention to her?
 2. From the beginning of the church Mary had a major role in liturgies, shrines, societies, the rosary. In the High Middle Ages as Jesus came to be seen more as a stern judge, Mary became more prominent as a compassionate conduit to Jesus. In the Counter-Reformation after Luther, the Roman Catholics emphasized Mary more and more.
 3. Mary and Green Bay, Wisconsin. When we hear “Green Bay” we think of the Green Bay Packers. But Green Bay, Wisconsin is also the only place in the United States where there is a Marian shrine officially approved by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. In 1859 a vision of Mary appeared three times to a twenty-eight, year-old woman, Adele Brise. The vision was only officially approved in 2010.
 - a. In 1531 a vision of Mary appeared to a peasant, Juan Diego, in Mexico (Our Lady of Guadalupe).
 - b. In 1858 a vision of Mary appeared to a woman, Bernadette, in Lourdes, France.
 - c. In 1917 a vision of Mary appeared to three young children in Fatima, Portugal.
 - d. In 1981 a vision of Mary appeared to three young children in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina.
 - e. In 1633, in Czestochowa, Poland, an icon of Mary, the Black Madonna, is said to have saved the Poles from an invasion by Sweden. Pope Paul II, dedicated his entire pontificate to the Black Madonna in his famous motto: “Totus Tuus.” Totally Yours, Mary. This shrine, the center of Polish Catholicism, receives 4-5 million visitors a year.
 4. Today the Catholic Church in this country has an official evaluation process for verifying visions of Mary. Thus while there are hundreds of Marian visions around the world, almost none of them receive official approval.
 5. The Roman Catholic Church has two papal infallible decrees concerning Mary. In 1854 Pope Pius IX, infallibly declared that Mary was immaculately conceived, that is, she was not born into sin as we are, but rather she was born free from original sin. In 1950 Pope Pius XII infallibly decreed

that Mary did not go through the ravages of death as we do, but rather her body was “assumed” directly into heaven.

II. So what about us?

1. At Christmas we put creches in our homes and in front of our churches, and we sing: “Silent night, Holy night! ... Round yon virgin mother and child, Holy infant so tender and mild.” But apart from Christmas, Lutherans and other Reformation or Protestant churches tend to overlook Mary.
2. It’s as if we hold that God acted by decree, without the incarnation. To be sure, God could have done it that way.
3. But God did it his way, not according to our ideas and our “wisdom.”
4. God came to save by means of the incarnation, therefore a mother. (Gal 4:4: “born of woman” – not “a” woman, not “the” woman, but “woman.”) In Paul’s statement of the basic Christian creed in 1 Cor 15:3-4, he does not mention the birth narratives. Mark and John also have no birth narratives.
5. The early church struggled with Mary’s place and status. At the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD, the leaders gathered there declared Mary as “the God-bearer.” Not “the Mother of God.” She cannot be the Mother of God in any absolute sense because that would mean God himself was her child.
 - a. The church struggled with boundaries on what can be said.
 - b. Jesus was God. God is one, and Jesus is truly human, therefore he has a mother.
 - c. The church also rejected Arius who said, “There was a time when he was not.”
 - d. He was truly human, therefore, he truly was born and he truly died.
 - e. As Athanasius said: He was truly God to SAVE us; he was truly man to save US.
 - f. How can all of this be?
 - g. The early church struggled with all this. At the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, the Council set limits on what could be said. It said that the divine and human in Christ are “unmixed and undivided.” **Stop there!**
6. Therefore we honor and praise what God does, including through Mary.
7. The Gospels are not biographies; they are proclamations of what God has done. He came to save us his way, through the cross and resurrection, from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Therefore we rejoice.

“And the angel said to them, ‘Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’” (Luke 2:10-11).