

## Denver Snuffer Podcast 156: Completing God's Image, Part 3

This is part three of a series where Denver addresses listener-submitted questions relating to the roles of Women in scripture and in the restoration movement. Today, Denver discusses the women as creators.

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DENVER: Let me, as clearly as I can put it: Wickedness never was and never will be happiness. There is—embedded into each of us [inaudible comment], as deeply as our DNA itself—a course in life which, if pursued in the proper way, will result in the bearing of children and a fullness of joy, experienced as a consequence of introducing offspring into the world for whom you are granted the challenge, the privilege, and the opportunity of nurturing and caring and teaching. These are things that stretch you beyond your comfort zone. These are things that will tear at your heart. These are challenges that will befuddle you, that will make you question and reevaluate and reconsider—time and time again—who you are and what you're saying and how you're treating these, your children.

The institution of marriage was designed—by its very nature, by that God who created us—to allow us to engage in that god-like process. It can be experienced in the way that God intended in one, and only one, way—that is, through the marriage of the man and the woman together; through their union that is intended to produce offspring; through her struggle to bear and bring forth the child; through his protection and providing for her during her period of inability and her period of nursing and caring for the infant (that is utterly dependent upon the body of the mother for its existence). All of these things are god-like. They are instructions; they are experiences that are intended to convey—through the mortal body and the mortal experience—things that replicate and reflect a divine perspective about life itself, about who God is. Because God is a male and a female, and they are productive; their love results in the creation of more life. They experience a fullness of joy, and when you have all joy in its fullness, the only way in which it is possible to make more joy is to create others in which they, too, can experience a fullness of joy. And so that increases through offspring, through family, through progeny.

Lectures on Faith described Christ as “the prototype of the saved man.” Lecture 7 focuses attention on Christ as the Savior and Redeemer. But the lecture extends the requirements met by Jesus Christ to also apply for every saved man. In other words, for any man to be saved they must “attain to the resurrection,” like Christ. Shifting attention for a moment from Jesus Christ as our Redeemer and Savior to His Mother, we could acknowledge Her as “the prototype of the saved woman.” In other words, could we consider what She did a Divine pattern to be followed by women?

“Attaining to the resurrection” does not mean merely being resurrected from the grave. We must conquer death:

But even when we rise from the grave, we will still not have “attained to the resurrection of the dead” nor hold the keys of resurrection. No one will until they, like Christ, have gone from exaltation to exaltation, until they can obtain the power to resurrect all that depends

upon them. For us “to attain to the resurrection of the dead” requires us to have the power to resurrect, not only ourselves, but also those who are dependent on us. This is what the prototype of the saved man did. This is Who we worship. This is who and what we must precisely and exactly become.

Remember Christ said, “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do. For whatever things he does, these also does the Son likewise.” The Father went before, and the Son follows after. To be like Him, sit on His throne, and attain to their same status, we must do precisely what the Gods have done.

For us to understand Christ we must understand the challenging path Joseph Smith explained in his final church conference in April 1844. All must progress, “Until you attain to the resurrection of the dead and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.”

Even that which we envision as the highest heaven requires those who sit enthroned in everlasting burnings to condescend to be there. D&C 130:26 reveals that a white stone is given to heirs of the celestial kingdom to reveal to them things pertaining to “a higher order of kingdoms.” We must go from “exaltation to exaltation” because there is a great deal not yet revealed to man about the eternities. There are places where, in everlasting glory, the personages are embodied in “spirit, glory, and power” like The Father.

Did Mary also “attain to the resurrection?” Protestants dismiss the Catholic veneration of Mary. But it may just be that Catholics have preserved something of value about her that ought not be ignored.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven, where she already shares in the glory of her Son’s Resurrection, anticipating the resurrection of all members of His Body.”

Karl Keating of Catholic Answers explains:

We know that after the crucifixion Mary was cared for by the apostle John. (John. 19:26-27.) Early Christian writings say John went to live at Ephesus and that Mary accompanied him. There is some dispute about where she ended her life, perhaps there, perhaps back at Jerusalem. Neither of these cities nor any other claimed her remains, although there are claims about possessing her (temporary) tomb. Why did no city claim the bones of Mary? Apparently because there were no bones to claim, and people knew it.

Remember, in the early Christian centuries, relics of saints were jealously guarded and highly prized. The bones of those martyred in the Colosseum, for instance, were quickly gathered up and preserved; there are many accounts of this in the biographies of those who gave up their lives for the Faith [for example, the bones of St. Peter and St. Paul were widely known to be preserved in Rome, and the sepulcher of David and the tomb of St. John the Baptist are both mentioned in Scripture]. Yet here was Mary, certainly the most privileged of all the saints ... but we have no record of her bodily remains being venerated anywhere.

A 5th Century letter from the Patriarch of Jerusalem responding to the Byzantine Empress Pulcheria's request for relics of the Holy Virgin Mary states there was a centuries old tradition that Mary was taken into heaven when she died and therefore there were no relics. He expressed surprise that the Empress was not acquainted with this well-known tradition. This was apparently common knowledge among the early Christians.

According to the tradition the apostles assembled to bury her, but burial was unnecessary because she had already been assumed into heaven, body and spirit. This teaching was an extension of another Catholic belief regarding Mary called "Immaculate Conception." The teaching was propounded by Pope Pius IX and declared that Mary was free from the weaknesses of the Fall of Adam, and born without the sinful nature of fallen man. Although an estimated 1.2 billion Catholics accept these teachings about Mary today, Protestants and Mormons have not. The angel's words in 1st Nephi seem more akin to Catholic veneration of Mary than the crude, incidental and dismissive way Mormon traditions have discussed the Virgin Mary.

The Heavenly Mother was there in the Garden when man was first introduced. She was with the Father when He said, "Let us make man"—for no man ever fathered a child without a mother to bear his seed. She was with the Father when man fell and was cast out of the Garden and made vulnerable to death. These Heavenly Parents were jointly committed to saving their offspring from death and hell.

If "the condescension of God" included the Mother of God as well as Her Son, then She was also a critical participant for providing the sacrificial lamb required for our redemption. Since the Fall of Adam, everyone who enters mortality must die to exit mortality. But unlike Adam and the rest of his posterity, Christ lived so as to be able to defy death. The wages of sin are death, but Christ did not earn those wages. Therefore, Christ could return from death because He attained to the resurrection. Joseph Smith explained,

The Scriptures inform us that Jesus said, As the Father hath power in Himself, even so hath the Son power--to do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious--in a manner to lay down His body and take it up again. Jesus, what are you going to do? To lay down my life as my Father did, and take it up again. Do we believe it? If you do not believe it, you do not believe the Bible. The Scriptures say it, and I defy all the learning and wisdom and all the combined powers of earth and hell together to refute it. Here, then, is eternal life--to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead..." (TPJS p. 348.)

If Christ attained to the resurrection through His progression from one small capacity to a great one, going from grace to grace and from exaltation to exaltation, did His Mother do

anything less? Was Her coming into this world any less of a condescension? Reflect on the Mother of God and consider this passage of Lecture 7 which describes Christ,

And if we should continue our interrogation, and ask how it is that he is saved, the answer would be, because he is a just and holy being. And if he were anything different from what he is he would not be saved, for his salvation depends on his being precisely what he is and nothing else. For if it were possible for Him to change in the least degree, so sure he would fail of salvation and lose all his dominion, power, authority and glory, which constitutes salvation. For salvation consists in the glory, authority, majesty, power and dominion which Jehovah possesses, and in nothing else, and no being can possess it but himself or one like him.

It requires as much to save a woman as a man. No person, male or female, can dwell where God dwells without possessing the same attributes as all those who have gone before. The pattern is unchangeable. We cannot claim to be like Them without possessing the same holiness these holy beings possess.

We have more quotes of Mary in the New Covenants book of Luke. When She was visited by the angel Gabriel and told of Her ministry to bear the Messiah, She responded: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word." The term "handmaid" includes the possible meanings: wife, female partner or consort. Mary was all of these to God the Father.

The account continues with Mary going to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was at that time six-months pregnant with John the Baptist. When Mary arrived, Elizabeth addressed her with this inspired utterance, "Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spoke out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why is it that this blessing is upon me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Consider what it may mean to be "blessed among women?" Elizabeth addressed Her as "the mother of my Lord"—which should not be interpreted narrowly or construed merely to mean a biological vessel to accomplish a pregnancy. When read in combination with the Book of Mormon description, it can mean so much more.

Mary responded with a psalm, giving us a glimpse into Her heart. What we find there is wondrous.

And Mary said, My soul does magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me Blessed. For he who is mighty has done to me great things; and I will magnify his holy name, for his mercy on them that fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their high seats and exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever.

These words are worthy of the Mother of God. She clearly “magnifies” or increases Her Lord. Christ did the same thing, glorifying the Father.

When Mary said the words, “he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden” the “condescension of God” seems to apply particularly for Her. She laid aside glory to be here, and the Father still held “regard” for His “handmaiden” in this “low estate.” What a great work our Heavenly Parents have undertaken for their children!

Mary declared, “from henceforth all generations shall call me Blessed.” All generations include the living, the unborn and the dead. Eventually every soul who has come to this world will recognize Her as “Blessed”—not only for what She is, but for what She did to magnify the work of our Father in Heaven.

Her description of the Heavenly Father includes these words of admiration and praise:

[H]is mercy on them that fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their high seats and exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he has sent away empty.

Clearly both the Father and Mary despise the “proud” whose overestimation of themselves is informed by “the imagination of their hearts” and not God’s regard. Both the Father and Mary want those who are “mighty” to be dispossessed from “their high seats” of power. The Parents of Christ prefer “them of low degree” whose humility and selflessness make them suitable to be exalted. The hungry are fed and the rich are sent away empty— which may not be fully realized until after this world. But the Parents of Christ will be the final judges of all people and will judge mankind based exactly upon the criteria They have revealed.

Based on several verses in Matthew, Protestants claim that Joseph fathered other children with Mary. Catholic theology venerates Mary and teaches Her perpetual virginity. Catholics believe the brothers mentioned in the scriptures are sons of Joseph from a prior marriage and not other children born to Mary. The Catholic view on this point is strengthened by Christ assigning John to be Mary’s son as one of His dying acts. If Mary had other sons to care for Her, that assignment of John would not have been necessary. The Catholics are much closer to the truth about Mary, but they still have an incomplete theology.

Returning to the words of the Divine Mother in Proverbs 8:

I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment. That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance and I will fill their treasures.

These treasures are not earthly, but “durable” and incapable of depreciation. What the Mother offers cannot be harmed by moth or rust, nor lost to thieves. They are in heaven. But obtaining them requires us to walk as She guides “in the way or righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment.” The great white throne is not occupied by the Father alone. Nor will that great judgment be made without the Mother’s involvement, for She lives in “the paths of judgment” and wisely counsels Her children to obtain durable “riches and honor”.

The Mother explains how She was present from the beginning as part of the God we call the Father, or in Hebrew the Elohim:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the Earth was. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth, while as yet he had not made the Earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens I was there, when he set a compass upon the face of the depth, when he established the clouds above, when he strengthened the fountains of the deep, when he gave to the sea his decree that the waters should not pass his commandment, when he appointed the foundations of the Earth, then I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him, rejoicing in the habitable part of his Earth and my delights were with the sons of men.

Before this creation, the Mother in Heaven was with the Father. She was beside Him when His work began. She was there when the plan was laid, the boundaries established, and the compass applied to establish order for the creation. All the Father knows, the Mother knows. All the Father established and ordered, the Mother established and ordered. They are One. She is the Father's "delight" and the potential of Her sons to be like Her Husband brings Her delight.

To be like their Father, Her sons must become one with Her daughters, for it is not good for man to be alone. The Father and Mother are "one" and Her sons and daughters must likewise become "one." Only when the man and woman were together was the creation "good." When men rebel, disobey, act cruelly or mistreat Her daughters, we are anything but a "delight" to the Heavenly Mother. When we offend Her we also offend Her Husband.

Before any of us will plan, measure, set a compass, and apportion the foundations of another earth, we must grow together and become like Them. Their work is glorious. They possess love - the power that creates and organizes. Love is the power behind all They do. We cannot be like them without a loving relationship that mirrors Theirs.

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The foregoing excerpts were taken from:

- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #9 titled "Marriage and Family" given in St. George, UT on July 26th, 2014; and
- Denver's conference talk titled "Our Divine Parents" given in Gilbert, AZ on March 25th, 2018