

WHO IS THIS WOMAN?

The title for our first talk about Mary was chosen very deliberately. Mary is referred to as “Woman” in a few key passages in the bible. We are going to take look at the following three:

(1) **Genesis 3:15** (2) **John 2:4** (3) **John 19:27**

These scriptural references are very important in helping us to know and understand who Mary is and what a hugely significant role God has given her in his plan of the salvation for world.

1. THE PROTOEVANGELIUM (Genesis 3:15)

This first scripture reference is known as: ‘**The Protoevangelium**’ (The First Gospel). It’s a prophecy about the new Adam and new Eve. It’s the first announcement of the Good News in the Bible. It’s very cryptic and not easy to understand. Let’s read it:

“I will put enmity between you and the WOMAN, and between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head, and you shall strike his heel.”

To begin to throw some light on the meaning of this text, we first of all need to understand its context.

CONTEXT : The words of this text are God's words and they are being addressed to the serpent/devil after he has successfully tempted Adam and Eve to fall from grace. Adam and Eve have sinned by eating the apple (the forbidden fruit) from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which God forbade them to eat from. The consequences for what they’ve done are terrible. It's bad, very BAD NEWS. They will now have to face pain, hardship and loss. They will eventually lose their lives by dying (which was never meant to happen). Their disobedience means sin and death have come into the world. Their immediate fate is removal from Paradise. They are to be driven out of the Garden of Eden (Paradise).

So that’s the context: Adam and Eve have sinned after being tempted by the serpent and now God is responding to the situation by telling the devil what he intends to do

God does not want things to end this way. He does not want his wonderful creation of the world and the human race, who are the crowning of his creation, to end up a complete disaster and failure.

Instead, he wants to save it and that’s what he plans to do. This what the PROTOEVANGELIUM (GOOD NEWS) is about – it’s God’s plan to start again with a new Adam and new Eve. He needs a new man and a new woman. They are the ones who will have the mission to put things right. They will have to face and defeat the serpent/devil - all his cunning, deceptive tricks, temptations. The New Adam and new Eve will be Jesus and Mary. MARY is the ‘**WOMAN**’ (New Eve) spoken of in the Protoevangelium prophecy and JESUS is ‘**HER SEED**’ (New Adam).

A Franciscan monk called Fr Philip Pavich has a very imaginative and amusing way of conveying the meaning of the Protoevangelium, which I'd like to share with you. This is how he puts it:

“After causing Adam and Eve to fall from grace, God says to the serpent: “You’re not going to get away with this so easily. I’m going to set up a RETURN MATCH. You’re going to have to face another Eve. And you are not going to like her one bit!

Also, you are going to have to face another Adam who will be the child of this Woman (her seed) This time he’s going to get you in the head and you won't be wearing a crash helmet either! All you’ll get is a piece of his heel.”

So, that’s Fr Pavich’s rather comical take on this prophecy about how God is going to save the world by sending a second Adam and Eve.

Let’s take a look at the text more closely. It really is quite an amazing text. Hidden in this prophecy are references to the: **Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection.** Hard to believe, but it’s true!

This is why we need the wisdom of the Church to help us uncover hidden truths buried in scripture.

1. The Incarnation is hidden in the phrase: **"her seed"** which refers the virgin birth of Jesus; his conception without the seed of a man – in other words, without a human father. In the Bible, a child is always referred to as the ‘seed’ of his father and never the ‘seed’ of the mother. Therefore, this text can only mean one thing: the Woman’s son will have no earthly father. And this is also confirmed by a later prophecy in the bible that Isaiah makes about the Messiah: Is 7:14 “The virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom she shall call Immanuel.”

2. The Crucifixion is hidden in the phrase: **“and you shall strike his heel”** This is universally accepted among biblical scholars to be a reference to the crucifixion of Christ. The pain and suffering he will have to undergo in the battle of overcoming evil and defeating the devil.

3. The Resurrection is hidden in the phrase **“he shall crush your head.”** This refers to the decisive victory of Christ which becomes fully revealed when he is raised from the dead after defeating Satan, sin and death on the Cross. It’s the killer blow to the head of the serpent. It’s what utterly destroys the devil’s power and ultimately brings about the restoration of grace and eternal life to the human race. (N.B. Apparently, the way to kill a snake is actually by crushing its head)

Summary of the Protoevangelium

The Protoevangelium is very important in helping us to understand who Mary is and what she is about. It gives us a clear idea of just how enormously important and central Mary is to God’s plan of salvation for the world. She is not just some optional extra. She is the 'Woman' who becomes the New Eve and, Jesus, her seed, is the New Adam who will deliver the killer blow to the devil. In these talks, what we are trying to do is to really emphasise and underline that this ‘Woman’, who is Mary, is not someone that should be overlooked and ignored. Catholic devotion to her is not based on mere sentimentality and shallow emotionalism, but rather it is soundly and solidly rooted in the

very depths of Christianity. She's at the very heart of it and belongs to the very core of the gospel message. We will see this more clearly as we look at our next two texts.

2. WEDDING FEAST OF CANA (John 2:1-5)

Mary, a guest at the wedding, is accompanied by Jesus and the Apostles. Big problem: no wine left! (wine is a biblical symbol of fulness and joy).

“On the third day, there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. And they ran out of wine, since the wine provided for the feast had all been used, and the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ Jesus said, ‘WOMAN’, what do you want from me? My hour has not come yet. His mother said to the servants, ‘Do what he tells you’.”

In this instance it is Jesus who addresses his mother as ‘Woman’. Again, this has great symbolic significance - it connects Mary to the ‘Woman’ spoken of in the Protoevangelium that we have just been looking at.

By Jesus calling his mother ‘Woman’ in this situation, a parallel of Mary can be made with the first woman Eve.

This parallel becomes very clear when we compare the positive effects of Mary’s action of prompting Jesus to perform a good deed, that restored the life and joy of the Wedding Feast at Cana, against the negative effects of Eve’s action of prompting Adam to perform an evil deed, that destroyed the life and joy they had in the Garden of Paradise.

On the one hand, Eve had listened to a bad angel (the devil) and then prompted Adam to commit his first evil act. On the other hand, Mary (the new Eve), had listened to a good angel (Gabriel at the Annunciation) and then, at Cana, prompted Jesus (the New Adam) to do his first glorious act – the miracle of changing water into wine (a symbol of Divine Grace- fulness of life and joy). This miracle of the changing of water into an abundant amount of wine that was then poured out at the wedding feast, restoring the life and joy of the feast to an even higher quality (cf Jn 2:10 “But you have kept the best wine until now.”), and which was made freely available for all the guests to enjoy, represents the pouring out upon all the world the new era of Grace. It marks the start of Jesus’ public ministry of going out and preaching the gospel that will finally lead to his death and Resurrection and the ultimate defeat of Satan.

Summary of Wedding Feast of Cana

Mary, the New Eve, prompts Jesus, the New Adam, to perform a miracle, bringing about the start of a new era of grace into the world, and cancelling out (or reversing) Eve’s prompting of Adam to perform a sinful act that brought sin into the world.

3. THE CRUCIFIXION (John 19:25-27)

Again, Jesus addresses his mother as 'Woman', this time as he is dying on the Cross.

"Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'WOMAN, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home."

Here, again, Mary is being addressed as 'Woman', linking her to Protoevangelium prophecy.

She is the New Eve who is standing beside the Tree of the Cross which parallels with the Old Eve who was standing by the Tree of Temptation.

Another important parallel that can also be drawn here at this Crucifixion scene, is the parallel of Mary's motherhood with Eve's motherhood. In Genesis 3:20 we are told it is Adam who names Eve, because she was the "mother of all the living." (Hebrew root of 'Eve' = means 'to live')

From the Cross, addressing his mother as 'Woman', Jesus acknowledges her to be the New Eve, and names her mother of the Beloved disciple, who represents of all the baptised, those who are born again and 'living' in the grace of God's Holy Spirit.

So whereas Eve was our mother by physical generation, Mary (New Eve) becomes our new mother by spiritual regeneration.

St. Epiphanius (4th century Church Father) remarked, "True it is . . . the whole race of man upon earth was born of Eve; but in reality it is from Mary that Life was truly born to the world, so that by giving birth to the Living One (Jesus), Mary might also become the 'mother of all the living,."

St John Paul II sees the naming of Mary as mother of all his disciples, by Jesus from the Cross, as the foundation event of all Marian devotion. He says: "From the Cross Jesus lays the foundation of Marian devotion in the Church, to which he makes known through John his will that Mary should receive a filial love from every disciple whose Mother she is by the decision of Jesus himself. The importance of Marian devotion is deduced from Jesus' words at the hour of his death."

Summary of Crucifixion

Adam named Eve the mother of the living. Likewise, Jesus (New Adam) named Mary (New Eve) mother of the beloved disciple (those 'living' in the Holy Spirit – all the baptised).