

Mary and the Bible – Part 3 of 4

Introduction:

In last week's article we discussed Covenant and the Ark of the Old Covenant. This week we will be focusing on Mary's title, Ark of the New Covenant, and its Old Testament roots.

Mary's Womb, the Ark of the New Covenant

In the Book of Exodus, the Lord instructed Moses to build a suitable place for his glorious presence. It was a gilded wooden tabernacle. The Old Testament tells us that one item was placed inside the Ark while the Jews were in the desert: God told Moses to put the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments inside the Ark (Dt 10:3-5). In Hebrews 9:4 we read that two additional items were placed in the Ark: "A golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded."

- In the Ark was the law of God inscribed in stone; in Mary's womb was the Word of God made flesh.
- In the Ark was the urn of manna, the bread from heaven that kept God's people alive in the wilderness; in Mary's womb is the bread of life come down from heaven that brings eternal life.
- In the Ark was the rod of Aaron, the proof of true priesthood; in Mary's womb is Jesus, the true high priest.
- The Ark of the Old Covenant was created pure inside and out and set aside for divine purpose. Mary was also created pure and holy and set aside for divine purpose. This demonstrates the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant, was conceived without original sin. From the first moment of her existence, she is kept pure for a special purpose in God's plan of redemption. She was free from sin, pure and holy.
- In the third century, St. Gregory the Wonder Worker said that Mary is truly an Ark – "Gold within and gold without and she has received in her womb all the treasures of the sanctuary."

St. Luke has used typology to reveal something about the place of Mary in salvation history. In the Ark of the Old Covenant, God came to His people with a spiritual presence, but in Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant, God comes to dwell His people not only spiritually but physically, in the womb of a specially prepared Jewish girl.



The Annunciation

In St. Luke's gospel description of the annunciation scene between the Angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary, the angel's initial message is that Mary will have a son who "will be great and will be called "Son of the Most High." (Lk 1:32-33)

In response to Mary's objection Gabriel says, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). The verb "to overshadow" used by Gabriel to describe the action of God in Mary is the precise action performed by God in settling over the Ark of the Old Covenant: "Moses could not enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud overshadowed it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Exod 40:35). Gabriel speaks of the child Jesus to be conceived in the womb

of Mary as “holy,” a reference to “the holy of holies.” Mary’s womb houses the same presence of God as dwelt in the Ark but in a radically different way. God presents himself no longer in cloud and fire, but in human flesh.

The Mary/Ark parallels continue. Immediately after accepting her vocation as the Mother of Jesus, Mary “sets off in haste to the hill country” (Lk 1:39). She hurries to visit her relative Elizabeth, pregnant with the child John the Baptist. As soon as Elizabeth hears Mary’s greeting, John the Baptist leaps in her womb rejoicing in the presence of his Lord. Just as the Ark was the portable sanctuary accompanying the Israelites through the desert, so Mary travels with the new presence of God in her womb. When John the Baptist leaps in his mother’s womb it reflects David, who danced before the Ark as it entered Jerusalem for the first time (2 Samuel 6:14-15). In referring to Mary as “the mother of my Lord” Elizabeth’s words reflect Mary’s womb as the Ark of the New Covenant – the name “Lord,” is the divine name God reveals to Moses in Exodus 3:14-15.

When St. Luke tells us in Lk 1:42 that Elizabeth **exclaimed** “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” The Greek verb “to exclaim” that Luke uses is used only once in the New Testament. It is used six times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Each time this verb was used in the Old Testament, it was used to describe the Levites giving praise to God before the Ark of the Covenant.

The Greek verb used by Luke to describe Elizabeth’s words is the same verb used to describe the Levites’ words in relation to the Ark of the Old Covenant. “And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary ... Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Lk 1:41-42).

It is not a coincidence that there are so many parallels between the Ark of the Old Covenant and Mary. St. Luke, the human author and the Holy Spirit, the divine author of this Gospel are teaching us that Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Catechism of the Catholic Church echoes the words from the earliest centuries when it teaches us that: “Mary in whom the Lord Himself has just made His dwelling, is the daughter of Zion in person, the Ark of the Covenant, the place where the glory of the Lord dwells. She is ‘the dwelling of God ... with men’ “ (CCC 2676).

The early Christians taught the same thing that the Catholic Church now teaches about Mary, including her being the Ark of the New Covenant.

Mary, the New Eve

St. Jerome, in the fourth century, understood the connection between Eve and Mary. He wrote, “Death came through Eve, but life has come through Mary” (*Letter to Eustochium* 21).

Like Jesus, the New Adam, we can see that Mary is the New Eve through a similar contrast:

- Eve gave birth to death; the New Eve (Mary) gave birth to Life.
- Eve gave birth to sin; the New Eve gave birth to grace.
- Eve listened to the serpent; the New Eve listened to the angel.

The biblical comparison is clear: Jesus is the New Adam, and Mary is the New Eve. Just as Eve is the mother of all physically alive, Mary the New Eve is the mother of all spiritually alive: Christians.

Mary, The Ark As Revealed In Mary's Visit To Elizabeth

Gold Box: Ark of the Old Covenant	Mary: Ark of the New Covenant
The Ark traveled to the house of Obed-edom in the hill country of Judea (2 Samuel 6:1-11).	Mary traveled to the house of Elizabeth and Zechariah in the hill country of Judea (Lk 1:39).
Dressed as a priest, David danced and leapt in front of the Ark (2 Samuel 6:14),	John the Baptist – of priestly lineage – leapt in his mother's womb at the approach of Mary (Lk 1: 41).
David asks, "How can the Ark of the Lord come to me?" (2 Samuel 6:9).	Elizabeth asks, "Why is this granted me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk 1: 44)
The Ark remained in the house of Obed-edom for three months. (2 Samuel 6:11).	Mary remained in the house of Elizabeth for three months. (Lk 1:56).
The Ark returns to its home and ends up in Jerusalem, where God's presence and glory is revealed in the temple. (2 Samuel: 6:12; 1 Kings 8:9-11).	Mary returns home and eventually goes to Jerusalem, where she presents God incarnate in the Temple (Lk 1:56; 2:21-22).

Mary, The Ark As Revealed By Items Inside The Ark

Inside the Ark of the Old Covenant	Inside Mary, Ark of the New Covenant
The stone tablets of the law – the word of God inscribed on the stone.	The body of Christ – the Word of God in the flesh.
The urn filled with manna from the wilderness – the miraculous bread come down from heaven.	The womb containing Jesus, the Bread of Life come from heaven (John 6:41).
The rod of Aaron that budded to prove and defend the true high priest.	The actual and eternal High Priest.