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## **IS MARY FULL OF GRACE?**

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The linguist Jerome set about to create a Latin version of the Bible in the late fourth century A.D. This is an important period of time in church history, as 1) the church at Rome was exerting its influence over more and more churches, more often and more successfully, and 2) the Roman church was refining its dogmas and doctrines and forming the roots of what we know as the Catholic Church. When it was complete, Jerome's translation would become the authoritative text for this developing denomination, and its language – Latin – would become the authoritative language for the church's publications and worship services (Catholic services were held in Latin until the mid-twentieth century). Though Jerome's work in many ways represents a monumental scholarly achievement, it is not without its mistakes. It is unfortunate that it was so widely adopted by the Catholics for one reason in particular – its translation of a simple phrase found in Luke 1:28.

The phrase is correctly translated in the New King James Version and others, when it simply says, "highly favored one." Jerome's version however implies something different than the majority of English translations – not that Mary was the **recipient** of grace and God's favor for being blessed with such an honor, but instead that she was a **fountain** of grace for others to access. Jerome's translation has come into English in the form of the common Catholic prayer, "Hail, Mary, **full of grace**, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

The later part of the prayer beginning with "Holy Mary" is absolutely fabricated – an invention of Catholicism found nowhere in the Bible either in command, example, or implication. However, its positioning after two Biblical phrases (found in Luke 1:28 and v. 42 respectively) and Jerome's slight alteration of the Greek text (full of grace) seem to give it credence. Is Mary truly exalted, and should she receive any additional honor or praise, even worship?

Like all Bible questions, it is always best to let the Bible explain itself. The validity of the practice of praying to Mary or exalting her was put to the test late in Christ's ministry when a woman moved by Christ's teachings said this: "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" (Luke 11:27). Had Christ intended for his followers to exalt or worship Mary, no doubt this was the opportunity to command it. Christ's response though gives no inclination of this – instead, it says quite the opposite, as is borne out by the NASB translation: "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it" (v. 28).

Mary is not "full of grace" as Jerome's version and the subsequent Catholic prayer teach; instead, as the Bible affirms it is Christ who is "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). If mankind wishes to access the grace that is found in Christ, he must access it through the word of God – not the words which Jerome or any other scholar mistranslated, but the authoritative original words which Christ and His inspired apostles spoke. If man is without the word of God, He is without Christ and without the blessings of grace found in Him: "He who rejects

Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

As one of Jerome’s contemporaries named Augustine said, “Her relationship as mother would not at all have profited Mary if she had not borne Christ more happily in the heart than in the flesh” (as quoted in “Mary, the Virgin” in *Fausset’s Bible Dictionary*). Was Mary granted an enormous blessing by being chosen by God the Father to be the means through which the Word would become flesh? Absolutely. Yet without accessing the grace which Christ provides through God’s word, Mary would have been lost, and all who trust in her will be lost. May Christians place their full confidence in the word of God and the Christ who gave it, and may they do their utmost to keep it so that they might be blessed.