

The idea that Mary is the "Ark of the New Covenant" is a good example of the difference between *Exegesis* and *Eisegesis*. Exegesis is drawing out the meaning from a passage or several passages of Scripture based on the content and context. Eisegesis on the other hand is when the reader imposes his interpretation onto the text and finds passages to force fit into their conclusion. Looking at the arguments for giving Mary another extra-Biblical title of honor reveals that this is clearly the latter method of Bible study.

This idea seems to be traced exclusively to Steve Ray, since every site that I found on it had him as the source of the idea. Though he tries to suggest that this is an ancient designation for Mary (dealt with later), this seems to be a personal theological project of Ray's that stems from a devotion to Mary and an attempt to find biblical reasons to give her heightened reverence.

Here's a breakdown of the evidences and parallels he gives and why they fail to support his conclusion:

Problem: Ray basis a lot of this on the idea that the Ark of the Covenant was "the dwelling place of God."

This is a major part of Ray's reasoning, and is the entire point of his parallel involving Mary, who he says was the "new dwelling place of God." The problem is that God did not dwell *inside* the Ark of the Covenant. This is just not what the Old Testament teaches.

God's presence was "seated" on and above the mercy seat of the Ark, where the priest would make sacrifices. It also filled the Tabernacle, which was the precursor to the temple, and appeared above it like a cloud.

Ray seems to use the Ark and the Tabernacle as interchangeable terms, which is surprising. In a different article of Ray's on this idea he states that the Ark "was a place where God himself would dwell (Ex 25:8)." But Exodus 25:8 is about the Tabernacle, not the Ark (though the Ark would reside in the Tabernacle).

If Ray wanted to make a parallel here, an appropriate one would involve how the mercy seat is referred to with the Greek word *hilasterion* (Rom 9:5) which is the same word for propitiation in reference to Christ. It is also very clear in Scripture that the Old Testament sacrifices which occurred here were a foreshadowing of Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross, where He was the propitiation for our sins (Romans 3:24-25). The mercy seat, the ark, and the tabernacle are more appropriately and realistically seen as foreshadowing of Christ.

Parallel: Luke 1:43 ("*And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?*") is supposedly a mirror of 2 Samuel 6:9 ("*David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, 'How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?'*")

This is an odd example to use . Elizabeth's *how* question is out of humility and awe of having the soon-to-be-born savior in her presence, while David's *how* question is asked explicitly out of fear. God had just struck down Uzzah for putting his hand on the ark, and David was too afraid to bring it into in his city.

Also, just because a similar question is asked doesn't mean it's a parallel. The verse in Luke could just as easily be a parallel to 2 Samuel 24:21, which has nothing to do with the ark at all (*"Why has my lord the king come to his servant?"*).

Parallel: David danced because of the ark, and John the Baptist leapt in his mother's womb when Mary came near.

Earlier, Ray went to lengths to show how the Greek word for overshadowed was the same Greek word used in the Septuagint to describe God's presence over the Ark. Here neither the words for leapt or danced are used in regards to John's activity in Elizabeth's womb.

This is a pretty thin parallel to hang your argument on. Lots of people did lots of things in front of the Ark (like die, mostly).

Parallel: Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months, and the ark stayed in the house of Obed-edom for three months.

...and Moses was hidden for three months (Hebrews 11:23) and Paul preached in the synagogue for three months (Acts 17:8) and Jehoahaz was king of Israel for three months (2 Kings 23:31) and rain was withheld from Israel for three months (Amos 4:7)...

Why aren't these "three months" passages parallel to Mary's stay with Elizabeth? Mary is not considered the New Testament king of Israel or a rain storm or a synagogue sermon series.

Also, Elizabeth was six months pregnant when Mary came and stayed three months. Maybe Mary just stayed until the baby was born?

Parallel: Elizabeth cried out with joy in the presence of Mary.

This is supposed to be closely tied to Old Testament liturgical ceremonies around the ark. He doesn't bother to share what these are, unfortunately. An issue here though is again he mentions that the Greek Septuagint shares the same word, but since the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and translated into Greek this isn't a strong case for anything. The Greek word used just means to cry out in a loud voice. This is not remarkable.

Furthermore, people cried out all the time throughout the Old Testament accounts.

Parallel: The Ark returns home to Jerusalem and Mary returns home and "eventually ends up in Jerusalem."

This is another odd thing to say. Mary never made her home in Jerusalem as far as we know in Scripture. They traveled there at least twice, once after Jesus was born and once when Jesus was about 12. She did not stay here like the Ark, and even the Ark did not find a permanent residence in Jerusalem.

Quote: "Knowing the depth of Scripture, the Jewish nature of the Bible, and the use of biblical typology it seems pretty clear that Luke has twice now revealed something of the person and place of Mary in the history of salvation – and he did it in a very clever manner. 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 with his people not only spiritually, but physically in the womb of a specially chosen and prepared Jewish girl."

Earlier Ray suggested that Mary had to instruct Luke into the intricacies of the Old Testament, and now he has him weaving a complex parallel throughout his Gospel. Luke was a Gentile who knew the Old Testament well. If these were important parallels the New Testament authors wanted us to reach, they would have pointed them out clearly as they did with references to Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament foreshadowing (first and last Adam, etc.).

I agree with parts of this, as Mary had a unique place in salvation history. As the mother of Jesus (not of God, that is theologically inaccurate), Mary was chosen to play a special role in the salvation of mankind and God did come to dwell with his people both spiritually and physically.

Parallel: The contents of the Ark.

I admit that it's kind of interesting to consider that manna, bread from God was in the Ark and the Bread of Life was in the womb of Mary. This is a fun anecdote for a small group Bible study, but not substantial enough to invent the title of "Ark of the New Covenant."

Parallel: The Ark in Revelation

I would disagree with a lot of what he says about the history of Revelation and it not being cared about until the Catholic Church decided it was cannon in the 4th century. I disagree more with the idea that "Christians realized there was more revelation in the Bible about Mary as the

Ark." This is just emphatically re-stating the conclusion he has failed to support with biblical evidence so far.

Revelation 12 is not necessarily *primarily* about Mary. Ray admits that many see this as a picture of the church. The notion that Mary is a queen helps him see it to be more Mary-focused, but I obviously would take issue with the idea that Mary is the queen of heaven. The only Scripture reference I know of to a "Queen of Heaven" is in Jeremiah 44. (God didn't like it).

Also, even if the primary reference in this passage was to Mary and not the church, why would this make her the Ark? This isn't made clear in his argument. Also, Mary being the 'New Eve' is not a biblical idea. He puts Rev 11:19—12:2 as the reasoning for this, which is not about Eve at all (I realize that Catholics have other reasons for this title, but I would still say it is not a biblical designation for Mary).

Additional Evidence: Some early church fathers referred to Mary in terms of the ark of the covenant.

There is a lot to be learned from early church fathers, but their words are not authoritative. If they say something that is foreign to Scripture, such as many of the titles given to Mary in Catholicism, it doesn't make it so.

Also, we know that the church fathers have said some pretty wacky things. For example, the author of 2 Clement taught that the Phoenix was a real bird and used this as evidence for the reality of Christ's resurrection (2 Clement 25:1-5). There are other examples, but that might be the most fun. We shouldn't treat quotes from early Christian leaders as evidence for theological arguments, at least not as primary evidence.

Two examples of church fathers sharing this idea isn't very overwhelming, but perhaps there are others (the link he had is no longer active). However, it does help his argument in that it shows this concept isn't entirely unique to him.

Response to Objections

"the Bible does not state that Jesus is the Ark of the New Covenant. Nor does it deny that Mary is the New Ark." That the Bible doesn't explicitly state that Jesus is more rightly considered the New Testament Ark is a surprising argument, given the 6 pages of speculation he just went through. Also, the idea that it doesn't deny that Mary is the Ark is not a good argument. It does not deny that John is the New Testament Samson or that Herod is the New Testament Cain (I know there aren't parallels there, but we could find some if we looked hard enough). A lack of an explicit denial doesn't allow us to reach strong conclusions about biblical figures.

Again trying to swat down the idea that Jesus is the Ark of the New Testament (which was a pretty good argument), he says "Again, this passage does not state that Jesus is the Ark of the

New Covenant. We have seen above that Mary is compared to the Ark twice in St. Luke's Gospel." That was a pretty strong statement to make based on the fact that Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months and John leapt in his mother's womb.

"Why should part of the Ark "symbolize" Deity when it bore the Deity Himself." Again, the Ark did not 'bear' God. He did not reside *inside* the Ark. This is a really important issue with Ray's entire argument. In fact, I think it negates most of his concept.

"Many have seen the Ark as a type of Christ too, and that is also legitimate, however, there is more evidence to see Mary as the Ark." This is a surprising statement. There is *more* evidence to see Mary as what the Ark and its contents point to than Jesus? I have a hard time seeing that.

Conclusion

This exploration of Mary as the New Covenant struck me as very odd scholarship, and after each weak argument that Ray presents he adds a "but wait, there's more!" style introduction to still another strange, cherry-picked passage. He's obviously very passionate and convinced about this, but his arguments reveal that his conclusion was already reached.

Are there some parallels between the Ark and Mary? Maybe a couple. Some of these things were interesting to think about. Is there enough here to justify adding "Ark of the New Covenant" to Mary's resume? I don't think so.

The main underlying issue here is a devotion to Mary which I would consider inappropriate and unbiblical. He makes a point of saying that veneration of Mary is not worship and that "worship is reserved for the Trinity alone." I've had difficulty seeing that this is, in practice, what Catholicism really teaches. Many of the titles and attributes attributed to Mary associated with Mary suggest otherwise (detailed in a section of the other doc I sent your way). To say, as Ray does, that "Mary is somehow the mother of the church" is shocking, given what the New Testament says about Christ and His church. This and other references to Mary show that she has a very, very high place in his theology.

If you go into the Old Testament with this high view of Mary's place in redemptive history you can find some of these parallels. However, it is plain that none of them are very strong individually. Putting multiple thin arguments together does not equal a strong case. I just don't see the parallel as being really in the text, and to suggest that there are "amazing parallels" and that "Luke wove marvelous things into his gospel" about this is pretty difficult to believe.