

The God Who Gives Favor

Luke 1: 26-38 NLT

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" ³⁴ Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

³⁵ The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.

³⁶ What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For the word of God will never fail." ³⁸ Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her."

We have read today of an amazing announcement was made unto Mary. That the Angel Gabriel visits Mary to inform her that she will give birth to Jesus, the Savior. Mary selflessly accepts God's plan, offering herself as a vessel for God's gift to the world. That should say something about who she was and is at the time.

If we would examine history, we will discover that our God often uses the unexpected, and seemingly inconsequential things in life, to fulfill His plan. Perhaps some of us can remember those times when we prayed for the Lord to intervene and healing did come. Those times when everything seemed out of control, and then all of a sudden it all works out. The times when a child is used to settle a difficult situation to the amazement of the adults. Events similar, in some ways, to this moment history, when a baby is born and all of humanity finds just what it needs and is seeking, **peace**.

This is perhaps the most remarkable historical example we will ever know, or, have witnessed. A woman, named Mary, an unknown and humble person, unfamiliar to most, living in Nazareth, is involved in the greatest story ever told. God chose Mary in His infinite wisdom, to be the vessel of the Savior of the world, Jesus.

I would bet she may have been wondering to herself, **"Why me Lord?"** This remarkable decision reminds all of us that God's ways are far above our ways, in thinking, speaking, and working within this world. It should remind all of us that our God recognizes the value and worth, the very potential opportunity of every person created, to participate in various events which just might change the world.

Let me make it clear, our God is still working His will in this world today!

Today, as we contemplate the humble obedience, and bold faith of Mary, we should all take comfort in realizing that our God works through ordinary people, like you and me, to work His miracles in life. Our lives, however small, or seemingly insignificant to some, can bring hope, love and the light of Christ, to someone who needs to touch the hem of His garment.

As we look at this passage, it is obvious to me, that Mary had to be somewhat frightened. The Bible doesn't say that, but it is more than likely that she was. After all, in the Jewish culture of that time, women were seen as property, and not much more. To make matters worse, Mary was pregnant, and unmarried. Being unmarried created a severe issue for her and Joseph, especially if he does claim to be with her, and he did. The religious authorities would most certainly deal with this in a very harsh way, compared to what takes place today. This prompts a few questions for most people, one of which might be, **"Lord, really, you choose her? Why?"** There had to be so many other women who were more qualified. Isn't that what most of us have felt at one time or another? Either for ourselves, or watching others who are often lifted up?

Even though God turned Mary's life upside down, even though the Lord calls her to do something wonderful, and scary, even though Mary knew that her life was never going to be what she had expected, she still offers herself to God and follows His leading.

This is where we will pick it up today...

First ~ God's Word to Mary

"²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin named Mary."

God reached out to Mary through an Angel Gabriel, to tell her she that she has God's favor, and she was chosen to do something special for Him and the world. ***It was specifically stated that Mary was a virgin***, meaning, she had never been with a man before. However, she was involved in the Jewish marriage process which included – Engagement, Betrothal, then Marriage. According to what we know, she was in the second step of the process of being married. Which means, she was in the Betrothal stage. This is where mutual promises are made in advance of the marriage ceremony. In this stage, the only way to back out of the marriage process was what they called "Divorce." Which was a serious matter to consider.

It is during this time, that the Lord sent her a message through the Angel Gabriel, informing her of what was coming. I would bet, she felt good about knowing that the Lord thinks highly of her. The name **Mary**, is the Greek spelling of the name **Miriam**, such as Moses' sister. It means, **"Exalted One."** A fitting title, for the one soon to be the mother of Jesus. God's word comes to her, the one considered as an **"Exalted One,"** while the world didn't even know she existed. I believe this should speak to most of us?

Are we listening, looking and wanting to find what the Lord has for us? The rest of the world may be unaware, as He can speak directly to us, in a multitude of ways. Maybe we should consider, ***“Has the Lord been speaking to any of us?” “Has He sent His angels to tell us that we are special in His sight?”*** My answer, ***“I believe He has and is.”*** At times we are so busy doing, trying to be or do something or someone, that we do not hear the Lord speaking to us. Or hearing those He has appointed to bring us His message. But I want you to know, I truly believe that He feels we are special to Him and He has found favor in us.

Illustration:

Did you know that the first group of people to use clocks were Christian monks? Monks desired the ability to pray around a rigorous, and exact prayer schedule. Benedict of Nursia, the great architect of monastic orders, required his followers to hold seven prayer services at specific times throughout the day. Praying seven times a day without fail.

The Cistercians, who rose in prominence about 600 years later, required timeliness and orderly prayer similar to that of the Benedictines. Their days were regimented into a sequence of activities, tardiness was considered a sin. You simply do not show up late...

*Innovation being the mother of invention, it was in fact within the monastery that the first mechanical clocks were developed, directed by the swinging of weights. The Bells in the church tower, first sounded on the hour to let monks know it was time to pray, or move on to their next activity. Eventually, in a book titled, ***“Revolution in Time, a History of Timekeeping,”*** That book states, ***“Bells sounded for start of work, meal breaks, end of work, closing of gates, start of market, close of market, assembly, emergencies, council meetings, end of drink service, time for street cleaning, curfew, and so on, through an extraordinary variety of special peals in individual towns and cities.”*** That was how people knew what time it was back then and for years. ***(In Spokane, the bell tower)****

Since that time mankind has often misused his time, abusing it so much, as to either neglecting hearing it, or simply, ignoring doing what they should have done. Sometimes, out of rebellion. Maybe the next time we hear a bell ringing, it is time to stop, go to the Lord in prayer and listen to Him and the message He has for us? Perhaps it wouldn't hurt, if we did have a regimented time with the Lord every day. So that we too, might discover His favor. Maybe even find that we too have something important He wants us to do.

Second ~ The Responsibility He gives to us

²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ “Don't be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” ³⁴ Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

How can this happen? There is a question we all might have stated. I have and I would bet you have as well. Mary was given some specific information, or instruction, for her to accomplish a specific task. As we re-read this passage, what do we see? Gabriel said three things we should hear. **1-She was “highly favored.”**

2-The Lord is with her

3-She was blessed

May I suggest that all three of these things are true for every believe in Christ!

We are “Highly Favored,” just as Mary was. According to Ephesians 1:6 NLT **“6 So, we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.”**

Matthew 28:20 - The Lord is with us, **“²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

Ephesians 1:3 That we are blessed, **“³ All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.”**

Because of these statements, does the Lord have something He is directing us to accomplish with His power and presence? **YES, I would say He does.** As we have accepted His Grace into our lives, He then begins to speak to us, through various events and people, to guide us toward and accomplish His work in this world. We may say to ourselves: **“I don’t know what that is?”** My answers to that is simple, **“Live each day for the Lord, listening to, following and serving Him, and everything we do will be guide by Him for His glory.”** We will be living His plan for our lives daily.

Illustration:

Walter Knight told of an old Scottish woman who went from home to home across the countryside selling thread, buttons, and shoestrings. When she came to an unmarked crossroad, she would toss a stick into the air and go in the direction the stick pointed when it landed.

One day, however, she was seen tossing the stick up several times. “Why do you toss the stick more than once?” someone asked. “Because,” replied the woman, “it keeps pointing to the left, and I want to take the road on the right.” She then dutifully kept throwing the stick into the air until it pointed the way she wanted to go.

•••Many people know the will of God, might even know what they are called to do, but refuse to do it because it is not their will. •••• We are a stubborn people, aren’t we?

The Lord has given us a free will and a responsibility to follow Him which will bring about opportunities to serve Him. Will we do it?

Third ~ The burden or pain His request may cause

³⁵ *The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.*

³⁶ *What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month.* ³⁷ *For the word of God will never fail.* ³⁸ *Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her."*

How was it even possible? She is to have a child, a baby, and she is not even pregnant? Then there are the birth pains. The many things she will go through prior to having her son. And then raising the child with all of the worrying and wondering, fear and the stress of parenting. Following the Lord's call does not always mean life will be easy or simple. We may find ourselves in the middle of situations that we would rather not be found. ***That my friends, is life!*** I would dare say that living in the world right now is not easy for most people. ***"Lord, are you sure that is what you want me to do? I am not comfortable doing that."*** ***"Lord, he or she would be better equipped for that, let them do it."*** ***"Lord, I am too young, to old, to dumb or too smart, to do that, call someone else."***

We have all kinds of excuses, but what did Mary do? Listen to her response and see if it matches what we are saying to the Lord? ***"Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her."*** Can you tell me that the task, or call to ministry, was any less stressful, difficult or overwhelming for her, that what most of us are asked to do? I think not...

But here is one great thought, Hebrews 13:5, "⁵ Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you."

God has told all of us, that He will be right here with us, every step of our journey in life. Whatever the task, whatever the journey, God is with us, so, who can be against us? Mary did it, and thus, Jesus came to save us all. We can do it as well, whatever He asks of us. For He will be with us, whatever is needing to be done, as we serve Him faithfully. So, what will we do today after looking at Mary's life?

Closing Prayer: