

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "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 holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:26-38, 2014

Listen.

"Greetings, favored ones! The Lord is with you and plans to do great things through you.

You may wonder, "How can this be?"

"Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God.

Whether at work, at school, at home or on the playground or in the checkout line at the store, or somewhere in your community the Holy Spirit is with you and will guide you in all you do and say

and the power of the Most High will empower you so that you may be a blessing to the world;

and what comes from you will be holy.

What is it like to hear those words believing that God speaks directly to you?

Will you let it be according to God's word?

These are essentially the words Mary heard from the angel Gabriel God sent to her to give her the great news that she was going to conceive and give birth to a son.

Not just any son, but the Son of God.

We know that given Mary's situation, being single, being engaged to be married to Joseph, there is no way she can explain away having conceived a child.

We know also of, not just the ridicule, but the danger to her very life that could bring.

But, when Gabriel comes to Mary notice what he says.

“Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”

Favored one!

The first thing Gabriel does is bless Mary with God’s favor.

Here is a young girl in a small town called Nazareth, a nobody by any ones standards, who has somehow found favor with God!

How does God do that?

He has done it before you know,

Remember Moses, David the youngest of the brothers and a shepherd, Ruth, Esther, Daniel

regular folks, some slaves; now Mary a young girl;
each having found favor with God, and God was with them.

Not one of them had done anything to win this favor.

But that should not surprise us. We know there is nothing we can do to win the favor of God,

And Mary must have known she had done nothing to win the favor of God for she was perplexed by all this.

And it sounds like she is a little skeptical.

How would you feel about a total stranger coming up to you and saying these things?

You would be wondering, “Ok, what kind of scam is this? What does this character want?”

Gabriel goes on to address what will be Mary's other concern when she finally gets the good news.

“Do not be afraid, Mary, again because you have found favor with God.”

What kind of greeting is this? How can this be?

“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Now Mary, among all the characters of the New Testament is recognized as a model of faith for her acceptance of the role God invites her to play as the mother of Jesus.

Her response and her actions demonstrate the marks of being a Jesus follower.

Trust in the promises of God.

But Mary was blessed before she said yes to God's calling to bear His son.

You have found favor with God, the Holy Spirit will come, the power of the most high will work in you,
The one who comes from you will be holy.

But you all know that to live in the faith, belief and trust in God's favor is not something you can do on your own.

Mary had God's favor and yet still needed affirmation from Elizabeth.

She went to see her, and you remember what she said when she greeted Mary,

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb...blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

You know what the affirmation of family and friends can be like when you have made a tough decision, or accomplished a significant milestone in your life.

You have found favor with God.

You have been blessed by God.

And I pray you have heard those words of blessing from family,

friends, or perhaps here in the gathering of this community of faith.

You have been found in God's favor but will still need affirmation from those who love you.

That is why you are baptized into community, a very specific community;

a community that believes in this God who calls you to a particular life, vocation and mission both personally and as a community;

this God who assigns favor even to the lowly.

When you were baptized, your parents vowed to raise you in the nurture and admonition, love and grace of the Lord.

The congregation affirmed this commitment with its collective blessing and promise of support,

and affirmed you and your family in this endeavor.

This affirmation enabled you and the church to live into God's plan,

just as Elizabeth's affirmation enabled Mary to do the same.

Consider the difficult times Mary will have throughout her life watching Jesus, her son, carrying out his mission, being rejected by friends, neighbors and family; being nailed to a cross and lifted high to the place of his death. Consider Mary burying her son.

She needed the continued affirmation from those who loved her.

There is a song entitled "Mary Did you know?" in which the question is asked;

"Mary did you know your son...?"

Would walk on water, save your sons and daughters?

Did you know this child that you will deliver will soon
deliver you,

That he would give sight to the blind, calm the storm,

Did you know that he had walked where angels trod,

that when you kiss your little baby you kiss the
face of God?

It is a beautiful song that speaks to the life and mission of Jesus, but also the experience of Mary, His mother.

Mary did you know?

No, she couldn't.

She blindly and faithfully accepts God's favor and blessing in her calling to be the bearer of His Son named Jesus.

In Mary's song of praise to God recorded in Luke, she acknowledges her own blessing from God who has looked with favor on her in her lowliness

“...for the Mighty One has done great things for me.” She says.

"Greetings, favored ones! The Lord is with you and plans to do great things through you.

You may wonder, “How can this be?”

"Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God. Whether at work, at school, at home or on the playground or in the checkout line at the store, or somewhere in your community the Holy Spirit is with you and will guide you in all you do and say

and the power of the Most High will empower you so that you may be a blessing to the world.

What will come from you will be holy.

Amen