

Being a servant of the Lord

Luke 1:26-38

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In the previous verses of Luke 1, the story is told of a priest named Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth who were older and unable to have children. The angel Gabriel came to them and told them that Elizabeth would bear a child. As we read the gospel story we see that he would grow up to become John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to speak with a young lady named Mary. She was a virgin who was betrothed to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. At this time, parents often betrothed their daughters to their future husband at the age of 13 or 14. The young man would pay a dowry to the girl's father and an official agreement would be made for the young lady to become his wife. This betrothal period would last about one year, or as long as it took the young man to prepare the home for his future bride. This "home" was usually a room that was added to the home of his parents. Mary's name meant "exalted one." It would turn out to be more fitting than her parents probably imagined.

The angel Gabriel greeted her with the phrase, *"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"*

In the Latin Vulgate in the 4th century, Jerome translated this verse with the phrase "full of grace" in place of "favored one". The only problem is that it is not a correct translation. The only time the Greek phrase for "full of grace" is used in the New Testament is for Jesus, in John 1:14, and in Acts 6:8 when referring to the Holy Spirit's work through the life of Stephen. This phrase was never used to describe Mary, Jesus' mother. In the trustworthy translations that we have today, the phrase is translated "favored one" or something very similar, but never "full of grace." This phrase "full of grace" has been used erroneously for centuries to mean that Mary is one who gives grace. It has given many reasons to pray to Mary as our intermediary and that she can somehow intercede to God on our behalf, but that is not in agreement with scripture. 1 Timothy

2:5 says this, *“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”* If we are to be true to scripture and to the gospel of Jesus Christ, we must go back to God’s Word as the final authority for our understanding of faith and doctrine. From Luke 1:46-47 we can see that Mary was aware of her need for a Savior as she addresses God, *“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant.”*

So what did it mean that Mary was favored by God? To answer that question we must step back and look at the full counsel of scripture. She found favor the same way anyone finds favor in the eyes of God. Just as Abraham did in Genesis 15:6, *“And He believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness.”* Scripture clearly tells us that all mankind have been separated from God because of our sin (Is. 59:2), but that we can be reconciled to God by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). No one is good enough to earn God’s love. Like Mary, the only way one can be favored by God is by trusting in Him. Mary was favored by God initially because of her faith in Him, and secondly God showed her favor by selecting her to be the mother of Jesus.

Scripture tells us that Mary was troubled with Gabriel’s greeting and she tried to understand what type of greeting that this might be. Gabriel then spoke to her again, *“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”*

As we look at this phrase, Gabriel addresses Mary’s fear with the fact that she has found favor with God. That shows us that her fear was connected to either thinking she had not found favor with God and was deserving of judgment, or that since she had found favor with God, He could be trusted in the midst of her fear. Either way, Mary was to know that God was not her adversary, He was with her and she was not alone. She was not alone with her sin and she would not be alone as she trusted in God in response to His call on her life.

Gabriel then told Mary that she would conceive and bear a son and that His name would be called “Jesus,” which means “the Lord Saves.” This was stated even more clearly in Matthew 1:21, when the angel told Joseph that, *“You shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.”*

Mary was told that her son, Jesus, would be great and called the Son of the Most High God. That *“the Lord God would give to him the throne of his father David, and he would reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there would be no end.”* Gabriel’s message was not the first time the idea of a child savior had been presented. In Isaiah 9:6-7, written in the 8th century BC, Isaiah, the prophet, says:

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to

establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.”

“And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’ And the angel answered 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 called holy — the Son of God.’” This was also prophesied by the prophet Isaiah:

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14)

The virgin birth was not just God displaying His supernatural power. The virgin birth was necessary. Jesus was not born with a sin nature. This made Him different than all other human beings since Adam and Eve. He was born as the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and this somehow avoided that the sin nature of man would be passed to Him. This is how He can be holy, even at his birth. Yes, He was fully human, but He did not possess the sin nature that enslaves all mankind. He was the Son of God. He would grow to be the exact representation of the Father (Hebrews 1:3).

The angel Gabriel continued by telling Mary that her relative Elizabeth, who was barren, was now pregnant, even in her old age, *“for nothing is impossible for God.”* Mary would most certainly need to cling to this truth in the days to come. But don't we all.

In humility Mary responded, *“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”* And the angel departed from her.

There were many concerns that surely came up in the mind of young Mary as she heard the words of the Angel Gabriel (how will I tell Joseph, my parents, how do you raise the Son of God?, etc.), but in the midst of the questions one thought prevailed. We know that because the scripture teaches us that the words of our mouth are the overflow of our hearts (Luke 6:45), and the words that came out of her mouth and thus her heart in this moment were these, *“I am the Lord's Servant. May it be to me as you have said.”*

It was the way that Christ lived. In John 5 we read that Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing. His life was not His own. In the words of Paul, *“I have been crucified with Christ”* (Gal. 2:20). My rights have been laid down and I have taken up the yoke of Christ. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, *“You are not your own; you were bought at a price.”* Paul often refers to himself as a slave of Christ. Since we have been bought by the blood of Christ, we are to do the same. Because of Mary's response of faith she was able to become part of one of the most important events of all time. She believed and surrendered. In a different way, each of us has an opportunity to be part of this same great story that God is working in our world. But it all depends on our willingness to surrender all.

So today whose are you? Are you yours or are you His? One answer will usher you into a life of surrender and eternal worth. The other answer will turn you back to a life of selfishness and futility.

We can say "I am the Lord's servant" when we have come to a place in our lives where we want God's will more than our own personal comfort or safety, more than ego-gratification or wanting to look good in the eyes of others, more than our own pleasure or preference, more than whatever it is we think we want. It is a state of wide openness to God in which we are free from undue attachments and have the capacity to relinquish whatever might keep us from putting God first. It is a prayer in which we abandon ourselves to God. As Christ served us, may we now serve Christ and serve others.

This was Jesus' way of life. He "*did not come to be served but to serve.*" In the same way that a ransom could be paid to free a slave, so Jesus served us by paying our ransom at the cross and buying our freedom from the slavery of sin and death (Mark 10:45). May we now serve God as Mary did, by giving God full access to everything that we have and to everything that we are.

- 1) Am I a "favored one of God"?**
- 2) Do I face my fears knowing that I am favored by God?**
- 3) Will I trust God enough to obey His call on my life?**
- 4) Am I the Lord's servant or am I still the master?**