

## Mary: Woman of Faith

- Luke 1:26-38
- It had been 400 years since the last prophet spoke. 400 years since the last word of Scripture had been written. 4 centuries of silence from God. The Persian empire had come and gone, defeated by Alexander the Great, who brought Greek language and culture to the conquered lands. When he died, the empire was divided, eventually ushering in the Roman empire, Pax Romana, safe travel and good roads. But that also brought Herod the Great, Emperor of Rome, who thought of himself as the king of kings, and who was reigning when the true King was born in Bethlehem. Before Jesus was born, God sent Gabriel three times to the earth. 400 years of silence and then 3 visits from Gabriel in a span of 3-4 months. Zechariah, Mary, and Joseph. God was on the move. Paul said it like this in Galatians: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." That "we" includes you and me and all who know Jesus as Savior and Lord. But it also includes Mary, a simple Jewish woman of faith whom God chose to bear his Son. Gabriel called her, "O favored one." Let's look at Mary today under these three points: the favor, the question, and the response.
- **The Favor**
- God sent Gabriel. You see that in verse 26. He told him to go to Galilee. And in Galilee, go to Nazareth. And in Nazareth, find a virgin who is betrothed to a man named Joseph, who is of the house of David. Gabriel didn't need GPS to find Nazareth, but if there had been GPS then, Nazareth probably wouldn't even have shown up. It was a one-horse town in the middle of nowhere, so much so that when Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, told his friend Nathanael that the one who had been prophesied about was on the scene, and it was Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said, "Come and see."
- Gabriel finds his way to Nazareth, and finds the one betrothed to Joseph the carpenter, and says to Mary, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" Now, listen, we know all of this, and we know why Gabriel was there, but Mary did not. And remember, for her and her parents and grandparents, and generations before them, Israel was struggling. And waiting. Hoping for change that would not seem to ever arrive. Being occupied by one enemy after another. Silence from the prophets. Silence from God. Then one day in Nazareth, an angel appears with this announcement: "O favored one, the Lord is with you." This was not the UPS guy dressed in brown, delivering a package. This was the angel of the Lord, a heavenly being, who had just come from the presence of almighty God. It is no wonder that Mary was "greatly troubled at the saying." I think that means, first, that she was terrified. Which led to Gabriel's next words, "Do not be afraid," a phrase he said to every person and group he appeared to in the Gospels. But besides being afraid, Mary was also puzzled. What does this mean, "O favored one?" Who am I?
- You have to love Mary's humility, here. She didn't say, "Of course, I am the favored one. I just KNEW you would pick me." There were other virgins in Galilee, but God had chosen to give her grace. Grace eliminates all boasting. Gabriel went on to

explain that Mary had found favor with God and that she would conceive and give birth to the Messiah. Five things she learns about her son. 1. His name will be Jesus. Joshua in Hebrew, which means Savior, Deliverer. 2. He will be great. We talk about great athletes, great thinkers, great musicians, great leaders. They are like these fake candles up here, on either side of the stage, compared to the radiance of the Son of God. 3. He will be called the Son of the Most High. We are sons and daughters of the Most High, but He is Immanuel, God with us, the firstborn among many brethren. 4. The Lord will give to him the throne of his father David. The son of Mary will be the King of kings. 5. His kingdom will never end. Alexander the Great, Herod the Great, William the Conqueror. Attila the Hun, Joseph Stalin, Adolph Hitler, Fidel Castro...all the world leaders and all who follow them end up in the same place, unless they bow the knee to the One whose kingdom will never end. Again, we know all of this. We have the benefit of the Bible that records this change that God introduced to His creation. But Mary's head must have been spinning to hear this news from heaven. That led to a humble question.

- **The Question (vs. 34)**

- Mary responded, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" First, Mary did not question that God could use her. Listen! This is because God had given her grace to receive from God the calling that only He can give. So have you and I. He has given grace to all who belong to him to do exactly what God has called them to do. It would have been disobedience for Mary to say to God, "You cannot possibly mean me. I am not worthy of your favor, there must be some mistake." I did a search this week for verses in the Bible that talk about God giving favor to his people. There are too many to mention all of them. But here are a few. "For you bless the righteous, O Lord; you cover him with favor as with a shield." -Psalm 5:12 Are you one of 'the righteous'? Yes! "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly." That is news you can use. If you are born again, then you are given favor and honor. But Psalm 84 ends with this: "O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!" Though Mary did not understand how God could do what Gabriel was telling her God was going to do, she did not doubt God. She trusted in him. She believed in his favor toward her. She was not too proud to say that she did not need God's favor; neither was she too proud to say that God could not GIVE her his favor! One more passage on favor: **Ephesians 1:11-14** Do you see yourself in there? We are with the Gentiles in Ephesus, mentioned in verse 13: "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit..." You hear, you believe, you receive the favor of the Lord. The Holy Spirit seals you, guaranteeing your inheritance as a son or daughter of God. The favor God gave to Mary was that the Lord Himself would be born from her. The favor God gives to all who trust him is that through Christ IN us, we are born again. "Christ IN you, the hope of glory."
- Mary asked, "How will this be?" And that is our question as well. How can a woman conceive and give birth to a child when there is no other human being involved? Fleming Rutledge writes, "Humankind cannot bring forth a Jesus, any more than it can bring forth true and lasting peace. Only God can do it. Only God will do it. Mary

was just as helpless as Joseph to make this happen. The human impossibility is overcome by the irresistible power of God.” And that is exactly what Gabriel says in response to Mary’s question, “How will this be? Gabriel says, “the Most High will overshadow you.” It is a mystery, one that we cannot understand, that the image of the invisible God would take on human flesh and enter the world He created in order to do what the Father required to redeem it. How can he do it? Gabriel answers, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” That leads Mary to...

- **The Response (vs 38)**

- “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” Here again we see the humility of Mary. Her heart was that of a servant, even a bondservant. “I am the servant of the Lord.” Her actions were as well: Let it be to me according to your word. She was humble when she did not understand what God was doing. She remained humble when she *did* understand, as much as any of us can understand such a mystery. She simply said Yes to God. She said yes to shame that would come to a young virgin betrothed to a man who would now be “found to be with child.” She said yes to the ostracism. She said yes to the suffering that would come to a mama’s heart years later as she would watch her son suffer and bleed and die. Simeon told her when Joseph and Mary brought their 8-day old son into the temple, “Behold this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:34-35)
- Daniel Darling writes, “Mary could only say yes because one day, some thirty years later, her son would say yes to God. Mary could say yes to the hard call of discipleship because Jesus said yes to the Father.”
- What is God asking you to do? Where is he asking you to go? What is he asking you to start doing that you have been resisting? Or what has he been asking you to stop doing? What is that place in your life right now where you know you need to say, “Let it be to me according to your word”? It may not be a major life change, like it was for Mary. It may simply be a heart change that will result in greater peace for you and for those who live with you. Or it may be a change of routine that results in you putting away a bad habit. It may be God is calling you to simply trust him to the point that you stop living in fear. Let me share a story I read last week from Ravi Zacharias.
- When I was twenty-five years old, I was invited to speak in Vietnam, hosted by my denomination, The Christian and Missionary Alliance. On one occasion during that time, I was being driven from Dalat to Saigon by a missionary named George Irwin. En route, our car started to sputter and chug and just died on us. Ironically, minutes before, George’s wife, Harriet, had said to all of us in the car, “We are about to go through the most dangerous part of the country.” I wondered why on earth she was telling us this now. Couldn’t she have waited ‘til we had passed through it? Nevertheless, there we were, stuck on the highway in the most dangerous part of the country, trying to figure out what was wrong with our jeep. Suddenly, a white car came speeding down the road. We tried to stop it for some help by waving our white handkerchiefs. The man driving the car just swerved it around us and increased his speed even more to avoid stopping. A few minutes went by, and

George tried the ignition again and the car started, much to our relief. As we drove a couple of miles down the road, we saw that the white car had been ambushed. The wounded and dying were on the side of the road, and the Viet Cong were running away in the distance. They had been waiting to ambush the next vehicle to come along, and that happened to be it. If our car had not broken down, it would have been us. God has an appointed time for all of us. His protection and security is ours 'til that moment comes when it's "closing time." I have absolutely no doubt that God stops and orders our steps in his sovereign will and grace. When we are face to face with Him, we will find out how many were the potential catastrophes from which He saved us. Every pain and wound is part of his sovereign plan for us. He is the ultimate guardian over every breakdown. He alone can be our protection.

- Amen. God alone gives us the grace we need to trust him day by day. You can trust him with your life, your family, your resources, your time, your talents. Don't hold onto them, but use them for his glory. Say with Mary, "Lord let it be to me according to your word."
- Prayer