

April 15, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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GOOD NEWS, MARY FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD **Luke 1:26-38**

Imagine being Mary. She has been venerated by the Roman Catholic Church as something far superior to the typical woman. She is like a super human in their teaching. Mariology is a systematic study in the church dogma in which Mary is attributed with not only deity, but singular deity above all the other saints. Four dogmas that reinforce Mary's super-human status are her perpetual virginity, her title "Mother of God," her immaculate conception (she as well as Jesus was conceived miraculously without sin), and her assumption (Mary, like Jesus, miraculously ascended into heaven).

It is a bit difficult for us to identify with someone who was so unique, so super-human, so unlike us. But was she? The story of our text reminds us that Mary was a very ordinary young woman who lived in very ordinary circumstances in a very ordinary little town called Nazareth. She was proceeding through a very ordinary life including being betrothed to the man she no doubt loved and planned to be a wife to for the rest of her life.

That is until God sent Gabriel with the good news that she was God's chosen vessel to bear the Savior from sins, the promised Messiah. Suddenly, because of God's favor, the young woman became "extra-ordinary Mary." Being swept up into God's eternal plan changed everything about Mary's life. That does not mean that she would be a perpetual virgin even after bearing sons and daughters through the normal biological processes. Nor did Mary become the mother of God, nor was she born without sin, nor did she suddenly ascend into heaven without experiencing death.

Mary is a wonderful example for us of what happens when God sweeps a mere human into His eternal plan. She illustrates the right

response when we come face-to-face with God's good news about Jesus Christ. We are generally born as normal human beings, which includes being born infected by the sin principle. We are born being at odds with our Creator. We need the Savior Jesus Christ to wash away our sins with His own blood. We need the good news of salvation. When God chooses to do His amazing, miraculous work of regeneration in our hearts, life becomes crazy miraculous like it did for Mary.

So what was your response when God began to draw you to the Savior Jesus Christ? What was your response when you heard the Good News? What was your response when it became obvious that God had chosen you for His own glory? The acceptable response is not to become proud or arrogant. If we respond to the offer of salvation with the idea that we are so smart to make the right decisions, we do not understand the work of God in our hearts.

The right response is humble submission to God's plan and work. The right response is to realize and admit that we are His bond servants who exist to be used for His glory. That is the lesson Mary teaches us.

God's Good News Is Not Easily Comprehended (vv.26-33).

This part of Luke's story focuses on a virgin named Mary. *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"* (vv.26-28).

God sent Gabriel with the message of the ages. That is the topic of Luke's writing. It's the Good News about God's plan. Luke's account of the Good News should shake the reader out of the doldrums of ordinary life in the rut. When God broke the four hundred years of silence, strange things happened in quick succession.

Gabriel is no doubt a very busy messenger and servant of God. But let's remember that we only see his activity mentioned a few times in Scripture. In fact, angels showing up and becoming obvious in real life is a bit of a rare occurrence in Bible history. But when God

was ready to introduce His plan of salvation, He put Gabriel to work informing mere humans that God was doing something spectacular. Yea, offering the acceptable sacrifice to pay for His people's sins is the most spectacular thing God does in eternity. That is the story Luke wrote to Theophilus.

In this wonderful story about the gospel, we discover again that God chooses to use particular people and particular places when He does His work of salvation. In this case, God chose the little town of Nazareth. Of course, God began to break His 400 years of silence by sending Gabriel to a virtually unknown priest who was carrying out his privileged two weeks of duty in Jerusalem. But even with Zechariah, he was normally tucked away in an unnamed obscure village in the Judean mountains. God broke His silence with a couple of miracles, Zechariah's muteness and Elizabeth's conception.

Then when it came time to announce the really great news about Messiah's coming, God bypassed Judah and the chief city of Jerusalem altogether. Instead of sending Gabriel to Jerusalem to talk to the high priest or to address the Sanhedrin, God sent this important angelic messenger to the little-known village of Nazareth, stuck up in the hills of Galilee. Nazareth is not even mentioned in the Old Testament. Josephus the Jewish historian never mentioned it. In fact, any pre-New Testament mention of Nazareth was unknown until 1962 when it was discovered in a scrap of evidence found in Caesarea Maritima.

In that same vein, God chose an unknown young woman named Mary. Though Mary was unknown to the public in general, she was known to God. In fact, God chose this particular person on purpose so that the mother of the promised Messiah would have a lineage linked to David.

It is helpful to compare the lineage Luke gave with the lineage Matthew gave. Luke's lineage of Jesus is found in 3:23-38. It begins "Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli" (Luke 3:23). But we know that Eli (Heli) was not the father of Joseph. According to Matthew's account, Jacob was Joseph's father. "Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary . . ." (Matthew 1:16).

How do we explain this apparent discrepancy? The word "son" can often be interpreted in a broader reference to "relative." This is

common in both the Old and New Testaments where someone is called the son of someone, but we know that he was actually a grandson or great grandson. This especially has to be true to cover the many gaps in both Luke's and Matthew's genealogies. So that through all the lists the word son does not mean the immediate posterity of the person mentioned previously.

Therefore, Luke's account reveals that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was the relative of Heli. Then Luke traced the abridged genealogy of Jesus back through Mary's line through David all the way back to Adam.

Matthew, on the other hand, traced the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph's line (though Jesus was not the seed of Joseph). He began his account with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, because he wrote his Gospel to prove that Jesus was indeed the King of the Jews. It is important to see that both Luke's genealogy of Jesus and Matthew's genealogy intersect at David. That is important because Jesus Christ is the Messiah who is promised to sit on David's throne in Jerusalem. From that point Mary's line was traced through David's son Nathan, while Joseph's line was traced through David's son Solomon. Again, the important matter is that Jesus, born to Mary in the family of Joseph, is the rightful heir to David's throne.

Luke told us that God sent this amazing message to a virgin. *To a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary (v.27).* It is necessary that the mother of Messiah would be a virgin to fulfill God's earlier promise through Isaiah. Seven hundred years earlier, God promised that a young woman would bear a son and name him Immanuel. He said through 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).*

God promised this sign to King Ahaz, who was quaking in fear because the nations of Israel and Syria had allied themselves against Judah. It was God giving a miraculous sign that God intended to calm and convince Ahaz that He Himself was in charge and would not let the enemy overrun Judah at that time. However, it appears that the sign was just that a young woman would give birth to a son, and before he was mature the two threatening kings would be dead.

The Hebrew word for virgin is *almah* which can also mean young woman. But what kind of a miraculous sign is it for a young woman to have a baby? That happens all the time. Now a virgin giving birth to a child and naming that child Immanuel (God with us) is a once-in-eternity miracle. Mary had to be a virgin to fulfill this promise.

Second, it was necessary that the mother of our Savior would be a virgin so that He would not be born with original sin through the seed of a human father. The sin nature is passed from generation to generation from Adam to you and me through the father's seed. The Savior from sin could not atone for our sins if He Himself was a sinner like us. Therefore, our Savior had to be born uniquely, that is, of a virgin with God the Holy Spirit being the father.

What could the messenger of God say to a mere human who was about to hear this astonishing news? *And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (v.28)*. Those were the most fitting words possible. To be swept into God's plan of salvation from sin is to certainly be favored.

And so God could say to each of us to whom He has sent the Holy Spirit to do the work of regeneration in our hearts, *"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"* That is good news indeed!

But why should the Good News be troubling? The text clearly states that Mary was troubled by Gabriel's announcement. *But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be (v.29)*. Mary was troubled because what Gabriel said was impossible. Sure she was engaged to Joseph, but they had not had physical relations. She was a virgin—just like God planned. Also, just seeing Gabriel and hearing him speak would be enough to trouble any human. And maybe most of all, to learn that you are the Lord's favored one, that He is with you, should by all means cause us mere humans to marvel.

God favored Mary as an instrument for His plan. *And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus" (vv.30-31a)*. God does amazing things when He favors individuals. The word translated favor is the Greek word *charis* which is generally translated "grace" in the New Testament. The same word is used in verse 28 where "grace" is a

perfect passive verb form, meaning God had poured out His grace on Mary and it would have continuing results.

This is exactly the same thing that happens to every person who receives God's good news of salvation and is saved through faith. No one can be saved from the power and penalty of sin apart from receiving God's grace. But God's work of grace in Mary's life was even more amazing than it is in ours. She the virgin would conceive in her womb. She the virgin would bear a son. She would call His name Jesus because, as we read in Matthew's account (1:21), *He shall save His people from their sins*.

As if that was not shocking enough, God's plan included eternal ramifications. Gabriel went on to say, *"He 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 father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (vv.32-33)*. Jesus would be called the Son of the Most High because He is just that. He is the Beloved Son in whom God is well pleased. He is the One and Only Unique Son who God sent to the world as Savior because He loves (John 3:16).

But more than that, He is the promised Messiah who will sit on David's throne. This statement goes back to a promise God made to David about nine hundred years earlier. God promised David: *"And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Samuel 7:10-13)*.

God kept His promise and sent the eternal King. God's people rejected the promised King. But God is not finished yet. Jesus will take the throne of David and will reign over Israel. This will happen after the end of this "time of the Gentiles" in which God is graciously drawing multitudes of Gentiles into the kingdom. Paul explained this complete fulfillment in his letter to the Christians in Rome. *Lest you*

be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob, and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:25-29). When God does His work of Good News, it has eternal ramifications.

The Acceptable Response to Good News (vv.34-38).

When God does miracles according to His plan, it is okay to wonder "How?" That is how Mary responded. *And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (v.34).* Mary's doubt was legitimate. It is better for us to ask common sense questions than to doubt secretly. If you don't understand what God is doing, ask questions. There is no guarantee your question will be answered. But it is okay to ask.

Mary had enough sense to doubt Gabriel's message because she was a virgin. Modernists who deny the authority of Scripture are content to conclude that Mary was a liar. People who trust God understand that there are times when it is difficult to figure out God's work. That should be especially true regarding salvation. In a way, human doubt should be expected in response to God's plan of salvation.

In short, here is the plan. Because Adam sinned against God, everyone born in his line (that is everyone) is also a sinner against God. Because God is perfectly righteous and holy, He cannot tolerate sin and eventually will punish every sinner by casting them into a lake of fire for eternity, a punishment they will share with Satan and the fallen angels. Because of His love, God graciously sent Jesus Christ His Son to shed His blood on the cross as the payment for sinners' sins. Because of our sin, we are spiritually blind and dead and do not even know that we are in danger of eternal punishment. Because God is gracious, He favors us and awakens us to our great need of salvation. Because we are helpless, God gives us the gift of

faith so that we are saved by grace through faith, the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9).

That idea is so hard for humans to comprehend that most people end up denying it and rejecting it. That is why we sinners by birth are in great need of God's favor in order to have faith. We do not even have the ability within ourselves to conjure up faith to trust God and depend on Him alone. Through His favor, God helps us see that we are helpless, spiritual beggars hungering for His righteousness. Through His favor, God helps us trust the very words of His promises.

It is good to hear God's plan. It is good to hear that God will do the impossible for you. In answer to Mary's sincere doubt 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 (v.35).* Gabriel promised that the Holy Spirit of God would abide upon Mary and create this miracle of life within her womb. No wonder the product of that Holy Spirit miracle would be called "Holy"—the Son of God.

Is that not what happens when the Holy Spirit creates us anew in salvation? We become the "Son's (children) of God." Paul wrote, *For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith (Galatians 3:26).* He expanded on that thought in the next chapter of Galatians, *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6).* When God does the miracle of salvation in us, He makes us His child and He makes us holy. As Peter wrote, *But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15-16).* And *You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).*

And for our encouragement, God lets us know that He has also done the impossible for others. Gabriel told Mary, *And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren" (v.36).* God also did a miracle for Mary's relative (possibly aunt or cousin). What a miracle that God is able to create life in those who should not be able to have life within them (Elizabeth too old and Mary a virgin).

What a miracle that God is able to recreate us, who were born sinners and acted like His enemies, into His own children who reflect His holy character. Gabriel was certainly right when he said, “*For nothing will be impossible with God*” (v.37).

In light of these things, how should we respond? It is right to humbly submit to God. *And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her* (v.38). “Servant of the Lord” is a good way to see ourselves. Moses was the servant of God (Exodus 14:31). Samuel was a servant of the Lord (1 Samuel 3:9). The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah is none other than Jesus Christ (Isaiah 42, 49, 50, 53). Paul delighted to call himself God’s bond servant (Titus 1:1). John was God’s servant (Revelation 1:1). Because we are purchased with Christ’s blood, we are His servants, so we might as well agree with Him.

And if we are truly servants, we should respond with Mary, *Let it be to me according to your word*. On one hand, things are going to work out according to the word of the Sovereign God who controls all things for His glory. On the other hand, we can live in great confidence and peace when we submit to that reality in our hearts.

God’s plan of salvation is an amazing, astonishing work. From the sending of the Beloved Son to be born in the virgin Mary, to the sending of the Holy Spirit into my heart when I confessed my sins and trusted Christ’s sacrifice for me, it is all beyond human comprehension. Do you believe it? You do if you have found favor with God. We cannot begin to explain or comprehend the joy of knowing that God has poured out His grace on us for His own glory.