

This morning we're going to take a look at The Annunciation, the announcement by the Archangel Gabriel to Mary that she would have a baby. He greeted her, saying, **"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"**

My question for us is what did Mary do to deserve being called God's **"favored one,"** and is there anything we can learn from her relationship with God?

OPENING PRAYER

LUKE 1:26-38: In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, **"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"** ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, **"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."** ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, **and you shall call his name Jesus.** ³² 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,** ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ 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.** ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ **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

God sent the angel, Gabriel, to Mary with the message, **"...behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² 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, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:28-31).**

When God makes promises, he keeps them. For example, he said through the prophet Isaiah 800 years earlier, **Isaiah 7:14, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son.”**

When God makes promises, he keeps them. He said to King David 1000 years earlier, **2nd Samuel 7:12,16, “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”**

God’s promises are Good News. God said the promised heir of David would be called the **“Son of the Most High,”** code for Messiah, the one who would save Israel from its enemies.

This was God’s promise, his Word to His people. In Isaiah, the Lord said, **Isaiah 55:11, “so shall My Word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”**

Tucked within God’s Word are signs of hope.

The angel said to Mary, **Luke 1:28, “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.”**

So even in the names of the characters of the Bible we find hope. For example, the name “Jeremiah” means “Yahweh lifts up,” and “John” means “Yahweh is merciful.” “**Jesus**” means “Yahweh Saves,” as in, God would save Israel from tyranny, God would save the world from its fall into darkness, and God would save you and me from our rebellious hearts through our new king, Jesus.

Mary said to the angel, **“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”**

He explained, **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.”**

How did Mary respond to this announcement? This is the single most important teaching Mary brought to the church. If we can be like Mary here, we're going to do great things in the name of God.

Mary said, "**Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your Word.**"

With those words of faithful acceptance of God's will, the whole world tilted about 5-degrees, and everything changed. The devil and his minions lost their choke hold on humanity, and we could no longer be enslaved by him.

A new way of thinking was given to the human family. Any love and charity of the human spirit which we see in the world today is the result of Christ's work on the Cross and his resurrection from the grave.

When Mary said, "**Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your Word,**" she opened the door for God to work in her life and in our lives in ways no one could have ever imagined, in ways much bigger and greater than anything anyone could have ever hoped for. For example, until relatively recently all of the hospital, orphanages, and schools for the poor were designed and built by Christians. This was God's work in and through his people.

Mary knew there was something more to life than her own life.

Did you notice there are three characters in this Gospel reading? First, there's the angel Gabriel. In this age of "spirituality" it's interesting how much attention angels get. But the word, "angel," only means, "messenger." Gabriel's duty was to deliver a message to the second character, Mary. She's certainly important, critical to the event that's taking place. But, grammatically, she's the indirect object of the action being taken by the subject.

And here's the thing: Even though he doesn't personally appear in this interaction, the third character, God, is the subject, the main actor. It's all about God. He is the main actor in our lives. He performed the miracle of bringing forth his Son from the womb of the virgin. He's the one who redeemed your life and mine with his promise of grace through the ministry of his son, Jesus.

God's grace is his "undeserved favor," as in, God helps us even though we don't deserve it. Indeed, God grants us his favor because if we were left to our own devices we'd surely run headlong into rack and ruin.

And that's why all he needs from us is an open heart, as he found in Mary, a voice that can say with her, **"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word."**

For me this means when I feel frustrated by a relationship, I can say, **"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word."** And the Lord encourages my heart.

When I want to grow closer to God, growing in faith and love, I can say, **"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word."** And the Lord embraces me as his son.

When I feel overwhelmed by responsibility and don't know what to do, I can say, **"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word."** And the Lord sends his angels to assist me.

When I feel alone in this world and know that my only hope is Jesus, I can say, **"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word."** And the Lord assures me of his presence.

Please say it with me. **"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord."** (Behold, I am the servant of the Lord.) **"Let it be to me according to your Word."** (Let it be to me according to your Word.)

This week may our hearts and minds be open to God's presence among us.

This week may you find consolation in the words, **"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word."**

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.