

Mary: From Favored to Apostle

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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December 23-24, 2023

Year B: Advent 4: Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 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 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.

Mary found favor with God; highly impossible and improbable. She was more than surprised. Then she moves from questioning to being a willing disciple.

In the three years of our lectionary cycle during Advent; we hear the stories about the characters surrounding Jesus' birth. The angel Gabriel is busy showing up unexpectedly to call them out to a new purpose in God's unfolding plan. We hear about Elizabeth becoming pregnant in her old age and Zechariah's disbelief that it would happen. "How can this be?" He asks before becoming mute for nine months. Gabriel tells Mary she will be pregnant, and she too asks, "How can this be?" Elizabeth gets a visit from Mary; who bursts into song. Then Elizabeth gives birth, and Zechariah bursts into song. The parallels, the poetry, the majesty of the text is stunning. Before Christmas Eve, take a read of Luke Chapter 1.

So much has been written about Mary both in text and song. The amount of literature surrounding the mother of Jesus is astonishing. Our Catholic siblings revere her and we hold a profound awe for her as well. For she is the theo-tokos; the God-bearer.

For a few moments we'll step back from the awe, the Magnificat, the Mary painted by artists the likes of Rosetti and Van Eyke. Who was this Mary? What was God working in her?

Mary was a 'she'; a female living in a male society. Might seem odd to say in 2023, but not in her context. Be seen but don't be heard, especially in public. She was a teenager at best, perhaps 12-14 years of age. She came from the wrong side of the tracks. Three strikes against her, yet the angel says, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." The English says Mary pondered these words. No. The Greek indicates, she wrestled. She debated. She reasoned within herself, and all the angel has said is barely a, 'hello!'

With good reason, right? A youngin' from Nazareth, has caught God's attention? No way. There stands Gabriel right in front of her and she is totally uncertain he is even addressing her. Have you ever had someone speak to you, but you don't quite hear their words and you turn to look over your shoulder, because certainly they're not really speaking to you. 'You talking to me?!' It's incredulous really. An angel of God first off. Secondly, that God has taken notice of she, Mary, a nobody from nowhere. She has found God's favor.

Martin Luther loved Mary. "It wasn't Mary's goodness or innocence or beauty or even her willingness to serve God that Luther focused on. Rather, it was the plain and simple fact that God *chose* Mary to bear the Christ child. And that fact, to Luther, is not simply plain and simple but also surprising, perhaps even shocking. God didn't choose a royal princess or holy priestess, but a plain and, at least to the world's eyes, utterly insignificant young girl. God chose her. God elected her. God addressed her and honored her and elevated her."

<http://www.davidlose.net/2017/12/adv-4-xmas-eve-gods-surprising-choices/>

This is Good News for all of us, yes? Just sit with that one for a moment. God chose Mary. Which means God also chooses us. Ordinary humans that we are, insignificant in the whole grand scheme of life...God sees us. God notices each one of us. God favors us. God regards us. Hmm...we could wrestle with that one for a long time. Or we take it on faith. Yes! God favors us.

From this initial greeting, next Mary hears the "this is your assignment" and you don't really have a choice. She will move in short order from peasant girl to prophet to mother and not only mother, but mother-of-God! "How can this be?" She asks. She is a virgin. She hasn't been with Joseph yet. And all this stuff about continuing King David's lineage? This is becoming complicated very fast.

How can this be? From a human standpoint, it all seems impossible. Thank goodness, Gabriel fills in the blanks. It won't happen all on Mary's power. "The

Holy Spirit will overshadow you.” Ahh, God will be in it. Of course, this is God’s doing, not hers. For it will be God’s own Son.

Furthermore, a promise and miracle has already come to pass. “Your relative, Elizabeth has conceived in her old age. Nothing is impossible with God.” Though we get no details from the text, again, we can almost hear Mary turning all this over in her head.

“Holy Spirit...Elizabeth..Elizabeth has never had a baby. She’s pregnant too?! I’ll be pregnant with her? Talk about almost impossible and very improbable!”

Now you and I know that we live in a highly individualized and rational society. One that focuses on individual thoughts, actions and reactions. This wasn’t the mindset of first century Israelites. But! You can’t convince me that Mary didn’t think all this through.

“This could ruin my life. Joseph could have me stoned for being with child before marriage. What is God thinking?”

Then it comes. From peasant to prophet, to mother, to theo-tokos, to disciple and a confession of faith from the lips of a new apostle. “Let it be with me according to your word.” The one who is regarded by God, now regards and honors God in return. Yes. Yes!

The power of yes is an incredible power. Do you remember what it felt like to say ‘yes’ to a job offer? A proposal? An offer of something you’ve dreamed of or wanted for a long, time? Yes! I’ll take it. Yes! I’ll do it! Yes!

If Mary has found favor with God, then she is not simply some pawn in this divine narrative being played out. As with everyone whom God calls in scripture, God respects them in all their humanity - for who they are with all their weaknesses’ and strengths.

Moses – he got angry and stuttered. Jonah – he was a complainer. Peter – hotheaded. Paul – a persecutor. Mary – a teenager. You and me?

We’ve found favor with God. Here we are, your servants, Lord. Let it be with us according to your word. Amen.

