

YOU ARE HIGHLY FAVORED

Luke 1:26-38

Key verse 1:28

“The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’”

Merry Christmas! For some of you who don't know me, my name is Moses Lenthang and I am originally from India. Beginning today we are going to study a series of Christmas messages. Christmas is all about Jesus. It's he who deserves to be worshiped and praised not only at this Christmas time but all the time. Let's clap our hands for Jesus. Please turn to your neighbor and say, “Friend, let's worship and praise Jesus all the time.”

Today's passage is about the birth of Jesus foretold. We may have heard it many times before. But I pray that the Holy Spirit may work in us and we can listen to this message as if we have never heard it before. The main theme of my message is who Jesus is and how this incredible blessing of God was possible in Mary. Based on this theme I want to develop three main points: Mary's mission, Mary's son and Mary's decision.

1. Mary's Mission: You are highly favored (26-29)

Look at verses 26-27. **“In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.”** Who was Mary? Verses 26-27 tell us that Mary was a virgin and she was the fiancé of Joseph who was a descendant of David. Why was this important? There are several Bible prophecies that tell us why. The Bible prophesied that the Messiah would descend from David's line. Isaiah 9:7 is one of them: **“Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”** Also, it is important that Mary was a virgin. Isaiah 7:14 prophesied: **“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel,”** which means, **“God with us.”** I have just shared two prophecies from Isaiah. This week we are going to have Christmas prayer meetings, we will hear more prophecies fulfilled by Jesus.

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Still, why was Mary chosen? Weren't there other Jewish virgin girls living in Galilee and engaged to marry from the line of David? God's choosing of Mary was totally his grace. It was God's favor on her. Look at verse 28. **"The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.'"** What an incredible thing for God to say to Mary out of ALL women in the world, "you have been highly favored." Why are people favored? Is it because they are better than other people? Is it because of some unique gift? We know that God is a fair God, a loving God and a just God. We don't believe that God is going to try to bless one person at the expense of another. But we do know that when favor comes our way, it's nothing that we earn or deserve. It is something that is supernaturally and sovereignly given by God. That is what favored by God means. What an incredible thing it is to be highly favored by God! What an awesome blessing!

How did Mary respond? Look at verse 29. **"When she heard this she was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be."** It's like saying, "What do you want from me?" Why was she so afraid of God's favor? It's because she knew that God's favor comes with a high price. She knew this favor would come with a cost. When God convicts us to do something, we know it is a blessing. At the same time there is fear inside of us because we know that favor comes with a cost. Somehow many people want God's grace and blessings but they are not willing to pay any cost. Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls this "cheap grace." I don't think God calls us for no reason. When he calls us, he wants to do something with us. Do you agree with me? If God's favor is on you, he wants to do something special with you. Amen. Let's see how the angel helped Mary understand what this incredible favor was.

2. Mary's son: His kingdom will never end (30-33)

Look at verses 30-33. **"But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.'"** Let's consider some details of the angel's words here. Mary's son will be called Jesus. In those days, Jesus was a common

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name. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means, “The Lord saves.” The angel is saying that on one hand, Mary would have a normal baby boy. But on the other hand, he would be the Son of the Most High, meaning the Son of God.

In 2 Samuel 7, God promised to give King David a kingship that would never end and a kingdom that would go on forever. This meant one of two things. Either there would be a continual succession of kings coming from David’s family line who would reign over Israel forever. Or one of those coming kings would be eternal and reign over all things. As time passed, the Israelites began to anticipate the former, hoping for a king, who would liberate Israel from their enemies and establish a global reign with peace and prosperity. However, the kingdom Jesus would inaugurate would be nothing like what the Jews expected or wanted. This King, Son of the Most High, would not seek an earthly crown at all nor political power but instead would preach the message of the kingdom of God, teach, heal the sick, forgive sin, and raise the dead. Ultimately he would be crucified on the cross and die.

Why? It is because since the fall of humankind, what God had designed for our good was destroyed. Because of sin, the whole world was infected with violence, war, terrorism, tragedies, and broken relationships. Everyone has sinned, and the ultimate consequence is even worse than physical death: it is eternal separation from a loving God in terrible misery and unhappiness. But the good news is that God loves us too much to leave us that way. So God promised he would someday send a Savior to the world to rescue mankind from sin and death. As God promised, when the time came, he sent the promised Messiah, Jesus. When Jesus came, he taught us that the reign of God is where all good things happen. In order for this to happen, Jesus died and rose again. In his death, the damage that we caused in our lives, in our relationships and in the world died with Him so that, when he came back to life three days later, he made new life possible for us, for the world and for our relationship with God. We are also forgiven for the damage we have done and we are also provided new possibilities for life as God designed it. Because of Jesus the world is being restored for better.

The most wonderful part of Jesus’ kingdom is that we will be with God forever, experiencing complete joy. Revelation 21:3-4 says, **“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.**

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They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Mary's son was indeed far different from what the Jews thought. Jesus is indeed the Son of God who came to be the Savior of the world.

3. Mary's decision (34-38)

How did Mary respond to the angel's message? She asked one technical question. **"How will this be, since I am a virgin?"** (34) It's like saying, "How can this be possible without a man?" Let me pause and ask you something. Is it okay to ask God questions? According to this passage, yes it is okay. In fact, the angel was pleased to answer Mary's question. Mary's question reveals faith that seeks understanding. She was seeking to figure out what God meant. Do you have that faith? Sometimes we have the idea that faith is against asking questions, and if we ask, we are afraid that we may appear to be weak Christians. Many college students ask lots of questions. That's a good thing. One young man during Bible study used to ask me a lot of complicated questions that I had no clue how to respond. But I newly realized that he has faith that seeks understanding. God knows all the answers, so let's bring our questions to him.

How did the angel answer Mary's question? Look at verse 35. **"The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.'"** As supporting proof of God's power, the angel said, **"Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."** (36,37)

In other words, the angel is telling her not to limit God. God cannot be regulated by what you can do. Everything you do in your own strength will only achieve what you can do. But when you decide to allow God to be involved in what you do, he will come alongside, and you will be able to do things beyond your own ability.

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After the angel explained that the power of the Holy Spirit would enable her to conceive, it was Mary's turn to give her final answer. She could have rejected everything and said sorry. She didn't have to pay any cost. However, if she said yes, she had to pay the cost. Joseph might divorce her. She would face public shame of all kinds. She would probably never get married. Scot McKnight in his book, "The Real Mary," says this quote: "Mary in faith consented to God's plan. Mary in faith began to carry a cross before Jesus was born. Mary began to suffer for the Messiah before the Messiah suffered."

Despite all the shame at every level, Mary was convicted of God's calling to be part of His redemptive history. And because of this she answered in verse 38, "**I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled.**" Mary's final response was, "Yes! Sign me up!" You can imagine her excitement of knowing that among all women, God called her to be the mother of Jesus. You wouldn't believe what she did next. Mary burst into a beautiful song called The Magnificat, even without studying music. More than that, the focal point of her joy was not because she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus but because of knowing who Jesus is, the long awaited Messiah was finally coming.

Now I want to end with this challenge today. What does it mean to you, "I am the Lord's servant"? It means to acknowledge that God is my Lord and King. Would you agree with me? It means that what he asks me to do, I do; where he sends me, I go. Whatever price he asks me to pay, I pay. Would you be able to do that? Because I am the Lord's servant, I don't try to put Him in my program but I want to be in His program.

Can you imagine between now and the years to come or in the generations to come, what God can do if you respond like Mary. Imagine what God could do through you. Remember when God called Abraham, Noah, Moses or when Jesus called his disciples, or even when God called Mother Sarah Barry! When they obeyed God's calling, they might have never thought that God would use them in such amazing ways. Of course they had to pay a great cost. But in the process, God changed their lives and the world as we know it. This is also available to you and to me. You too are highly favored by God.

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Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2:8, **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”** The apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 2:9, **“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession.”** If God’s favor is on you, he wants to do something special with you. Do you agree with me? Amen.

In 1990, when I was in New Delhi, I was at the lowest point of my life. I was jobless, and dropped out of the university, and I thought my life was over. I thought I was not favored by God but others were. I planned to give up everything and booked my train ticket to return to my hometown. The day of my departure was Christmas Eve and my Bible teacher called me saying she wanted to give me a Christmas gift before leaving. Since I had never received a Christmas gift before, I thought I would just go for the gift. At the dinner table, the missionary let me read from her Bible Matthew 6:33, which says, **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”** Then she said that was her Christmas gift. The moment I read it, the word of God convicted me and challenged me that the time of difficult situation was the best time to make a decision of faith to trust in God. I knew that decision would cost me something. But I accepted God’s calling. Looking back, I can say that God was always with me although I thought I was not favored. If it was not for God’s favor, I may not be a pastor giving this message today. I am favored by God not because of anything good in me but because of God’s grace and mission.

In conclusion, I want to tell you that as God called Mary, God still calls each one of us to be part of God’s big story. To be favored by God is a great blessing but it will cost us something. Yet, the cost you are going to pay is nothing compared with what God is going to accomplish in your life. When we accept God’s favor and let God plan our life, God will help us to experience many surprises and will accomplish things we could never do on our own. I want to finish by asking you to turn to your neighbor and say, “Friend, you are highly favored by God.” And say to yourself, “I too am highly favored by God.” May God richly bless you and Merry Christmas to you all.