

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Divine Announcement to Mary, Part 1

Scripture: Luke 1:26-31

Code: 42-8

It's a great joy, this morning, to return to the gospel of Luke. I have to stay with this or we will all go to heaven in chapter 3. There is so much...I also want to tell you folks as we go through chapter 1 and 2 of Luke, you really can't hurry. When we get a little past this inaugural section of the arrival of Christ and get into His life and His teachings, we will deal with a little more familiar teaching and will move a little more rapidly. But this great event recorded in chapter 1 and 2, it demands such careful, thoughtful scrutiny, I want you to know I can't be in a hurry and do justice to the greatness of divine truth.

This morning we're going to find ourselves in Luke chapter 1 beginning at verse 26. Before we actually read the text, a little bit of background.

Throughout the nations of the world there are holidays. We're in the process of recognizing one over the weekend that our nation has designated as Martin Luther King Day, in which we remember the birthday of the freedom fighter, as we might call him. Nations have days like that. There is Independence Day. There's Presidents Day. And other nations have specific days and generally they are used to commemorate certain people or events that are historic. The populous of the nation recognizes the historical significance of such commemorations.

Surely the most widely shared commemoration across the world, involving more people and more nations than any other holiday celebration is Christmas. It transcends national history and it goes everywhere where Christianity has ever been. Though it is the most widely celebrated around the world, in many ways it is the least understood. All the holidays and all the celebrations and all the commemorations of people and events across the globe take note of human events...human beings. Christmas commemorates a divine person and a divine event.

We're not remember what a man has done or what men have done, but what God has done. This is not a celebration of human history. This is not a recognition of human achievement. It is a recognition of a marvelous, miraculous, divine accomplishment. Christmas celebrates the most monumental event and the most monumental person in the history of the world. Christmas is all about the eternal, sovereign creator God of the universe coming to earth, coming into the earth of His creation as a human being to live among His creation as one of them.

The child of Christmas was God in human form, born as a baby, living as a man. The story begins in verse 26.

"Now in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, 'Hail, favored one, the Lord is with you.' She was greatly troubled at the statement and kept pondering what kind of salutation this might be. 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 name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His Kingdom will have no end. And Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age, and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God.' And Mary said, 'Behold, the bondservant of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her."

There with those simple straightforward, unmistakably clear words is the beginning of the glorious, beautiful, true account of God becoming flesh, the incarnation. The simple, lovely narrative clearly designed to feature the divine character of the event. There's nothing man-made about this. There's nothing human about this. There is no more wonderful, no more marvelous, no more compelling, no more miraculous story in all of history than this one as God begins to tell the drama of salvation in the birth of the God/Man.

And though this is how the story begins in the New Testament account, it's not the first mention of the coming Savior, the child that would be born. Not at all, in fact you can go all the way back to the third chapter of Genesis, Genesis chapter 3, you know, is where the Fall of man is recorded, living in the garden in the paradise of God, Adam and Eve enjoying the full blessing of God in holy innocence, fell into sin and immediately upon that sin they were cursed as was the whole human race.

Genesis chapter 3 verse 15 comes a promise that there will come a seed of the woman. A woman has no seed, man has a seed. But there will be a woman who will have a seed. She will bear a child who will bruise the serpent's head. There's the first prophecy that the Messiah would come, that the seed of the woman would destroy the one who had destroyed the human race, bruise his head, a human offspring of Eve would be born of a seed in a woman and some day deliver the fatal blow to Satan.

Later on in the book of Genesis another prophecy of the coming child. Genesis 49:10 says, "Shiloh will come." Shiloh means in Hebrew, "the one to whom it belongs...the rightful one...the rightful

ruler...the true King...the true monarch...the true lion of Judah," as he's called in Revelation 5:5, the true King of Judah will come to establish His great and glorious Kingdom and reign. Still in the Pentateuch, the books of Moses, Deuteronomy chapter 18, the prophecy says there will be a prophet like no other prophet, the great prophet, the final prophet will come, the ultimate prophet. That, too, looked forward to the birth of Christ.

The psalmist writing in Psalm 2 says, "God will have a Son, this day I have begotten Thee," Psalm 2 says, "and He will give His Son the nations as His inheritance." The Son will come to rule the world.

Isaiah the prophet said in chapter 9 that a child would be born, a Son would be given and the government of the world would be upon His shoulders and His name would be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Father of eternity, the Prince of peace, the increase of His government as King and there would be no end upon His scepter would come all authority and He would rule forever.

Daniel chapter 2 verse 45, all through chapter 9, particularly verse 26, looked at the coming Messiah, the coming King, the coming Anointed One, the coming Monarch who would establish His glorious Kingdom.

Isaiah the prophet also in chapter 53 of that great prophecy saw the coming child as one who would be a suffering servant. He said, "On Him would be laid the iniquity of us all." He would bear the sins of all of us. He would be bruised for our iniquities, chastised for our peace with God.

The Old Testament is filled with prophecy and promises. So much so that at the end of the gospel of Luke in chapter 24 when Jesus after His resurrection was walking with His disciples, it says that He spoke to them and said, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you that all things which are written about Me in the law of Moses and the prophets and all the holy writings must be fulfilled. And He opened their minds to understand the scriptures," talking about the Old Testament. And He showed them Himself in the Old Testament, in the law, in the prophets, in all the holy writings. Every book of the Old Testament anticipates the coming of the Savior, every book. All throughout the Psalms, all throughout the prophets, all throughout the law He is seen as the ultimate and final sacrifice. The general prophecies of His great Kingdom, the specific prophecies such as Micah's statement that He would be born in the town of Bethlehem, 350 predictions concerning this child who would be born are given in the Old Testament, at least.

So this is the story of God coming into the world but it's not the first time we've heard about it. It's been promised. This is the story of its fulfillment. God coming into the world as a man breaks with supernatural surprise on the unmiraculous tedium of human history. It was planned before creation. It was predicted from the beginning of human history. And here it is. The hope originally awakened in that first promise in Genesis 3:15 and kept alive for millennia in the hearts of God's faithful people

is about to be realized. And Luke's account emphasizes the divine character of this great event.

As I've read this over and over, what strikes me of the simplicity of it, the utterance absence of embellishment. And I can't embellish it. I really can't add to it. I can't think of some clever innovative way to improve the story, I wouldn't tamper with it. I can give you a few things to help you understand some of the things that occur in the story, but it possesses all on its own so much wonder and so much amazement as to thrill any open mind. I'm struck again by the lack of fanfare. I'm struck again by the clear simplicity of this as God wanted the story to be unmistakably clear.

As we look at it we'll look at it from God's side. The first thing I want you to see, the divine messenger, verse 26, the divine messenger. Everything about it is divine. We start with a divine messenger, verse 26, "Now in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth." This is the second time in this chapter a holy angel appears. It's the second time that holy angel, of course, has been Gabriel. A monumental reality, I've been telling you, nobody had seen an angel in over 400 years and even then it was only one person apparently who saw him. Nobody had heard a word from God in over 400 years, and there hadn't been a miracle in over 400 years and there hadn't been a sequence of miracles in over 500 years. That was the unmiraculous tedium that was broken by this supernatural event. God hasn't sent an angel. God hasn't done a miracle and God hasn't said a word for centuries.

Then an angel appeared to a man named Zacharias, and he was just a humble priest from the hill country of Judea doing his duty down in the temple a couple of weeks a year. An angel appeared to him and launched the great saga of redemption in the Messiah, announcing to him that he would go home and have a son with his wife. And both of them were either in their seventies or eighties, they were old, she was barren. A miracle would happen. They would be given a son, that son would be born to be the forerunner of the Messiah, the announcer, the herald of the Messiah. And God broke in to that unmiraculous tedium with the first great miracle, a miracle birth in a couple that couldn't have a child. Not just any child would be born, a child chosen by God to be the forerunner of the Messiah.

This first tells us, "Now in the sixth month," what is that? The sixth month of the year? No, it's the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Go back to verse 24. The promise of God to Zacharias came true. After his duty in the temple was complete he went home. It says in verse 23, "After the days of his priestly service were over, he went home and Elizabeth his wife became pregnant. She kept herself in seclusion for five months." Verse 26, "In the sixth month," that's the sixth month of her pregnancy, the angel Gabriel came back.

Back in verse 19 Gabriel is identified as the angel who spoke to Zacharias. He's a special angel. Only two are named in the Bible, only two holy angels, Michael who is associated with power and strength, sort of super-angel, and Gabriel. And Gabriel is messenger, the supreme messenger. He brought great, glorious, massive, critical announcements from God. It was Gabriel who brought the

announcement to Daniel in Daniel chapter 9 of the rest of redemptive history as he unfolded the incredible vision of Daniel's seventy weeks. And it is Gabriel...this message is so critically important that it is Gabriel who comes to bring it again.

It says in verse 26, "This angel named Gabriel was sent from God." Always Luke focuses on the divine aspect. The source of the message was God. This is really the key to the whole story. Luke is recording the truth about divine intervention. Let me tell you something, folks, this...this is the first real invasion of life from another world. This is the only real extra-terrestrial whoever came down to walk among us. There aren't any little green men flying around meeting people on hills in New Mexico.

Here's the beginning of the greatest moment in human history, a moment all generations in Israel and the world have awaited. Gabriel comes with the most astounding and significant birth announcement ever made. Amazingly Gabriel comes right from God. Back in verse 19 it says, "I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God." That's where Gabriel stands, to be dispatched by God Himself to this duty. He comes down out of heaven to a city in Galilee called Nazareth.

City is a stretch, folks. That's a stretch. Actually the Greeks didn't have a word for town and that's why Nazareth got called a city, polis, from which we get things like political, metropolitan. It has to do with a city, but Nazareth was by no stretch of the imagination a city. A couple of thousand people at the most. It was a town. It's located for us in Galilee, you know why? Because if it wasn't located, non-Palestinians wouldn't have any idea about it. They would ask, "Well, where's that?" And so, we're given its identification for all the world to know, it was in Galilee. The area of Galilee north of Jerusalem was known to folks, of course, because it was a region. The city of Nazareth might not have been known to anybody outside Palestine if it hadn't been described as to its location.

Nazareth, by the way, was very insignificant. It wasn't the seat of anything. It wasn't an important place at all. There were east and west roads that ran from Europe across the Middle East into Asia. There were north and south roads that ran from Africa through that narrow band of land called Palestine to the land to the north, but all those roads missed Nazareth. It was about 60 to 75...60 to 70 miles north of Jerusalem depending on what point in Jerusalem you begin at, which was quite a ways if you're walking. It was fifteen miles, still is, fifteen miles west of the north tip of the Sea of Galilee and about twenty-two miles from the Mediterranean. So somewhere in the middle between the tip of the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean sits this town, located at the very tip of the Jezreel Valley on the southern slope of the foothills of the Lebanon Mountains to the north. And it's right at the north of the plain of Esdraelon, also called Megiddo where the battle of Armageddon will be fought.

Three mountains are famous in the area, Mount Tabor, Mount Hermon and Mount Carmel where Elijah met the priests of Baal. It's a little geography, but I think the important thing to know is that

Galilee was not the seat of Jewish culture. Galilee was not the seat of Jewish religion. Galilee wasn't the seat of nothing, is what it was. And Galilee tended to be more Gentile in its orientation. When you get in to Judah in the south and you get in Jerusalem and that area, to the north, of course, was more of the land of Israel. To the south was a vast barren almost uninhabital desert except by nomads. To the east was another desert and to the west, of course, was the sea. And so the southern part of Israel was somewhat isolated. But in the north there was Gentile population surrounding that area, that's why it's called Galilee of the Gentiles and it's wonderful to think of the fact that when God sent the Jewish Messiah, the promised Jewish King, when salvation came first to Israel it came in a place that was intersected by Gentiles almost as if to say, "This one will be the Savior of the world." Obscure little town.

It's amazing to go there. I've been there many times. And it's remarkable for its plainness. When I have a vision of Nazareth in my mind, I see rough little bumpy streets, this is modern Nazareth, I've been there, with people working on cars stuck half way out in the street from little garages. It's just a plain place. The only thing that makes it notable is in the middle of it is a church devoted to Mary because it is to her that the angel came. Apart from that it's just a plain, non-descript town, a little larger now than it was then.

Further we see the divine messenger in verse 26. In verse 27 we see the divine choice...the divine choice. Looking at this from God's perspective, the divine choice.

The angel comes down from the presence of God, comes down to the region of Galilee to the little town of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph of the descendants of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. The angel comes down and goes to one house...one house. God has chosen one person.

This is a most astonishing thing. Out of all the purposes and plans of God that could have been, this is the one He chose. He came down, verse 27, to a virgin. Over in verse 34, I read earlier, when she was told she was going to have a baby she said, "How can this be since I'm a virgin?" She herself confirmed this. In contrast to Gabriel's first trip earlier in the chapter, when he went to bring God's message of a miracle birth to an old man, this time he comes to bring God's message of a miracle birth to a young girl.

Virgin is the word parthenos, it means "one who has had no sexual relation." That's exactly what it means. One who has had no sexual relation. This word is never used of a married woman. According to Roman law, listen to this, the minimum age for girls to be engaged and married was twelve. That's right, twelve. For boys, whom we all know develop slower, it was fourteen. Augustus, the emperor, had set the minimum age at ten, that would be the age for engagement. And Jewish practice basically followed that. Girls were usually engaged around twelve or thirteen and married after the engagement or the betrothal was over. And the reason they did that was because they

therefore would guarantee their virginity. As soon as they had reached puberty they would be engaged and then soon married. In that way they didn't have to live five, ten, who knows how many years, trying to restrain their normal adult passions.

So, here was a girl, I mean a girl, twelve or thirteen, engaged to a man. Literally the word engaged is betrothed, it's more than engagement. It's not the same as our engagement. Betrothal was a binding, legal relationship and it was arranged by parents which is the way all marriages should be done. And not only should they be done by parents but by grandparents as well. And if I live long enough, by great-grandparents. Betrothal was binding. It was a legal document, parents agreed that their children would marry and it occurred soon after puberty. Probably was planned for in the community. When they were younger they were saying, "You know, I would like him for her, or her for him," and the parents kind of worked that through until the time was right to make the official betrothal. There was no sexual relationship during the period of betrothal which usually lasted a year. The couple did not live together, but only death or divorce could sever the contract. And if the man died, the betrothed girl would be considered a widow.

Betrothal, as I said, lasted about a year. And during that year the girl would prove her faithfulness by not giving herself to anyone else. She would prove her faithfulness. She would prove her purity. And during that same year the boy would prepare a home a for her, a place for her, usually with an addition to his father's house.

At the end of that year when they were 13 or 14, there would be a wedding feast that usually lasted seven days when everybody came together and celebrated for seven days...the kind of thing that Jesus was at in John 2. It's recorded that He was at a wedding, remember, and they ran out of wine because it lasted so long. At the end of the seven days the friend of the bridegroom handed him his bride and everybody left and the marriage was consummated.

Well Mary was betrothed. Her husband had paid a dowry, a price to her father, and the actual wedding was still in the future. Now the young man to whom she was betrothed is named Joseph. Now when you get named Joseph, you've got a little pressure. Joseph means "may he have many sons." She was engaged to Joseph. Very importantly he was of the descendants of David. He had David DNA. He was in the royal line. His blood line had come right through David. He really was in the kingly line, the royal line, the great king of Israel from whose loins the Messiah, Savior, King would come, David. We'll see more about David when we get down into the portions that talk about the throne of David.

But here was a young boy, 13- or 14-year-old boy who really had royal blood. there was no Jewish king at the time. There was an Edomite king by the name of Herod who was reigning at this particular time, was near the end of his reign, about 4 B.C. when these events happened. Joseph's genealogy is given in Matthew 1 to prove that he came from David, Matthew opens his gospel with these words,

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David." Well, if Jesus was a Son of David bearing the line of David so His father had to be as well. And even though Joseph was not His father by blood, he wasn't His natural father, he was of the line of David and passed that on to Jesus because Jesus was his Son, if not by birth, by adoption...which was legally binding.

So Jesus was born of a father who was royalty. Though he was not His father physically, he was His father legally. A humble Galilean carpenter, interestingly enough, in an obscure town called Nazareth with royal blood.

The virgin's name was Mary. And she was named well, I don't think her parents had any idea how well, Mary means "exalted one." Nothing describes her as note worthy, look at that. The virgin's name was Mary period. Isn't that interesting? Does that interest you? I'm always struck by what the Bible doesn't say. It doesn't say anything about her at all...absolutely nothing. It doesn't say she was a devout believer. I mean, even Zacharias and Elizabeth got a verse of commendation. Go back to verse 6, "They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blameless in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord." They got a commendation. Mary, she got nothing. We'll just put a period after her name, Mary. That's all.

Now, it's likely that she also was from David's line. That if she traced her ancestry it would get back to David. Why do I say that? Because there's a genealogy in Luke 3, we'll get to it later, not now, there's a genealogy in Luke 3. If you match the genealogy in Luke 3 with the genealogy in Matthew 1, they're different. We know the genealogy in Matthew 1 is Joseph, therefore the genealogy in Luke 3 must be Mary. Even though she's not named in that genealogy because only the men are named, that would be the line that led to Mary so that Jesus would have royal right passed down to Him by His legal father, Joseph, He would have royal blood passed down to Him through His mother Mary. In every sense then He was royalty.

Joseph was David's descendant, and Mary was David's descendant. Both of them gave to Jesus' royal heritage. Mary gave it to Him through blood by birth. Joseph gave it through the right to rule by adoption.

So, the divine messenger comes to this girl of divine choice. Third point, the divine blessing. This is the incredible part...the divine blessing.

Here comes the message from God. Verse 28, "And coming in," now that, I don't want to beg the obvious, but obviously she was in the house doing what a twelve- or thirteen-year-old girl would do, domestic duties, probably dominated by preparing food. She may have been in the house preparing food at the time. Apparently no one was there with her. And the angel Gabriel entered the house, I like this, he said to her, "Hello," that's what "hail" means, it's benign really, chair, hello. I mean, if an angel Gabriel out of the presence of God showed up in your house and just said, "Hello," it would

seem like somewhat of an understatement, wouldn't it? Where is the fanfare again? I love the simplicity of this. "Hello." And I think maybe the simplicity of that introduction was designed to prevent panic. "Hello, favored one, the Lord is with you."

Now I'm sure Mary knew this wasn't a human being. He's not like any human being she ever saw. This young girl who wouldn't have had adult experiences to galvanize her, who...in the tenderness of her youth could be frightened by perhaps lots of things, hears from this supernatural being whom she can see and who speaks in a human voice, an audible voice, "Hello charitoo, favored one, blessed one, the Lord is with you."

The Roman Catholic statement, "Hail, Mary, favored one," they translate, "Hail, Mary, full of grace." That comes from the Latin Vulgate translation of this verse. And you hear it sung in that familiar Ave Maria, gratia plena, it means "full of grace."

Let me tell you something, friends, the misunderstanding of the meaning of this verse by the Roman Catholic Church has spawned an incredibly blasphemous system. The whole system of Maryolatry comes back to this, the whole thing. "Hail, Mary, full of grace?" Here is the seriously erroneous notion that Mary full of grace has grace to dispense to others. That's what Roman Catholic theology teaches. It teaches that Mary is full of grace which she bestows on others. She is the source of grace. She possesses grace to give, that's the error of Romanism. And it's the dominating theme of Catholic theology. Mary is the bestower of grace.

That's not what the angel said. Mary was not the source of grace, Mary was the recipient of grace. "Hail, favored one, you've been favored by God...you've been given grace by God." You see, there wasn't anything worthy about her. There's no commendation here. It doesn't say, "And the virgin's name was Mary, and Mary was righteous and godly and loved God with all her heart, soul, mind and strength, and served the Lord with all her heart," and on and on. It doesn't say that. It just says, "Mary, period, you've been chosen." Nothing about her. We don't ever know anything about her. We don't know anything about her life.

But I'll tell you one thing, she is not the bestower of grace. You cannot go to Mary and receive any grace. Let me shake you a little bit. Mary can't hear the prayers of anybody. Only God hears prayers. Mary cannot hear the prayers of anyone. Neither can any other glorified saint. And Mary has no grace to give. She is not the giver of grace, she is the receiver of grace.

What the angel said was that Mary was going to receive God's grace which He would freely give her. She was highly graced. She was to be receiving the grace that God alone could give. This grace would come because he said, "The Lord's with you...the Lord's with you." Now that's similar to what was said to Gideon, "The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior." The Lord is with you, Mary, you're going to receive grace, divine grace.

It had to be that way. It had to be grace. You know why? Because Mary was unworthy. Mary was not sinless. Mary was not immaculately conceived. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that not only was Jesus virgin born without a human father, but so was Mary. They invent that to somehow make her quasi-supernatural. The Lord is simply going to give you grace. And people who receive grace can be classified under one term, they're all sinners. If they weren't sinners they wouldn't need grace.

Some manuscripts add, and the New King James has it, "Blessed are you among women." The older manuscripts omit that. Whether it's in or out, it's true, she was blessed. She wasn't the blesser. You don't say, "O Mary, forgive my sin, O Mary, bless me, Mary, do this for me, Mary, plead for me before Jesus." Mary can't do that. Mary doesn't hear anybody's prayer, never has. Ever since Mary's been in the presence of God, she has known only the glories of His presence. She doesn't know anything about you or anybody else, neither does any saint. The only one who hears prayers is God. Mary never grace to anybody. She had no grace to give. You can't give grace to anybody, can you? And Mary's like you. I can't give you grace, only God gives grace.

And that's what shook her to the core, verse 29, "She was greatly troubled at this statement." It was what he said that just shook her. She kept pondering what kind of salutation this might be, what in the world...it's just a little girl in a little obscure town, maybe preparing a little meal, all alone in a house. And here comes a messenger from God saying God has graced her and she is shaken by this. Back in verse 12, Zacharias when the angel came to him was also troubled and fear gripped him. But here it's not so much the appearance of Gabriel that strikes her, although she does have fear as we will find out in verse 30, but it's what he said that shook her. She is diatarasso, she's disturbed, she's perplexed, she's confused. It's talking about a mental state, perplexed by what he said. I mean, what troubled her was, "What do you mean God has graced me, the Lord is with me?" Why would she be so perplexed by that? Because she knew she was a sinner.

It might have been earlier in that day when she had an unholy impure thought about Joseph who was to be her husband. It might have been earlier in that same day that she had spoken an unkind word to someone. It might have been earlier in the same day when she had failed to acknowledge the Lord from the heart for some blessing. She knew her sin. She knew who she was just like you know who you are. Mary is one of us, folks, she's not some quasi-supernatural being, she's one of us. She knew she was a sinner. That's why in chapter 1 verse 47 when she praises God, she says, "God, my Savior." She knew she needed a Savior. She knew what all righteous people knew.

And I think this is the only little indication we have that she was a righteous lady, that she really knew God, that she was a true believer. And the reason I say that is because she was struck with the fact that she didn't deserve anything from God. It's that kind of humility that demonstrates true righteousness. All genuinely righteous people are distressed when they come before God because

they know they're sinners. "What would God ever have in mind in choosing to favor me with grace?" She might have been less surprised if the angel had showed up and said, "Mary, God's going to judge you. Mary, God knows your heart, He knows your sin and He hears what you say and He reads what you think and I'm here to tell you you're going to be judged." It might have been that she would have reacted like Isaiah when he saw God, "Woe is me, for I am done." But to be told you're going to be graced by God, you're going to be the recipient of His grace and to know you're just a humble, sinful, lowly girl engaged to a common carpenter with all the struggles of the heart of a young person? How is it that she could be the object of anything but God's judgment? How could she be singled out for special privileges?

You see, it's...that whole mystery in her mind, Mary is appalled...would be appalled if she knew what the Roman Catholic Church has said about her, she would be appalled. She would be embarrassed beyond words. She just kept pondering...what kind of greeting is this? Staggering, nothing at all could have prepared her for this breathtaking word. Humble, common, sinful girl, how did she arrive at the focal point of divine history? Hasn't been an angel in centuries, why me?

Continuing the conversation, breaking in to Mary's preoccupation, verse 30, "The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.'" This indicates that her confusion and perplexity also had a measure of fear. Appearances of divine persons always elicited and generated fear and called for this assurance. Chapter 13, the angel, same angel Gabriel...chapter 1 verse 13, chapter 1:13, Gabriel says to Zacharias, "Do not be afraid." Chapter 2 verse 10 when the angels appeared to the shepherds in the field, they say, "Do not be afraid." Seeing a holy angel out of the presence of God is a frightening thing.

Nothing for Mary to fear. This isn't judgment. The angel affirmingly says, "For you have found favor with God." In other words, God has graced you. Why? Divine choice, it doesn't say anything she did, it purposely leaves out any commendation of this girl. Mary was not and is not a source of grace. She is like all the rest of us, a recipient of it. Mary is one of us.

The issue here is not Mary's worthiness, the issue here is God's choice. The issue here is not Mary's merit, the issue here is God's sovereignty. It was said of Noah, Why did God spare Noah? Drown the whole world and save Noah? Why? "Noah found grace in the sight of God." God graciously chose Noah. God graciously chose Mary. She didn't deserve it. She wasn't worthy of it. She was just a young girl, just a sinner like everybody else.

This is not a statement about Mary's spiritual life, there is no statement about that. Nothing is said about her. And I think it's a good thing because if any small thing had been said, imagine what they would have concocted off of that, since they concocted a whole system out of nothing. God wants us to know that this grace from God came to one of whom nothing could be said to make her worthy. Mary knew it.

Later on this 13-year-old girl, or so, praised God, chapter 1 verse 46, Mary said, "My soul exalts the Lord, my spirit has rejoiced in God, my Savior, for He has regard for the humble state of His bondsman. For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed." Not the blesser, she's the blessed. "For the mighty One has done great things for me." And what is amazing about it is, "Holy is His name." How can a holy God do such great things for such a sinner as me? She knew. She was humble. She had a beatitude mentality.

So the divine messenger, Gabriel, comes to the divine choice, Mary, with a divine blessing, grace...announcing the fourth point, the divine child. To this point she doesn't even know what the message is, all she knows is that God has chosen her to be gracious to her. By the way, as a footnote, God is only gracious to those who believe in Him, right? He gives no grace to those who refuse Him, He gives no grace to those who do not know Him. The Lord was with her and the Lord was gracious to her in a special and unique way, but that because she did belong to Him.

Then comes the announcement of the divine child. "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son and you shall name Him Jesus." With that, we arrive at the high point of the meeting between Gabriel and Mary, and the amazing promise that God would be born through her.

Time's gone. Next week we come to this incredible point in the story.

Father, we feel a little bit like we've been there. Right there at the moment of the most wonderful, glorious event in all of human history, the hope of all the world, the desire of the nations, the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, the one who would bruise the serpent's head, the ruler, Shiloh, the great prophet, the final Lamb, the King of kings, without fanfare the angel says, "You will conceive in your womb and bear a Son and you shall name Him Jesus, He will be great, will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David." And with that our God, the great Redeemer is come. We thank You, Lord, for how Your Word lives, how it moves our hearts, how it bears the ring of truth, how it compels us to the glorious, majestic, supernatural, profound simplicity of the story, a story so simple and so clear that even a little child could understand, and so profound that all the wisdom of the world can't fathom it. O God, how we thank You that You came into the world, that God the Son was born to redeem us all, including Mary. We thank You that our lives are a bit like hers, the divine messenger brought us the gospel, not an angel but some messenger, some preacher, some teacher, some writer, even those who wrote Scripture. And the divine messenger brought us a message and then You made a divine choice before the foundation of the world to give us grace and to come and be with us, bless us. Mary's story is really our story. Oh we can't all obviously have that special service which she rendered to you of bearing Christ, that could only belong to one, but while we cannot bear Christ in our wombs, we can bear Christ to the world around us. We cannot give birth to Him but we can take Him and the glory of his gospel everywhere. Mary is one of us, unworthy, unspectacular, without merit, without achievement she is

chosen, given a message, given grace to bear the Son of God. May we, Father, as she brought the child forth, may we bring Him forth in our worlds that His glorious life, death, resurrection and gospel may bring light and life to the world. We pray in His name. Amen.

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