2023 Christmas – II

**YOU WHO 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! As we gather here this morning to celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, our hearts are drawn to the timeless narrative in today’s passage, shared by Luke. This passage takes us into the account of an ordinary young woman named Mary, who faces the moment of a divine encounter when she becomes the vessel for God’s miraculous plan. The angel greeted her by saying that God had high favor on her. It’s a beautiful story of a divine mystery.

 The concept of being “God’s favored” carries profound implications for each of us. “*Do you believe that you are God’s favored?”* If so, that’s excellent. Yet, in the midst of the complexities of a world often infatuated by material success and fleeting pleasures and amidst the challenges we face, we often wonder what it truly means to be chosen and favored by God. If you feel that way, you are not alone. Today, let us unravel the layers of divine favor and discover how it extends far beyond personal blessings, reaching into the fabric of our identity, purpose, and the entirety of our existence.

 Let’s first examine verses 26 and 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.” The phrase “*In the sixth month”* refers to Elizabeth’s pregnancy. Earlier in the chapter, we learned about Elizabeth, Mary’s relative, who was miraculously pregnant with John the Baptist. The timing highlights the divine coordination of events leading to the fulfillment of God’s plan. The long-anticipated moment has arrived, and God was about to fulfill his promise to send the Messiah. And now God sent his angel to Mary to announce the birth of the Messiah.

Mary is introduced as a virgin engaged to Joseph. The mention of Mary’s virginity sets the stage for the miraculous nature of the conception that Gabriel is about to announce. Engagement in Jewish culture was a formal stage of marriage, though actual consummation would typically occur later. Mary’s engagement to Joseph, who is from the house of David, is crucial in the context of Messianic prophecy, as the Messiah was expected to come from the lineage of David. Mary was from a small town in Galilee called Nazareth, which was often looked down on among the Jews. Yet, God sent Gabriel to Nazareth, highlighting the humble nature of God’s choice for the mother of the Messiah.

Look at verses 28-33. These verses reveal the unexpected message of the angel Gabriel to Mary. Let’s examine it step by step. Read verse 28. “The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’” The word *“Greeting!”* can be paraphrased as *“Hello!”* I am an old-school fellow. So, I tend to be conservative. Yet, I hear young people greeting one another by saying various words, such as “*Hey!” “Hey there!” “Yo!” “What’s up?” or “Hola!” or “What’s good!”* What I like the most is ***“Hiya!”*** (Let’s greet one another by saying ***“Hiya!”*** while giving high fives) (Pic#1)

But the angel’s greeting toward Mary wasn’t just a simple hello or hiya. He said to her*, “You who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”* Living in this troubled world, what is needed the most is the notion that we are God’s favor and the Lord is with us no matter what. But it’s not easy to have the conviction that we are God’s favorites. When we are in challenging situations and compare ourselves with others, we are unsure if we are in God’s favor. But we must know and believe that we, as Christians, are God’s favored ones, no matter who we are. I will tell you why.

First of all, the term **“highly favored”** is a translation of the Greek word ***“kecharitomene (케카라이도민).”*** It conveys the idea of being given freely to an extraordinary degree. In the context of today’s passage, Mary is being singled out as the recipient of divine favor, indicating a special and unique blessing from God. Yes, Mary was God’s favored, highly favored. Yet, being highly favored means much more than getting special attention from God. Verse 29 mentions that Mary was greatly troubled at the angel’s words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

Look at verse 30. The angel Gabriel reassured her to alleviate Mary’s fear and uncertainty by saying, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.” The angel’s reassurance indicates that God’s divine grace was at work in Mary’s life even though she was unaware of it. So why did Gabrial keep saying that God favored her?

Verses 31-33 unveil the central revelation. Read verses 31-33. “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.” It was a shocking announcement. Mary, who was engaged to Joseph, would conceive a child, and she was to name him Jesus, which means **“Yahweh Saves.”**

Gabriel also elaborates on the greatness of Jesus, proclaiming that he will be called the Son of the Most High. Mary must have been shocked repeatedly. First, she would conceive a child and name him “Jesus,” which means “the Lord saves.” Then he would be called “The Son of the Most High?” This divine title signifies Jesus’ unique and divine nature.

But the angel Gabriel continues by saying, “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.” Mary didn’t know that the angel’s anticipation aligns with the Scripture, especially Isaiah’s prophecy of a Messiah, emphasizing the sonship and divine identity of the child. For instance, Isaiah 7:14 reads, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the Virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel.” Isaiah 9:6 reads, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!” In short, the angel’s announcement concerning the birth of Jesus and his identity highlights the eternal nature of Jesus’ reign, establishing him as the everlasting King. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

I am unsure how Mary felt listening to the unexpected and surprising announcements, especially about her pregnancy and the child she would bear, the Son of the Most High. This announcement sounded so unreal. So, she asked the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” (34)

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.” In addressing Mary’s question, the angel Gabriel explains that a divine process will take place. He assured that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would surround and influence her. This divine intervention will lead to the conception of a child who would be called the holy Son of God. The title “the holy Son of God” signifies that Jesus is the Incarnation of God – the Great I AM, the “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace!” (Isaiah 9:6) The angel’s announcement was fantastic.

Yet some of us wonder how the virgin birth of the Messiah was possible, thinking the virgin birth of the child was a scientific and biological impossibility. Yes, the virgin birth of the Messiah remains a divine mystery beyond the boundaries of science and human logic. However, God’s creation and his redemption cannot be understood fully by science and reason. It’s a mystery of God, surpassing the limitation of scientific understanding. The angel Gabriel emphasized this divine intervention by declaring, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” (37: ESV)

In response to the angel’s reassurance of the divine capability, Mary humbly accepts her role in God’s plan. She said, “I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.” (38) Her declaration demonstrates her trust in God’s divine will and power and reveals her willingness to surrender to the divine purpose. Then the angel left her.

In reflecting on Mary’s trust and submission to God’s plan, we find a profound truth about what it means to be favored by God. The story of Mary is a timeless reminder that God’s favor is not earned but freely given through our faith in Christ Jesus. Yet, we must know that Mary’s acceptance of God’s favor goes beyond mere religious observance. It’s her trust in God’s divine will and her willingness to surrender to God’s purpose. **(Trust and obey)**

God’s divine favor upon us is a mystery, which I believe is beyond our human understanding. Our blessings through Christ are abundant, including his one-sided grace of forgiveness, transformation, and glorification. It sounds simple but infinitely profound. We experience God’s kingdom and fullness of life now and forever through Christ Jesus.

Furthermore, it’s essential to recognize that being highly favored by God transcends the temporal and material levels. While material blessings may bring temporary comfort and security, they diminish compared to the enduring and eternal nature of spiritual blessings. The Apostle Paul affirms this truth: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Material prosperity, though not inherently wrong, is fleeting and subject to the uncertainties of the world.

Therefore, our concept of being highly favored by God must not be in the accumulation of earthly wealth but in the richness of our spiritual inheritance. Psalm 103: 2-5 beautifully captures the essence of God’s eternal favor: “Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” As we navigate the complexities of life, the spiritual blessings we receive through God’s favor are real and everlasting. And we must know that we are highly favored by God through Christ Jesus, no matter what.

Imagine that we are pregnant with the baby Jesus. (Pic#2) Our primary concern should be if Christ Jesus is growing in us. Of course, we should grow in Christ. But it also means Christ must grow in us. Romans 8:28-30 confirms it by declaring, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

In conclusion, let us rejoice that God’s favor extends beyond temporary and material. As we embrace the spiritual blessings bestowed upon us through Christ, let us recognize a spiritual richness in Christ, such as our identity, purpose, fullness of life, and eternal existence. “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”