

Sermon for December 17, 2017 – 2nd Article of the Creed (Conceived by the Holy Spirit)

Luke 1:26-38 (English Heritage Version)

Theme: **Gabriel's message to Mary teaches you. . .**

- 1) That you, too, have found favor with God.
- 2) That Jesus is your Savior.

²⁶In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin pledged in marriage to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women." ²⁹But she was greatly troubled by the statement and was wondering what kind of greeting this could be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, because you have found favor with God. ³¹Listen, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus. ³²He 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. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon 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. ³⁶Listen, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age even though she was called barren, and this is her sixth month. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible for God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "See, I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Over the last two weeks we have been looking at God the Father as our Creator and Preserver. Oh, how wonderful it would have been if Adam and Eve had never sinned – if humanity had remained in the wonderful relationship the Lord created us to have with him. Sadly, it didn't. Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, humanity has been living in constant rebellion against God's commandments and under the threat of eternal condemnation.

But the LORD did not want any of us lost to the fires of hell forever. This is why he promised to send a Savior. This is also why he sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin named Mary some 2000 years ago: to announce that the LORD was fulfilling his promise – sending his only begotten Son to not only save humanity as a whole, but to personally show *you* his divine grace and favor.

Let us rejoice in these precious truths, under the theme: **Gabriel's message to Mary teaches you. . .** 1) That you, too, have found favor with God. 2) That Jesus is your Savior.

Part One: You, too, have found favor with God.

Even though thousands of years had passed, God never forgot the vow he made after Adam and Eve fell into sin: a special Savior would be born of a woman, who would rescue humanity from the power Satan had over it. How would he accomplish this? The Savior would reconcile us to

God by living the perfect life of obedience to God's commandments that we all failed to live. Having accomplished that, this special Savior would then take all our sins upon himself – suffering the just punishment they incurred, in order to pay for them in full.

God never forgot his promise. No, through thousands of years of history he patiently got all things ready – waiting for the exact moment to act. That moment had finally come. We read:

²⁶*In the sixth month, (that is, six months after Zechariah and Elizabeth were told that they would give birth to the forerunner of the Messiah) the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin pledged in marriage to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women."²⁹But she was greatly troubled by the statement and was wondering what kind of greeting this could be.*

Mary was rightfully troubled at the angel's words! Why? Because she knew that she was a lowly sinner before God – deserving of nothing but His wrath and punishment. Now she was in the presence of a holy angel telling her that God favors her highly! How could this be?

³⁰*The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, because you have found favor with God.*

The angel comforts Mary – giving her the reason why she shouldn't be afraid or perplexed. And what reason was that it? Because she found favor with God, or to say it another way: God – for his mercy's sake – chose not to look at Mary's sins. No, he chose to love and honor her in spite of them – keeping his promise to send a Savior who would pay for them in full. Young Mary looked forward toward the day when God would graciously send that Messiah. Little did she know that that day had come, and that the LORD - in sheer mercy – had chosen her from eternity to be the vessel through which He would bring His salvation into the world.

I want to pause here for a moment to reflect on the grace God has shown us. We, like Mary, are sinners. We don't deserve an ounce of mercy and favor from God, and yet He – out of sheer mercy – visits us! And here is the cool part: God doesn't just send an angel, He himself visits us personally with the message, "Greetings, you who are highly favored, I am with you!"

Where, exactly, does God meet us with this message? Here in worship – as He promises: *"For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."* (Matthew. 18:20 NIV84)

That's right: Every time we humbly gather around his Word and Sacraments – repenting of our sins and trusting in his mercy to forgive – Jesus himself meets with us in the Gospel, saying: "Do not fear, my child, you have found favor with God. I, myself, have redeemed you. See the Communion set on the altar? In, with and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion, I offer you the very body and blood I used to pay for all your sins. See the font over there? That is where I washed you clean from all your sins in the sacrament of Holy Baptism and sent the Holy Spirit to seal you as God's child. See the lectern and pulpit? Every time you hear the pastor speak my words from the Bible, you are listening to me. From here I warn you about your sins and comfort you with my forgiveness. From here I come to tell you that I love you, have saved you, and will be with you always to the very end of the age!"

Yes, brothers and sisters in Christ, learn from Gabriel's message to Mary: the LORD not only highly favors her, he so highly favors each one of you that he sent his one and only Son to take on human flesh and blood in Mary's womb to win the forgiveness, righteousness salvation you need to stand before God.

Part Two: That Jesus is your Savior.

Gabriel told Mary: ³¹*Listen, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus.*

Mary was going to have a baby – and not just any ordinary baby. No, her son would be the LORD's promised Savior, which, by the way, is the very meaning of "Jesus" - the name Mary and Joseph were to give this child.

The angel continued: ³²*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. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."*

Wow: Mary was to give birth to the LORD's child – the great descendant that God promised King David centuries beforehand, the one who would conquer all his enemies, allowing his people to live in eternal peace.

The magnitude of everything God promised Mary prompted her to ask: *"How will this be, since I am a virgin?"*

³⁵*The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon 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.*

The word translated as "overshadow" in this verse is the same word the Old Testament uses to speak about how the LORD filled the tabernacle with his presence during the Exodus. Do you remember the account of how the Lord led Israel out of Egypt with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night? That cloud and fire was called the "Glory of the LORD." It did more than symbolize the LORD's presence; it was the LORD's presence. When the Israelites set up the tabernacle, the glory of the LORD came upon it and "overshadowed it". This showed the Israelites that God was making his home in that place, that the Lord was with them.

The Holy Spirit was overshadowing Mary - making her womb his holy temple. Just as the Presence of the Glory of the LORD reassured the Israelites in the wilderness that the LORD was protecting them, and that He was performing the great work of saving them, so also the Holy Spirit's presence over Mary showed His protection, and that He was accomplishing His salvation through Mary. And in Mary's womb, this most Holy of Holies which the Holy Spirit sanctified with His presence, the eternal Son of God, came down from heaven and was clothed with human flesh and blood - *taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* (Philippians 2:7 NIV84)

How this exactly happened is every bit a mystery as the inner workings of the Trinity. There is no explanation, other than to say: by the power of the Holy Spirit, God the Father sent his Son to take on human flesh and blood in Mary's womb. Throughout the process, Mary remained a virgin. This allowed Jesus to be born holy and sinless: 100% God and 100% man in one person.

And because Jesus was conceived in this way, we can be absolutely sure that He is our Savior. How so? Because if Jesus were only true God, he could not act as our substitute because he wouldn't be human. At the same time, if Jesus were merely a man, conceived by natural means, his work would do us no good, because he wouldn't have been able pass the benefits of his work on to us. Only God can do that.

Jesus' miraculous conception, however, proves that he is true God and true man. It proves that he is your Savior, who came to reconcile you with God.

The angel continues: *³⁶Listen, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age even though she was called barren, and this is her sixth month. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible for God.* ³⁸*Then Mary said, "See, I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.*

Oh, what a wonderful response of faith on Mary's part. Overwhelmed with the grace God showed her, she humbly submitted herself to God's will. Oh, that we would all do the same – trusting in the LORD's mercy, power and care for us. Regardless of how horrible our sins have been in the past, the LORD promises to forgive all who turn to him in repentance and faith. Why? Not because we have earned or deserve it, but simply because Jesus, His Son, took on human flesh and blood in Mary's womb to be our Savior. He did everything necessary to win our forgiveness. We are, therefore, reconciled with God. Believe it. Continually rejoice in the love God graciously shows you in Christ. And, in the peace of his forgiveness, live as the dear child of heaven Christ saved you to be – all to the glory of his name. Amen.