

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 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, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

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<sup>[a]</sup> the Son of God. 36 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. 37 For no word from God will ever fail."

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

## Highly Favored

How you respond to a call says a lot about the person on the other line. Before the days of caller ID it was a game of Russian Roulette. You didn't know if you were going to interrupt dinner for a set of encyclopedias or catch up with an old friend or family member in trouble. You picked up the phone and answered which led to joy, excitement, or irritation, "Again? No thank you."

Mary doesn't seem to be irritated by an interruption of Gabriel. I doubt they had many heavenly visitors drop in. She is terrified, perplexed, followed by amazed and finally accepting of whatever this call, his message may mean. But I wonder if she really understood where this call would take her? It meant interruption, inconvenience, anger, frustration, fear for life, and death. Don't get me wrong, that call was long awaited but it also wasn't easy either.

When you think of God's call maybe you imagine someone like an encyclopedia salesman or a solar rept who just won't stop. It's that number you've seen repeatedly, asked, "Take me off your list," but they keep calling. Or maybe you think of God's call as family but are you afraid of what family might ask for? Are you afraid of what God may ask you to do? When God calls, it may not be to do something we would consider amazing, exciting, never before heard of. It's rare thing when God calls angels to deliver isolated messages to individuals without verifying that call to many people. God usually calls us through the ordinary means and methods described in his book the Bible. There we can be amazed at what he calls us to do as well as who he calls us. Highly Favored

But first God called Mary, the angel Gabriel showed up and announced, "*Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.*" *Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.* Mary is a confused, she knows she's been good this year but maybe not quite that good. It has been a good year. Joseph proposed. They are betrothed. She's waiting for a wedding passing her time on Pinterest trying to find every idea possible for the best wedding ever. She's probably even writing her future name imagining being called, "Mary Carpenter." Just then an angel interrupts her carefully laid out plans for the future with God's plan.

God's calling her was to be a surrogate mother for his son. Imagine you are a young Jewish girl, that's serious business. That's inconvenient. That certainly interrupts things like weddings and dresses, and causes questions concerning fidelity. Moreover think of the child, the son of God, you mess this kid up... then what. Before she is given the option to accept this mission Gabriel continues. *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.*"

Just wrap your mind around what was just said. And yet Mary doesn't doubt that it can be done but the question concerns how it will take place, "How?" I've never done anything like that before. She was greatly confused as she begins to ponder the reality of her situation: a teenage pregnancy and a baby born out of wedlock. They stoned people for adultery back then. Not only that but imagine her just trying to break the news to family, to Joseph, "I'm pregnant but it's not what you think... I saw an angel and the Spirit of the Lord did this." Maybe she grabbed Gabriel by the neck and said, "You're coming with me. There are some other people you need to explain this too."

One wonders when she told Joseph or even if she said anything. V. 39 says she hurried away to the hill country to a town of Judah. She remained with Elizabeth for three

months. The baby bump may have said it all as Joseph had in mind to divorce her quietly. She has wooed and won Joseph and now he is walking away. Maybe Mary cried herself to sleep as her world came crashing down. Did she know all of this was wrapped up in God's call? Did she know when she responded with, "*May it be according to your will.*"

If that's what God calls of those who are highly favored what does that mean for us? Especially when I greet you with the same words, "*Greetings you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you!*" Maybe you're thinking, "I've been good this year but not quite that good." A bit confused. You are favored. You are recipients of God's grace. Just as Mary was a recipient of God's grace and favor and not the source of God's grace and favor. You are those called by God. The church is literally a group of those called out of this world to live with God.

What does he call you to do? That's when people start thinking God is a bit irritating and interrupting life. Others think of him as the old friend who only ever wants us to be happy. As children we have grand visions of life and where God will take us and what he will call us to do. But God doesn't always call us to the great and extravagant. He doesn't always call us to the comfortable life but sometimes like with Mary's call he leads us to a life of struggle and stress. Wherever he leads we follow but what if that's not where we want to go? What if we don't want to spend time in the hospital? What if we don't want to struggle through life? That's the problem isn't it? **God's call isn't always to the positive and never to the negative. God's call can lead to blessing and benefit as well as struggle and strife. Sometimes we become so wrapped up in our carefully woven schemes and plans that we easily forget whose we are and in whom we live and move and have our being.**

But an angel hasn't appeared to us in the middle of the night with God's call to service so how can we know what God expects? Dreams or visions? Maybe it was just that burrito. Feelings? "God wouldn't want me to be unhappy." - feelings aren't always trustworthy indicators of truth. How about the one place he has clearly spoken to us? His Word. If you feel called by God to accept another job far from home, far from church - maybe you should reevaluate your call as a husband, father, mother, or wife. If you feel called by God to ignore your parents and leave them behind maybe reevaluate your "call" according to the fourth commandment. If you feel that God only calls for my blessings and benefit take a lesson from the mouth of a Galilean teenager who became the mother of God, carried the Savior of the nations at a great cost by stating, "*Let it be to me according to your word.*"

Mary's call was amazing but even more so was the message of the one to come. I imagine Gabriel is even more amazed at who is coming. God took on human nature. Gabriel knows that the eternal Word of the Father, the one through whom all things were made, Gabriel's creator, Mary's maker, would now be mothered by Mary, in a despised country, from a despised area known as Galilee, an unimportant village within that area, Nazareth.

Jesus was not raised by the rich and famous but by an obscure teenage girl known by everyone in that town as Mary. One who was looked down upon for having an affair. Jesus' grew as an illegitimate child. Who would go on to live an ordinary life and suffer an extraordinary death. It wasn't the physical pain and suffering that was extraordinary but separation from the father. That's what God called his son to do for the human race. Suffer, died, and serve. It is because of Jesus that Mary is called, "*Highly favored.*"

It's because of this that I've been called to serve you and announce that because of Jesus life, death, and resurrection, you too are "Highly favored." God cares for you so much that he sent his son into this world to be inconvenience, interrupted, and irritated more than we can ever experience or imagine. You receive the same grace as Mary.

That means you may not be rich and famous and that's okay. Your life might not be easy or complicated and that's okay. You can hold God to the word that he has given us. If he has called you to a difficult situation hold him to it that he will get you through. That doesn't mean you should expect that God will remove you from every pain or problem in life but it does mean he is there with you. So in whatever calling you are, whether working on cars, volunteering, or serving as grandma and grandpa live it all for the glory of God.

Because of Jesus and his work we too respond in the same way as Mary. Wherever you are at you can respond in the same way as Mary, "*I am the Lord's servant,*" (*The Lord's slave*). "*May your word to me be fulfilled.*" Every week, or even every day, every time you pray the Lord's prayer you are asking, "Thy will be done." We don't necessarily know what God's will is for us in this life but we know what he has clearly called us in Scripture. What he clearly calls us in Baptism and Lord's Supper. You are not illegitimate children. You are not an interruption, irritation, or an annoyance. You are highly favored.

When you call on God it doesn't show up as, "Blocked call," "Unknown caller," but Child, Heir, Son or Daughter. You can be certain that he has answered. *No word from God will ever fail.* You are highly favored because of him. Amen.

