

“Why Am I So Favored?”

It all seemed so surreal. Could this be happening? Am I really pregnant?

These questions were racing through Mary’s mind as she ran to the home of her cousin Elizabeth.

Mary, a virgin who was betrothed to a man named Joseph, had just seen an angel and received the terrifying news that she was pregnant by the power of God, through the Holy Spirit.

The angel told her that her son would be the Son of the Most High (God) and that would he would establish God’s Kingdom forever.

She was to name him Jesus, which means “Yahweh is salvation.” He was the promised Messiah that the OT prophets long ago talked about and the one the people had been waiting for. He was now coming into the world to save people from their sins. (Mt. 1:21)

This was a lot for one person to digest in a short period of time.

How could all this be true? How could it be happening fast? “I want to be God’s servant. I am God’s servant!” thought Mary as she hurried off to Judea, “but what about all the problems this will cause me because I am pregnant and not yet married?”

The Need for Assurance

God had spoken to her through the angel Gabriel, but she still needed further assurance from God that this was all true. So she hurries off to her Cousin Elizabeth’s house to see if what the angel had told her was real.

Earlier in Luke, when the angel had addressed Mary’s doubts about the possibility of having a virgin birth he told her that her cousin Elizabeth, an old barren woman well beyond child-bearing years, was now pregnant with the child who would be the forerunner of Jesus.

Elizabeth’s son was to be named John and he would be the one who would prepare the way for the coming of Jesus, much like a fullback prepares the way for the running back to run through the line of scrimmage. John was to clear the way- To make a straight path for the Lord.

Mary had to see it to believe it. If Elizabeth was pregnant than perhaps she could be pregnant too.

So off Mary goes. When she arrives at Zechariah and Elizabeth’s home baby John leaps inside the womb of Elizabeth.

This was no ordinary kick.

I remember with each of my children putting my hands on Malia's tummy to feel that little life role around inside. (How could anyone ever say that it is just a clump of unformed tissue?) But this was no ordinary kick. John did a supernatural somersault inside the womb of Elizabeth when Mary entered her house.

We should not be surprised because the angel Gabriel had already told dad that his son John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

Mary got her confirmation. If Elizabeth is pregnant then I must be pregnant too!

But not only did Mary get her confirmation, so did Elizabeth.

Elizabeth did not need confirmation that she was pregnant. She was already six months into it. She knew she was pregnant. What Elizabeth needed confirming was the **purpose** for which she was pregnant.

Her son John was to be the one who would prepare the people for the coming of the Lord.

What Elizabeth needed to know was that the Messiah was going to be born. So when she saw Mary and her baby leapt inside her womb God gave her the confirmation she needed. Her pregnancy was **not** in vain.

So what Luke is doing for us in this encounter between Mary and Elizabeth is he is tying their two separate stories together and he is showing us how God is giving confirmation to both women that God was fulfilling his promise to bring the Messiah into the world through both of their pregnancies.

Elizabeth is humbled by the confirmation. "But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (v.43)

Mary's heart is raised to exaltation and praise. Thus we have her magnificat, her song of praise for God's confirmation in v. 46-55.

This is the context for our scripture text this morning.

Why Am I So Favored?

What I would like to do now is to focus in on v. 43, which the response of Elizabeth, and consider for a moment not only why is she so favored that the mother of her Lord would come to her, but also why are **we** so favored that our Lord would come to us?

Thus I have entitled the message "Why Am I So Favored?" I think that by doing this we will get at the heart of the meaning of Christmas for us.

This question put forth by Elizabeth is one of great humility.

In many places the Bible gives expression to man's humble state before God.

When God spoke to Moses in the burning bush Moses was humbled and he hid his face from God. (Ex. 3:6)

When God called the prophet Isaiah to speak his word to rebellious Israel Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips.” (Isa. 6:5)

In Psalm 8 King David, when reflecting on the majesty of God’s creation said this,

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and stars,
which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?

The apostle Paul- when he was confronted by the resurrected Jesus and blinded by the light of his grace- fell facedown on the ground, having been humbled by God. (Acts 9)

What lies behind all of these examples and Elizabeth’s response in the text is a deep inner awareness that they have all been in the presence of God and they are not worthy to stand in such a place. Each one of these people reflects in some way a profound inner sense of their puniness and their depravity before the presence of God.

It is true. We are puny when compared to the vastness of God’s creation and we are certainly sinful; and the fact God would come down to us and allow us to be in his presence is grace extraordinaire.

This takes us to the heart of Christmas.

Christmas is all about grace, God’s undeserved grace. We are puny. We are sinners. Our sin has separated us from God. It has broken fellowship with him. We have death because of our sin, but in Christmas God gives life because God comes down to us in the child Jesus. God comes to us in human flesh through this little babe in order to save us/rescue us from our sins through his death on the cross. All we have to do is embrace him by faith in order to be saved. That’s all we have to do, that’s all we can do. Salvation can not be earned by sinful men.

So why are we so favored that our Lord would come down to us in order to save us? We do not deserve such favor, so why?

I would like to offer three reasons for this favor in your life and I hope it will encourage you and lead you to know and grow in your life with Jesus Christ, God’s only Savior.

First, You Are Favored Because God Loves You.

That is the basic message of the Bible. You were created in God’s image. He breathed the breath of life in you. You have sinned against God but He still loves you. Love is at the heart of God. It is not soupy, flaky, or fickle like human love. It is not cheap, conditional, or susceptible to fleeting human emotion like ours is. God’s love is constant, immovable, steadfast, faithful, persevering, and never ending.

That’s how God loves you and that is why you are so favored. John tells us in his epistle that at God is love. Where would we be without it?

Second, You Are Favored Because God Is In The Redemption Business.

Because God loves you He desires to save you from your sin, misery, depravity, false hopes and false dreams. God desires to rescue you from the death trap that your life is stuck in.

God, because He loves His people, has always been in the redemption business.

When Adam and Eve sinned God came looking. He sought them out. He promised them that their offspring would one day crush the head of the serpent. That promise of redemption was fulfilled when God sent his Son Jesus into the world to crush the head of the devil's death through Jesus' death on the cross.

When God flooded the world he redeemed Noah and his family and anyone else who was willing to get on the boat and God promised to never again to destroy the world with a flood. The world then and the world now is still a wicked place. We did not deserve such favor.

God called Abraham and told him he would bring forth from his seed a special people, the Jews, and through them God would shine the light of His love and truth into the world, not just for them, but for everybody. That's why God's hand of favor still remains on this people because they were chosen to be His instrument of salvation.

Then there is Jesus. Matthew's gospel tells us in the genealogical account of Jesus that Jesus is the one who fulfilled the promise of Abraham. He is the one who came into the world to bless all the nations of the earth through his death on the cross. In him we and the world are redeemed from our sin when we place our hope in him for our salvation and life with God.

Finally there comes "the new heavens and new earth" that both the OT and NT talk about.

There is more yet to come when Christ returns and completes his work of redemption by forever crushing the powers of sin, death, and evil. The devil and his angels will be dealt their final blow. There will be no more tears and all that is wrong in the world will be made right.

God is in the redemption business. He always has been and He always will be. Jesus stands at the very center of that redemption. All that is and will be redeemed will be redeemed **through him alone**. That is the message of Christmas. He is Emmanuel, God with us- God come down to us, to save us from our sins.

Third, You Are Favored Because God Has Appointed You To Be His Herald.

Once you commit your life to Christ God commits you to be his herald.

One of the beautiful things about the gospel of Luke is the songs of praise sung by Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist.

What God was doing in the world and what God was doing in them through the coming of His Son, Jesus, was He was leading them to give praise to God in song through the singing of scripture. These songs were loaded with words from the Psalms and the Prophets. They were prophesying- which means they were proclaiming the Word of God- through their songs of praise.

Conclusion

The most wonderful act of worship at Christmas is the singing of all the Christmas hymns.

Last week I went to the symphony in town. It was a mixture of holiday songs and Christmas hymns. It was all good, but for me there was no comparison as to what was more powerful. It was “Joy to the Word.” To hear the powerful Word of God, the powerful message of Christmas, that God has come down to us in this little baby Jesus, was to be lifted up into the presence of God.

We sing all of these wonderful songs but we must also give witness through our words, through our testimony. If God loves us, if God has redeemed us in Jesus, and we have experienced that redemption through faith in him then we must share it. We too, like Mary, are called by God to be his heralds of praise.

Who might God be calling you to share the good news of Christmas with in your life?

Don't be afraid my friend. The God's favor rests upon your life just as it did on the life of Elizabeth. Why? Because God loves you and God has made the way for your redemption in Jesus, and God will be with you when you declare His praises to those whom God puts in your path.

Amen.