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Luke 1:26-38

Mary, receive the body of Christ

In the sixth month, 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 be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name 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 the house of Jacob 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 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. **36**Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. **37**For nothing is impossible with God." **38**"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

There are only four days until Christ. Have you been receiving your Christmas cards? I like Christmas cards. It is nice to receive something in the mail other than a bill.

When it comes to Christmas cards, there is a hierarchy. On the bottom, are the cards sent by companies thanking you for past business. The card is usually elaborate. It has the signature of the owner stamped in it. Husbands, never give your wife this kind of card.

A step up is the card with a picture of the family on it or a card containing a letter about the family. This is a wonderful way to inform friends and family of milestones within the past year. Jamie and I usually keep the pictures up all year round.

The final card is the one that I call the jackpot. This is the card with the personal handwritten message. These cards take time and care. They are sometimes elaborate while others times are very plain. Some might have a few dollars from a grandma while others contain precious words. These are special cards because they are personal and filled with love.

In our reading from Luke, we see that God delivers a special Christmas card to Mary. The angel Gabriel appears to her in a very personal and powerful way and makes an incredible announcement: "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28).

Each phrase is important. "Greetings", literally, it is the word "rejoice." It is the same word used by the prophet Zephaniah and Zachariah to speak of the Day of Salvation. Both write that on that day, the Daughter of Zion will rejoice because the LORD is with her, as her king and savior (Zeph 3:14 & Zech 9:9). Mary is the daughter of Zion bearing the son who will be king and savior.

The next phrase “you who are favored”, literally means “you who have been graced.” This is important because many think Mary earned the privilege to bear Jesus. That is not true. God graced her. God chose Mary.

The final phrase “the Lord is with you”, refers to the fact that the presence of the Lord will be in her womb. Mary contains the savior of the world.

By saying, “Greetings, you who are favored, the Lord is with you”, the angel was saying, “Rejoice Mary, daughter of Zion! God is gracing you to be part of this plan. The Lord is with you, literally in your womb. You will bear Jesus, the Son of the Most High, the King of Israel, the seed of Eve that will crush the serpent’s head.”

This is an amazing greeting. One can hardly comprehend the emotions Mary must have felt. She is about to receive the very thing that people for thousands of years have waited for. Second, God choose Mary for this task. Think of the privilege. Think of how special one would feel. Even more, Mary has God in her womb. Whenever she wonders where God is at, all she has to do is pat her stomach. This is an amazing message.

I must confess that the sinner in me would love to take advantage of this message. This would be an eternal trump card. If someone was bragging about their child, I could say, “Well, mine is the Son of God.” During Christmas, I could send out a Christmas letter entitled, “Raising the Son of God.” Talk about fun!

In all seriousness, I asked the confirmation students how they would feel if they were Mary. They said they would be afraid. I asked, “Why?” They said, “Because she is young. She would have the responsibility of raising the Son of God. No one could truly understand what she was going through.”

The confirmation students are right. Verse 29 tells us that the message greatly troubles Mary. She wonders how this can be. The angel responds. Nothing is impossible with God. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the Most High will overshadow you. The word overshadow is the same word used to talk about God in the wilderness overshadowing the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34).

To the scientific mind, these words disappoint. God does not let us in on the details. I imagine if we knew how it all worked, we would try to bring about our own Messiahs. If we knew the DNA code, we could bring about an American Messiah. We could bring about a Lutheran Messiah. By clothing the incarnation in mystery, we can only receive this as a gift.

Mary’s question is deeper. It is theological. She is not really asking how it is to occur. Rather, she is asking, how can it be that she would become the tabernacle of God? How can it be that she is involved in the fulfillment of the O.T.? How can she bear the seed that will crush the serpent’s head? She is a lowly maiden. She is a sinner.

That is the point. Mary is a lowly maiden because Christ came for the lowly. She is a sinner because Christ was born under the law, in order to redeem those under the law (Galatians 4:4-5). This is grace. Of course, Mary does not deserve it. If she deserved it, it would no longer be grace.

St. Paul reminds us: "God chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God chooses the weak things of the world to shame that which is strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are... So that no man should boast before God but instead boast in the Lord" (I Corinthians 1:27-31)

Of course, God chose lowly Mary. God graces Mary.

The greatest miracle in this passage is that Mary trusts these words. Mary does not have all the details. Mary trusts the Word of the LORD. "I am the LORD's servant, may it be to me as you have said" (1:38). Mary believes and she receives the body of Christ into her womb.

Reformation, there is good news for you in these words. God has a Christmas card for you. The announcement made to Mary 2000 years ago extends to you this day. Even though I am no angel, these words are heavenly.

Today, at the Lord's Table, God is saying to you, "Rejoice, oh favored ones, the Lord is with you. Receive the body of Christ." God has handpicked you. "In love God predestined us to be adopted (handpicked) as his children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (Ephesians 1:5). In Holy Baptism, Christ has united himself to you. He is closer to you than you are even to yourself. In this meal, the Most High overshadows the bread and wine for you. The Lord is with you.

You might object and ask how can this be? I cannot give you a scientific answer. God has promised and God is no liar. You can trust His Word. Others might wonder why God would enter bread and wine for you. You know your sin. You know that you do not read the Bible enough or pray enough. How can this be that God would stoop so low for you? The answer is grace. God loves you. Christ became incarnate for you. For others still, the Devil's accusations are too great. Remember, you have an eternal trump card. If the Devil ever accuses you of your sin tell him, "Yes I am a sinner, but I am united to Christ. The Lord is with me. Get behind me Satan." Nothing is impossible with God.

Talk about hitting the jackpot!

**In Jesus Name
Amen**