

# MARY: FAVOR & FAITH

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This time of year, whether we like it or not the Christmas music is everywhere. We all know that these can be songs that proclaim the birth of the Christ-child and the good news of the gospel or tell us about "Frosty" and "Rudolph".

Of course we know that music has always been tied to the Christmas story. Whether it was Simeon, Elizabeth or the Angels who proclaimed the birth of the Messiah, singing and music and the Christmas story are intertwined. In our lesson today let's focus on Mary's song.

In reality, we don't have a lot of information on Mary and her life. It is believed that John the Apostle took care of her and she may have lived her final days in Ephesus. But the most significant things we learn about her are found in our text today.

*Luke 1:26-47 "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 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."*

Our study today will consist of two main points; "God chose Mary" (Favor) and "Mary chose God" (Faith).

God wanted to use her to fulfill His purpose and although she didn't understand everything, she wanted to be part of the fulfillment of His purpose and will.

## GOD CHOSE MARY

Think about the enormity of what this calling was. She would be the first person to hear His name, to fully be told what and who He would be. She would be the first person to put her trust in Him. She had more clarity than anyone on the prophetic Genesis passage that talks about crushing the head of the serpent and Isaiah proclaiming that the Messiah would be "born of a virgin".

- **Favor is for purpose not prominence**

*Luke 1:28 "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."*

God doesn't show partiality, but His favor rest on people in different ways. God does not have favorites; he loves all the same. However, there is nothing wrong with seeking His favor, but we need to understand from the original word for "favor" is the same root word for "grace". Just like grace, favor is undeserved, we have no right to have it. Favor comes to those who align their lives with Him and his purposes. This does not refer to financial or positional capacities; Mary had none of these, yet she was favored.

Randy talked about praying for his son's as they grew up, for their future spouses, for salvation and for God's favor. At the basis of this favor, like Mary, is a humble heart and a humble spirit. She saw herself as a "Handmaiden of the Lord".

Randy suggested that Mary would be horrified of the adoration, focus and even worship she has received through the centuries in Christendom.

Contrast this with today's standards of view of importance. Forbes identified the "70 people that matter". The characteristics of these 'important' people were position, power, influence in areas of politics and wealth.

Mary could not claim any of these, rather wondered, "why me, I'm an insignificant person from an inconsequential place".

But it was this humble spirit and heart that opened the door for God's favor...not a promotion, but a purpose.

- **Being afraid is normal**

*Luke 1:29-30 "Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God."*

Throughout scripture when humans encountered angels, it was a fearful, even terrifying experience. Gabriel tells her not to be afraid. It's always a bit scary when God says he wants to do something to or with your life. Yet in the midst of uncertainty, even fear, she said "yes". Mary couldn't even fathom how this could occur, but she surrendered to God's purpose.

- **Your life will forever be interrupted**

*Luke 1:26-27 "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."*

She would be carrying the Savior of the world, but make no mistake this would cost her dearly. Her reputation, relationships, people will think the worst of her and I'm certain she heard hurtful things on a regular basis. Phillip Yancey talked about how God's purposes are, full of great joy but are accompanied by great pain. Mary came to understand this.

## MARY CHOSE GOD

For us today, there are places for us to birth the life of Jesus in situations and locations in our world.

- **Faith believes and then seeks to understand**

*Luke 1:34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

Faith believes then seeks to understand. Zechariah wanted proof; this is much different. God is okay with us not understanding, it's okay to ask questions. We learn that he has options that we're not even aware of, that we never even conceived of. He is supernatural, our task is to keep trusting Him, even beyond our understanding. Mary believed God with what little information she had. We have so much more information available to us and yet at times we don't believe.

- **Faith requires surrender**

*Luke 1:38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her."*

Mary woke up that morning thinking about how Joseph would soon come to take her to their new home. (a great picture of us waiting for Jesus to come and take us away) But God had a different script for her life; she surrendered.

Some versions use the term "handmaiden"; don't romanticize this phrase, this literally meant "slave", a servant of a servant. She is humbly submitting and surrendering to His purpose.

- **Faith is strengthened in song**

*Luke 1:46-55 "Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. 47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! 48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. 49 For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. 50 He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. 51 His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. 52 He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. 54 He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. 55 For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever."*

This song was spontaneous, it came from her heart, her spirit and it was very prophetic. God is about to interrupt the world with hope and deliverance. This song was a proclamation of incredible far reaching things in this world. It not only strengthened her, but throughout history it was a song that intimidated some, but encouraged others, especially the persecuted, marginalized and overlooked and forgotten. It gave us great insight into the person of Jesus and His role in our world. She saw herself as very small and God as very big. We can't reduce this to a historical or mysterious story, it speaks directly to us to align ourselves with God's purposes and believe Him to pour out His favor on us. It's not about position or promotions, it's about His purpose.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As you read Luke 1:26-47, what were your observations about this event. What did you learn about Mary, about God and what does it mean to your life today?
2. The first thing that we consider, is that God chose Mary. What was communicated to her? What do you think she was thinking and feeling during this encounter?
3. Review your notes on pages 2 and 3 and discuss; Favor is for purpose not prominence. Is this God showing partiality? What is God's favor? What do we learn about Mary as she receives God's favor? Is God's favor connected to power, position, influence, etc.?
4. What do we learn about being afraid and how her life was interrupted?
5. We know that God chose Mary, but Mary also chose God. What do we learn about these three areas?
  - a) **Faith believes then seeks to understand**
  - b) **Faith requires surrender**
  - c) **Faith is strengthened in song**
6. This Christmas season let's not reduce this to a historical or traditional story. Rather consider what does this story speak to us to about aligning ourselves with God's purposes? What did we learn about God pouring out his favor on us? Lastly, what exactly does it mean to have his favor?