

God Speaks to a Virgin

St. Luke 1:26-56

Our text begins by telling us that it is the “sixth month” – but St. Luke doesn’t mean June – he means the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John the Baptist. And once again – we have the same angel, Gabriel – with a similar message – coming to a woman in a similar “condition.”

“Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” is his message. “Favored”? Who is Mary that she should be called “favored”?

Mary is a betrothed virgin – which means she is probably fairly young – and although “betrothed” means Joseph is her husband – typically she would not yet be living with him – and the marriage would not yet be consummated, hence “a virgin.”

In the eyes of the world, there is not much favoring Mary. She’s young – a woman without a child (which has great significance for Israel) – and from Nazareth, which is not held in high regard. So, it seems, Mary doesn’t have much going for her.

“Favored”? Well, she IS betrothed to a man “of the house of David” – which is to say – she is in the line of the Promised Messiah!! Now THAT is something!

We’re told that Gabriel’s greeting troubles Mary and causes fear – why is that? Often people say that she’s afraid because she’s just found out she is pregnant – however – Gabriel hasn’t said anything about a child, yet.

And since she hasn’t heard anything about a child yet, she’s probably not thinking about the “house of David” and the messianic line. So, what is troubling her? It is that last part of the greeting – “the Lord is with you.”

What if you could see Jesus standing right next to you? What if you were face to face with God? Is that what you’re saying, Gabriel? She’s trying to discern what the angel of God is telling her – she’s trying to figure it out.

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” What is this “favor” – why has she found “favor with God”?

Mary is the “favored one” – not because she is special, some kind of a super-Believer – but because God has chosen her. Of all the virgins “of the house of David” in Israel at that time – God has favored her – chosen her to be the very means by which God is born into His Creation.

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus.” There it is – the birth announcement! And along with it – God names her child. Just as He named His Creation “in the beginning” – just as He named the child to be born of Zechariah and Elizabeth (John) – so Mary’s child is to be called “Jesus,” which means, “the Lord saves.”

And then Gabriel piles it on! “He will be GREAT and will be called the Son of the Most High (He’s the Son of God)” – the Lord will give Him the throne of his father David and He will reign forever (He’s the Messiah, the promised descendent of David, to rule in His kingdom without end).

“How will this be, since I am a virgin?” You remember Zechariah last week. He too asked a question of Gabriel – but his question was a bit different. When told that his wife Elizabeth will bear a son, he asked – “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”

What proof can you give me so that I know what you are saying is true? Explain this to me so that it makes sense. As Gabriel tells us, Zechariah’s question is one that comes from unbelief.

Mary’s response is different. It’s going to happen – what you say Gabriel – but, “HOW will this be?” I’m a virgin – I can’t make this happen. And that’s the point. The child to be born of Mary is not the result of her doing anything – it is pure gift – it is all God’s doing (just like Creation – just like John the Baptist – so also Jesus).

“The Holy Spirit” – whom we confess to be “the Lord and Giver of life” – “will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.”

Zechariah wants “proof” – a sign – but the only sign his unbelief will receive from the Lord is silence until the child is born. Mary, on the other hand, believes – and God gives her more – He gives her a sign, something tangible, something she can see and even touch --- a pregnant Elizabeth.

Sounds a bit like the Sacraments to me – a tangible Gospel, with visible elements – full of good news. God’s Word is enough for faith – but God is always giving more – He gives faith more to hold onto, to receive, to believe.

Like Mary with her hand on Elizabeth’s belly – so the water splashing, or the eating and drinking of bread and wine, show forth God’s favor “for you.” This is “for you” Mary. This is “for you” dear Christian.

Pregnant Mary (Luther says she gets pregnant through the ear – by hearing the promise – by the Holy Spirit working through the Word) --- pregnant Mary “went with haste” to the house of her relatives, Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Another greeting – associated with the presence of the Lord. “Filled with the Holy Spirit” – Elizabeth greets Mary, saying – “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is it granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to be?”

A blessed Virgin and a blessed Baby! “The mother of my Lord” – indeed – Mary is the Mother of God! All of which, is to say – the Savior is here – the Advent of God. And John the Baptist begins his ministry of preparing the way of the Lord – leaping for joy in Elizabeth’s womb – announcing that the Lord is nigh!

And if there is any doubt about the result of Gabriel’s announcement to Mary – verse 45 clears the air – “And blessed is she who BELIEVED that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Strike up the organ and get ready to sing – because what follows is Mary’s song, the Magnificat – which has been sung in all generations since the Advent of the Savior – which we will sing, once again, tonight.

“My soul magnifies the Lord.” Magnifies – makes larger, increases. Sounds like what John the Baptist says – “He [Jesus] must increase, and I must decrease.” The Magnificat is not about Mary, but about the Lord!

The Lord uses the humble, the hungry (I wonder if this is a reference to Elizabeth and Zechariah, who were hungry for a child, so to speak) – the Lord uses the meek, the lowly, the poor – those, like Mary, who have nothing to offer, nothing to do, nothing to give – but who are favored and blessed to be chosen as God’s instruments to do great, and salvific things.

“He has shown strength with His arm” – His almighty power and dominion – through humble means like a young virgin from Nazareth – through a Word announced by a messenger, a Word that does what He says.

“He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy” – remembering His promise – sending His Messiah, your Savior.

To humble, lowly, poor sinners, comes the Advent of our God – proclaiming His message of good news. “I forgive you all your sin.” Does that trouble you? Is it met with faith, or unbelief? Does it have to make sense? Do you want proof?

Your reason says, “that’s not how it works.” My family doesn’t forgive me freely – I have to earn back their trust – make myself worthy of their favor.

That is why “the Lord is with you” – to speak His Holy Spirit filled Word into your ears – conceiving a faith that says, “let it be to be according to Your Word.” That is why the Lord gives you His Sacraments – that you might leap for joy in this tangible good news – as He gives you grace upon grace.

What Advent joy – that the Lord has looked upon our humble estate, and has blessed us with a Savior, even Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.