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Fourth Sunday in Advent
Luke 1:26-38
12-20-2020

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Greetings favored one, the Lord is with you! This morning I could have greeted you by saying good morning or simply hello but the angel Gabriel greets Mary in our Gospel today with this beautiful greeting. Greetings favored one. This greeting can be easily read over and dismissed as a simple hello Mary, I've got a message for you, this is my way of getting your attention. But this greeting is not easily overshadowed. It means more than just a passing acknowledgment.

Greetings favored one, the Lord is with you! Favored one in Greek is *charitoō*, highly favored for God's grace. This specific word *charitoō*, favored one is only used twice in all of Scripture, here and Ephesians. This word *charitoō* is high, high form of favor. It isn't like when I call my parents and my dad sitting next to my mom and says "who is it?" and I shout through the phone "your favorite daughter" and my dad laughs it off, uhuh. No God means it, Mary is highly highly favored.

What is it about Mary that makes her so highly favored by God? Why Mary? Is it because of Mary's good nature, her likeable personality, her kind deeds? No. He did not choose Mary because of her deemed "good qualities." Nor did he choose her because of her deemed "bad qualities." Mary was poor and lowly, weak and meek but this was not why God chose her. God chose Mary because he wanted to. She was highly favored because God said so. God chooses whom he wants, whom he pleases. He does not select based on merit or worth.

Greetings favored one. God is playing favorites. In Gabriel's first words to Mary, God is selecting Mary. He doesn't beat around the bush he says it right away, greetings favored one. Specifically choosing Mary, doubling and tripling grace for her. He favored Mary for his own grace. God is choosing Mary in this greeting from the Angel Gabriel. God is specifically choosing Mary. This is Gabriel's role to be a messenger, to choose Mary.

When Gabriel appeared to Mary, he called her by name. Mary, you have found favor with God. The power in a name. When someone knows your name, they know true knowledge of you, they know your identity in your name. When someone says your name, they are directing something at you specifically. Think of the difference of say to your room of children, would someone please unload the dishwasher versus Susan, please unload the dishwasher. It is directed specifically to you, not the whole room but at you. When Gabriel appeared and said Mary, you have found favor with. There is no room for error, Gabriel did not go to the wrong house he was exactly where he was sent to be. To Mary.

This terrifies Mary. This angel appears, knowing her name and telling her she has found favor with God. She is perplexed, in acute distress. Mary is going back and forth in her own head about what is going on. She is distressed because she is engaged to be married in nine months to Joseph. Now this engagement is far different than what we think of as an engagement. When we

hear someone is engaged it's typically a huge celebration, were eager to hear about the proposal it's a "hallmark moment." This is not the case for Mary, her engagement isn't about love, it certainly wouldn't be a stereotypical hallmark movie. It is a legal, binding document. It is a formal process. A couple engaged would fill out a document and then wait nine months to be married to ensure the woman is a virgin. Then once the nine months has passed and the woman does not give birth, they can be married. This news that Gabriel brings means Mary would fail this legal binding document, she would be delivering a baby in that waiting period. This sends her in an anxious tailspin. How is this to work?

Gabriel says, "do not be afraid." Gabriel preaches peace into Mary, delivers her peace in the midst of her distress. He proclaims that she is to bear a son, who will reign over the house of Jacob, whose kingdom will have no end. He says to her that the Spirit will overshadow you and you will bear a child. Nothing is impossible with God. Gabriel brings it closer to home for Mary when he says see how your cousin Elizabeth bears a child in her old age. Nothing is impossible with God. It is through God that Elizabeth conceived her child, John the Baptist. Our opening to the Gospel is "in the sixth month." Here Luke is referring to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the length of time since Gabriel came to preach to Elizabeth of her child. Do not be afraid for God is at work through you, his highly favored, his chosen. You.

Mary is preached into peace. She hears all the angel has to say to her and she is at peace. She says "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." Mary is an instrument. She is a vessel for God to work through. God the creator is creating through Mary to deliver the promised Messiah, the savior of the nations. Jesus Christ.

So where does this leave you. Yes I mean you sitting there in your pew. Where does this leave you. This is the message, the good news that you receive today. God has chosen you. Greetings, highly favored one, the Lord is with you! God has grace upon grace upon grace for you. He doesn't have a passive, hi how's it going wanting to check in with you message. No, God is here in the midst of your own distress, in your own perplexities to stop you in your tracks. God knows you by name and speaks directly to you. He is here speaking peace into your life. Do not be afraid, I am with you. Do not fear for your own health, your own property, your job, your finances, your family, your future do not be afraid. God is still creating and making new in his world, with his creatures. You are an instrument of the creator. He is actively working through you to do his will. He does the unexpected, the surreal and even what sends us into distress. He does what we cannot even fathom, he does what causes us pain and suffering, he does what brings our greatest joys and surprises. God is at work in all times and in all places. God calls you by name and does the impossible. Mary the virgin gave birth to a son, our savior. A barren Elizabeth gave birth in her old age, there is nothing that God cannot do. Nothing is impossible with God.

May the peace of Christ which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.