

Luke 1:26-38 (ESV)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit 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. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."

³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

We depend upon the promises made to us. Your job is a promise of a paycheck for services rendered.

The government promises to use tax revenues to provide for the common good.

Marriage vows are a promise of fidelity until death due you part. Promises mean everything to us.

A cynic becomes skeptical of the promises made by others, and often for good reasons. Advertisements promise more than what they can deliver.

Politicians say things every election cycle that go beyond the pale. Promises made by parents, spouses and friends with the best intentions aren't always kept.

If you believe every promise made to you you're said to be naïve and gullible. If you look cynically upon everything you're told, you become a curmudgeon.

The promise of a long awaited Messiah was not new to the people of Israel. The prophets spoke of such a deliverer for centuries.

Is it possible to believe a promise even if you don't live to see its fulfillment? Is it possible to believe a promise even if it seems humanly impossible for it to come to pass?

The promise to the children of Abraham was that the long awaited Messiah or Christ would come into the world. The promise to us today is that He will come again.

That's what Advent is all about. That's what our faith is all about. Christ has come. Christ will come again.

This morning we see how this Gospel promise is lived out in the life of Mary, a young woman, called, and favored by the LORD.

Now Mary and her situation was certainly unique, but the promise is for all of God's people. The one born of Mary is JESUS whose kingdom would have no end. Christ came as promised. He will come again.

Promises are important to all of us. You rely upon the promises of the people who are important to you. Life would be chaotic if those promises weren't kept.

The promises of God in the Gospel are foundational for life and faith. Rely upon those promises. Lean on them. They will be a refuge, a pillar, an anchor for your soul.

Today we look at the promises of God in the Gospel as the conception of JESUS is announced.

Luke gives us the fullest account of the call of Mary through the angel Gabriel. It was in the sixth month that Gabriel was sent from God to the city of Nazareth.

The word angel means messenger or sent one. In the Bible angels sometimes were sent to deliver a message, sometimes to intervene in a crisis or sometimes to bring about judgment.

Here Mary told of her special role in the birth of the Messiah. It was her high calling to carry the child to be born as the Son of the Most High.

The call of God is the message delivered that the LORD has a place for you in His kingdom.

Mary's call is unique, but so is yours. The psalmist said that he would glad to be called to be a door keeper in the house of the LORD. There are no unimportant calls in God's economy.

The call of God is both personal and corporate. It involves you as an individual but it doesn't stop there. It also involves how you will have a part of the kingdom or the family of God's people.

For Mary, she was to carry in her womb the eternal Son of God. No one else could have that privilege. But her calling would affect the house of Jacob.

When the LORD calls you, His message will be that He has a place for you in His kingdom.

Whenever I hear of a lone ranger Christian who doesn't feel they need to be involved in the Body of Christ, I want to remind them of the call of God.

When you become a believer, you are called to come out of your own individual world and become a part of something far bigger than yourself.

Like it or not, when the LORD calls you, your extended family becomes quite large. Fellow believers from every tribe, race and nation become your brothers and sisters in the LORD.

But closer to home, the people sitting around you become a part of your extended family. Whether you like them or not, you are called to get along with them; more than that you are called to love them. That's a part of your calling.

The call of God is delivered to you by a messenger of the LORD. For Mary it was Gabriel who was the sent to bring her this Word from God. Your messenger might not be so glamorous.

The messenger is secondary to the message. In Reformed circles we distinguish between the Gospel call which is proclaimed to all people, and the effectual call of God.

Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

What has been your internal response to the call of the Gospel? Is it received as good news, or as another obligation that's going to cost you time and effort?

Do you see the Gospel call through the eyes of a consumer? If you do your part, then the LORD will do His, and life will be good. It's a good bargain.

Or do you view the Gospel call as the promise of God? Out of sheer grace, nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ JESUS. The Gospel call is the promise of a Savior who paid for your sins and brings you into His kingdom.

That is a promise that you can rely on both now and for eternity. Gabriel was the messenger that called Mary. Listen to how he phrased that calling.

Luke 1:28 (ESV)

And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

The favored of the LORD is the chosen of God. The children of Abraham were the chosen people. Israel was a chosen race. Mary was the highly favored of the LORD.

Luke 1:28 (KJV)

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women.

To be highly favored of God is not a sign that you are better or more righteous than anyone else. It does mean that you have bestowed with grace and mercy.

It doesn't mean that life will be easy, it does mean that God will be faithful. As a child of God, you are and remain "highly favored" of the LORD.

Many of you know that my mother is no longer able to join us in worship any longer because of the progression of her disease. Of late she's been very unresponsive. Sometimes we're not even sure she knows who we are.

She was at our place for Thanksgiving and we couldn't get any kind of response out of her at all. So I lifted up her head, looked directly at her and said, "Mom, do you know who I am? **This is your favorite child.**" She opened up her eyes and said, "Ugh!" At least I got a response.

Mary was highly blessed; most favored among women. To be the one to carry the Christ child in her womb is an honor almost beyond comprehension.

To be chosen of the LORD for anything is no small honor. Listen to how Peter put it.

1 Peter 2:9-10 (ESV)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

In the play *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye in his ongoing dialogue with the LORD talked about how much his fellow Jewish brethren have been called on to suffer.

He said, *"LORD, I know that we are your chosen people. But every once in a while, can't you choose someone else?"*

To be highly favored of the LORD is to be chosen by God to be numbered among the children of Abraham here on earth:

- to sometimes suffer unjustly,
- to know hardship,
- to be rejected by many,
- but also to be testaments of God's faithfulness in a fallen world that groans for redemption.

After the birth of JESUS when he was brought to the Temple by Mary and Joseph, they were met by Simeon, who spoke of what Mary's highly favored status would bring.

Luke 2:34-35 (ESV)

And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ **(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also)**..."

When you are called on to go through a time of loss or suffering, your natural reaction might be to think that you have fallen out of favor with the LORD.

That isn't what the Bible teaches. The LORD does discipline those He loves, but more than that, He conforms us in the image of His Son.

JESUS was the suffering servant of Israel. He was despised and rejected by men. He learned obedience through suffering. At the pinnacle of his passion in the garden He prayed, "Father not my will, but Thy will be done."

To be highly favored of the LORD is to be transformed from a self-centered, egotistical and prideful creature to a humble servant of the LORD most high who like Mary can say with sincerity,

Luke 1:38 (ESV)

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

I don't know about you, but I'm a long way from being where Mary was. Only by His grace can I hope to grow in that kind of favor with the LORD.

If you are in Christ, know that you are highly favored of the LORD as well. Every trial, every disappointment, every setback falls within the providence of God who loves you more than you could ever know.

Temporal joys are a blessing, but they are not meant to be an end in themselves. He is preparing you for a kingdom that is not subject to the effects of sin and depravity.

To be called, to be highly favored, is to wait expectedly for the promise of God to be fulfilled. The long awaited Messiah was to be born of Mary. He has come. He will come again.

As Mary was to wait expectedly for the promised child to be born, we now await for His return.

In the meantime, we trust in all the promises of God. He will never leave or forsake those who look to Him in faith. He will supply what you need. His grace will be sufficient.

He will make all things work together for good, for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

JESUS will be with you always, even to the ends of the earth. Those are promises you can count on.

Psalm 119:50 (ESV)

**This is my comfort in my affliction, that
your promise gives me life.**

For some of you here, the promises of God are especially important this time of year. Time has brought about changes in your life, and you need a promise that is dependable, true and reliable.

Others here are facing huge challenges with an uncertain future. The promise of God is not a guarantee of worldly success, but it is a pledge of God's faithfulness.

When Abraham was given the promise of descendants that would outnumber the stars in the sky, He believed the promise of God. And it was credited to him as righteousness.

Romans 4:20-21 (ESV)

No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

The promise of the first Advent was that the Messiah would come into the world. The promise of this Advent is that He will come again.

Not as a newborn child, but as the King of Kings and LORD of LORDS. O come, O come, Emmanuel.