

### **Luke 1:26-38**

**In the sixth month, 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. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." 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. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."**

**"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" 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. 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. For nothing is impossible with God." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.**

In the name of our Savior, dear friends,

Most Christians are bothered by the fact that our government and schools bow to pressure about anything Christmas, because it supposedly promoting Christianity over other religions. So you have Winter break instead of Christmas break, and Holiday trees instead of Christmas trees. I'm glad to say that the White House has not bowed to the pressure and they still put up a Christmas tree.

I'd like to mention a couple of strange ones. One big city had red poinsettias on the grounds of the courthouse. Someone complained that they were an obvious symbol of Christmas. The solution? The courthouse changed the red poinsettias to white ones. Item #2: One elementary school renamed its school play, "How the Grinch Stole the Holidays." The Grinch didn't need to steal Christmas. The school did it for him. The most current incident: Back a few years ago, a city permitted a German Christmas village on city property. There was a decorative arch that said "Christmas Village" over the entrance. But when the city manager heard complaints from city employees and visitors, the word "Christmas" was removed from the arch. So now it just says "Village," which is a little ridiculous. So the Christmas Village people decided to take the whole thing down as something now quite useless. The city manager told reporters *"This is not about taking Christmas out of the holiday; this is about being more inclusive, in keeping with what this holiday is all about."* Oh, really? Since when is this holiday not about Christ??

We get upset with repeated attempts to take Christ away from Christmas. But I would submit that we might fall into the same trap ourselves. We can take Christ out of Christmas accidentally. How? We can get all wrapped up in the Christmas wrappings, all lit up with the lights, all baked out with the Christmas baking, all decked out with our Christmas clothes, and we can easily become the Christmas turkey, by missing out on the main meaning of Christmas.

But you are here today, so you don't miss out on the Christ of Christmas. You want the true meaning. That is why we're going to Nazareth to see what happened when Jesus Christ came to town the first time. And perhaps that will guide us in his coming to our town! This meeting between Mary and the angel Gabriel will help us

**Theme: Remember What Christ's Coming Really Means.**

- 1. It Means God is Gracious**
- 2. It Means God Keeps His Promises**
- 3. It Requires a Simple yet Courageous Faith**

So let's follow Gabriel to a backwoods little place named Nazareth. The time frame? It is six months after Mary's cousin Elizabeth got pregnant with the child we call John the Baptist. **In the sixth month, 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. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."**

**"Greetings, you who are highly favored!"** This is a key phrase for many people, and a lot of them don't know where it came from. There has been lots of false information concerning this phrase. It almost sounds like Mary is the one who has some special significance, she is full of grace, she has some special quality that led the Lord to choose her. The true and literal meaning is just the opposite. Mary is highly favored by God, literally graced **by God**. There was nothing particularly special about Mary that made the difference between her and countless other young women in Israel at the time. There were just two requirements, laid down by the Lord in his prophecies. The mother of Jesus had to be a virgin, and she had to descend from the line of David. There had to be literally hundreds that fit those qualifications. But God in his grace, his undeserved love, had picked Mary out to be the mother of the Savior. All the VIP's in the world had no idea who she was and what was going on. But God knew, and he chose her.

Isn't there some comfort in that for you and me? We often feel insignificant, kind of lost in the crowd. We're just one more number in the social security system, one more soul waiting in line forever at the post office, one more person waiting to buy the latest fad for Christmas presents. In the mass of humanity, how special we feel if someone just remembers our name! But guess what! God in his grace, has chosen you to be his, he has called you by name and made you his child. Just like he chose Mary, and chose Elizabeth to be a mother of the last great prophet, and chose a humble carpenter to be the earthly father for his son, just as he called Abraham to be the father of all believers, and called Zacchaeus by name out of the tree, so he has called you and me to be his children. There was nothing special about us, that brought about his choice. We confess to being sinners who deserve nothing, just like the rest of humanity. It was his grace, his undeserved favor that brought us to his family. As Jesus once said: **No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.** John 6:44. Or as he once told his disciples; **You did not choose me: I chose you.** Just as God's favor rested on Mary, so God's favor has been extended to you and me personally. Jesus has come to us by faith! His coming means that God is gracious; and

## 2. It Means God Keeps His Promises

Let's hear about the promise: **But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.** It's all about Jesus! That's the wonderful name that means Savior. And Gabriel reveals more: **He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.** Yes, this child would be the Son of God himself. **The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."** God was fulfilling his promises of a coming king, who would sit on David's throne forever, just as he had told David in 2 Sam. 7:12—**I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.** So this promised child **will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.** The king of all is ruling over all, he is watching over you and me personally, and putting it all together in his great master plan. And he promised: **the kingdom of God is within you.** The Lord graciously rules in our hearts, and guides us every day. His promises are fulfilled for us every day!

But sometimes, dear friends, don't we expect more? It's a little like the child on Christmas day—ripping through all the packages and gifts, and then when they're all open—isn't there any more? Let's go to Grandma's house, 'cause I know there'll be more there! And all the gifts already received are forgotten. God promised us a Savior from sin and he kept his promise. Every day, each and every sin is completely and graciously forgiven, all our doubts, all our dissatisfaction, because Jesus came,

and came to die on the cross for each and every sin. That's the best promise of all, because it guarantees that we will live forever. You can't have a better promise than that! It's time to simply believe it because Jesus Christ is coming to our town, right now. And to have the true meaning of that requires a faith like Mary's.

### 3. It Requires a Simple yet Courageous Faith

How does Mary respond to the angel's startling message? **"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"** She doesn't question the promises of Jesus, doesn't question the destiny of her son, but she does wonder: how is this going to be possible? How could I have this wonderful child, since I've never been with a man? And Gabriel answers: **"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. 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. For nothing is impossible with God."**

How did Mary react? **"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."** She accepted the angel's message and believed it would happen and trusted that what God had promised would come true. She believed that God could do the impossible, just as the angel had said. Sometimes the Bible calls that a child-like faith – just believing whatever you are told. A simple childlike faith means there are no doubts, no needing to have proof. She simply believed the messenger from God. Mary's faith may be simple and childlike but she is not naïve. She realizes there are going to be problems. What are my parents going to think? Even worse: How's Joseph going to react? (This may be the end of my relationship with him.) What will happen to me? (An unwed pregnancy was sometimes punished with stoning.) Her faith was simple, but yet courageous.

Let's apply that to ourselves. We too need a simple faith. Maybe you are at a point in your faith life where you might feel you are very weak. Maybe circumstances of life or pressure of the world has caused you to weaken in your trust. Perhaps you're struggling with family problems that cause you to doubt God's care. Let's remember Gabriel's words, **"Nothing is impossible with our miraculous God."** That is still true! Christ's coming means a time for simple, trusting faith. Simply believe that Jesus Christ came into this world as an unborn baby, conceived by the Holy Spirit within Mary, to be your Savior. And he still is coming to us each and every day to give us strength and help and peace and hope.

And that simple faith leads to a courageous faith. Because we know the truth and the blessings it brings, we can stand up to the naysayers of this world, the Grinches who would like to steal the Christmas tree and Christ with it; or the Scrooges, who are ready to say "Bah Humbug!" to it all. I never feel ashamed to greet a stranger with Merry Christmas! And if he or she looks stressed out, I might say it even louder! If there is a battle in school over a Christmas song or a poster, be courageous in standing up for the true meaning of Christmas. Even if you may lose to political correctness, you have made the point, that Christmas is all about Christ.

So what does Christ's coming really mean? It's all about God's grace in sending us a Savior. And just like Gabriel was God's messenger to bring the message of grace to Mary, so perhaps you and I can be such an angel, a messenger, to bring the truth of Christmas to others. God grant it this Christmas. Amen.