

²⁶In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin pledged in marriage to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women."

²⁹But she was greatly troubled by the statement and was wondering what kind of greeting this could be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, because you have found favor with God. ³¹Listen, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus. ³²He 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. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."

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

³⁵The angel answered her, "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. ³⁶Listen, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age even though she was called barren, and this is her sixth month. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible for God."

³⁸Then Mary said, "See, I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. (EHV)

Theme: Grace is possible with Jesus

1. Mary found God's favor
2. We receive his work through faith.

Everybody loves to get gifts at Christmas. There is no reason to deny it—we all like receiving gifts. One of the best things about gifts is that you haven't done anything to deserve them—if you did, then it wouldn't be a gift, but compensation. Sure, there is such a thing as a "thank-you gift;" but even a thank-you gift is given out of thanks by the giver, not out of obligation. You can't say that you earned that thank-you gift based on what you did.

Gifts are just that—they are gifts from the giver. But how often don't we feel as if we are entitled to receive certain things from others as if they owe us something? Maybe we don't show this on the outside (although many people do); but we are disappointed about how many gifts we we're given, or what those gifts are, or how expensive or not they are. We feel as if we deserve something better, more expensive, nicer. When we look at gifts this way, then we turn a gift into something earned and deserved; and it is no longer a gift. From here, the person receiving a gift can easily take credit for it, "Yes, I know you gave this to me, but I deserved it because of such and such reason." How quickly and easily it is to take credit for something that was given to us purely as a gift!

And we do this not just with our Christmas gifts—but also with the gift of salvation. It is all too easy for us to take credit, at least partially for the gifts of God's grace. We like to think that God saved us because who we are, where we go to Church, what we've done, whom we are related to, or so on. God has to be pleased with us for such and such reason and that is why we're saved. Or we try to take credit for our faith—we chose to believe, we accepted God into our hearts, God saw that we would believe so he chose us. We could go on and on; it's natural for us to try and take credit for something that we simply shouldn't. And by doing so, we take glory upon ourselves and away from God.

But today, by looking at Gabriel's announcement to Mary, we see that God's grace is just that—a gift of grace!

Gabriel appeared to Mary and said to her, Greetings, **you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women.** “Highly favored” certainly is a great thing to be called! What exactly does it mean that Mary was highly favored? It simply means that someone, here God, has shown favor on her—that is, God has decided to give her a great blessing, or has shown kindness to her.

In verse 30 Gabriel says something similar, **you have found favor with God.** The Greek word for “favor” is the word that we often translate as “grace.” We could translate, “you have found grace from God.”

What did Mary do to deserve to this great gift and honor? Nothing. She did absolutely nothing; notice how confused Mary was at Gabriel’s greeting—she knew that she didn’t do anything to deserve to be highly favored. What do we know about Mary? We know that she was young, a virgin, and probably poor. There is nothing in all of Scripture to indicate that she had done something to earn God’s favor—Yes, we are told that she had found favor with God, but not in the sense that God had found something in her that lead her to give her his grace, but rather that she had found God’s grace, graciously given to her! Yes, she was a virgin, but so were countless other Jewish girls at the time—many of whom could also trace their lineage back to David. We think of the Song of Mary, which she sang after she went to visit her relative Elizabeth. One of the lines that Mary sang is, **my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.** Mary had a Savior—she needed a Savior because she was a sinner just like you and me. There is nothing in all of Scripture that indicates that she was without sin, or was in anyway better than any of us, that would have led God to give her such a special gift. Not to mention the fact that there is nothing in all of Scripture to support Mary being a bestower of grace, a co-redemptrix, or that she should be the recipient of our prayers and adoration!

She was a sinner just like us, in need of God’s grace and favor, just like us. And she found God’s grace when he gave her a special gift. And that gift was himself! Gabriel told her that she would conceive and give birth to a son. And her son, **will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.** Her son would be the Son of God, and thus also God himself! He would also be a king who would reign over an eternal kingdom—indicating that he is the eternal God.

They were to give him the name, Jesus, which means “the Lord saves.” As true God and true man—he was able to serve as our perfect substitute. He lived a perfect life that we could not, and yet die in our place and pay for our sins. By his work we are saved. Salvation, then, is ours not because of anything we have done, not because of who we are, but simply by a gift of God’s grace—otherwise our salvation wouldn’t be a gift!

Now, what sense does this make? How can someone be God and man at the same time? How can a virgin become pregnant and give birth to her Savior? Mary didn’t doubt the words of the angel, but she certainly was filled with wonder and awe and she had her questions, **How can this be, since I am a virgin?**

That’s more than a fair question. So, Gabriel said to her, **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.** This tells us that Jesus would be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary—so he is both God’s Son and also true man.

We understand what this is trying to say, and we can explain the result of this miracle—Jesus is both God and man at the same time. But who can honestly fully understand and comprehend all of this? We can’t! Our sinful human minds are too weak and feeble to fully comprehend everything that is going on with Christ and his dual nature. And we’ve known about it and have been able to contemplate this holy mystery ever since we were brought to faith and were taught it in confirmation class.

Mary, on the other hand, is just hearing about this for the first time. And yet, how did Mary respond? **I am the Lord’s servant. May it happen to me as you have said.** Mary believed! With simple faith she did not question this amazing message about her son! May our attitude by

the same as Mary's, humbly believing and obeying the Lord's will as his servant, rather than questioning things that we can't even begin to understand!

Mary believed the impossible would happen inside of her. God would take on human flesh and live inside the womb of her womb for nine months. None of this makes any sense; neither did the fact that Elizabeth, her old relative, who was barren and well beyond childbearing years, was sixth months pregnant. But she was—which proves what Gabriel said, **nothing is impossible for God.**

That line reminds me of something that Jesus would say to his disciples. Jesus was talking about those who were rich and said, **it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.** The disciples responded by asking, **who then can be saved.** Jesus said, **with people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.** What is impossible for man is possible with God, who can do all things. The Lord did what is impossible for us—saving us sinners from eternal damnation by doing the impossible and becoming man.

Mary didn't choose to believe this about her son. If the choice was up to her, she never would have chosen to believe it. But she did believe! This faith that Mary had was another gift of God's grace. The faith worked in her heart was a product of Gabriel's announcement. Not only did the Holy Spirit conceive a child in Mary, but he also worked faith into her heart; and she became the Lord's servant to do his bidding and carry in her womb the eternal God!

In the same way, we don't choose to believe this. But the Holy Spirit has worked faith into our hearts through the waters of baptism and the Word. He has kept us in that one true faith and strengthened that faith through the Word and the Lord's Supper. If the choice was up to us, we never would have chosen to believe in the impossible, something so contrary to reason, and something that we aren't able to fully grasp and understand. And yet we do believe—all because of the Holy Spirit.

And so this faith, then, is purely a gift of God's grace! Faith is not ours by any work of our own. It's not something we deserve or have earned. But out of love for us sinners, the Holy Spirit has worked faith into our hearts.

And it is faith, of course, which receives all the blessings that Christ won for us on the cross. Through faith, then, we have the forgiveness of sins. Through faith in him we receive his righteous perfection. And through faith in him we have the sure and certain hope of eternal life in heaven; as he says, **whoever believe in me will live, even if he dies.**

Everything, then, can be boiled down to grace. It was grace, not anything to do with Mary, that led the Lord to chose her to be the mother of his Son! This doesn't diminish Mary—she was given a great honor. Rather this gives credit where the credit is due—to the Lord, the giver of this gracious gift.

And it is this same grace by which we are saved! Our forgiveness and eternal life is a gift of God's grace, which gives the credit to whom it belongs—to Christ! As Paul famously says in Ephesians 5, **it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.** Our salvation is purely a gift of God's grace, a gift not earned or deserved, but given to us out of the undeserved love of God that he has for us! There is no room whatsoever to take credit for any part of salvation—all credit and glory belongs to Christ and to him alone. And because of that we have complete assurance that we truly are saved!

True gifts aren't earned or deserved. This is never more true than when it comes to the Lord's grace! He graciously came to Mary, who found the favor of God by giving birth to his Son and our Savior. We too have found the grace of God in Jesus, her Son and our Savior. And by another gift of God's grace: faith, we receive all the blessings Christ has won for us! Our

salvation is nothing but a gift—a gift of grace, and it is a gift we truly treasure, both now and into eternity! Amen.