

*Pastor Matthew Ude
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Second Sunday In Advent*

Receive the Gifts of the Lord

Luke 1:26-30 ²⁶ Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by 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. The virgin's name *was* Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!" ²⁹ But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

So it's Christmas morning (or evening) and you sit down to open your presents. At what point do you say thanks? Do you say thanks after you have played with your toy for a little while? Do you say thanks immediately after you open your presents? Or do you say thanks before opening your present as soon as the present is handed to you?

We ought to say thanks before we even open it shouldn't we? Because it does not matter what the gift is, the very fact that our parents or our

spouse or whoever thought of us and bought us a gift in itself deserves our appreciation regardless of what is in the box.

This is the angel Gabriel's greeting to Mary, "Rejoice" why because you are favored. The Lord is with you. You are blessed. You have found favor with God. All that is to say that Mary ought to rejoice because God has given her a gift even before Mary has any clue what this grace this gift is.

What does it mean that she "found favor with God."

If we go back to the book of Esther, we see a nice parallel to Mary.

Esther 5:2 ² So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, *that* she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that *was* in his hand.

Notice that the exact same phrase is used here. She found favor before the king. What does this mean?

In the Persian Empire you were not allowed to enter into the King's presence without being summoned. If you were to enter the King's presence without being summoned the penalty was death. And this is what Esther had done. According to the law of the Persians Esther deserved death, unless the King held out the scepter to her in effect granting her pardon. So by the grace of the king Esther did not die when she entered his presence.

So also Mary does not need to fear the presence of the Angel Gabriel who stands in the presence of God. She does not need to fear death in that presence because the Lord has granted her His grace.

The same is true also of Noah. In Genesis 6 God was sorry that he had made man, and grieved in his heart and determined to wipe out all men from the face of the earth but **“Noah found grace (favor) in the eyes of the Lord.”**

Genesis 6:8

What does that mean other than the same thing that is that by the grace of God Noah did not find death in the presence of God but rather God’s grace and favor.

And now we can look at **Ephesians 1:6** to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He **has made us accepted** in the Beloved.

That phrase “made us accepted” in the Greek is the same word that the Angel says to Mary “Rejoice, highly favored.” The translation is very different but the word in the Greek is the same. We like Mary are those who have been made acceptable. We have been granted God’s favor so that we should not die in his presence.

Rejoice we have received the gift of the Lord and we have not died in his presence.

Luke 1:31-33 ³¹ "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³² "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give 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."

We already rejoice and thank God simply knowing that we have received gifts from Him regardless of what those gifts are, but now we open the gift and find out just how truly astonishing it is.

So what does this name Jesus mean? First it means Jehovah Saves. And we have already seen that by His death we are granted favor before God. But the name has more significance than that, for it also designates that He will rule and indicates the office of Jesus, namely that He is our prophet, priest and king.

We have in this congregation five people who have the same name as Mary, although in many different forms, Mary, Marie, Marian and Miriam. In the Greek a person's name changes slightly depending on where it is in the sentence. However when we translate into the English we simply choose one form of the word and stick to it, because we don't change the name in the English.

I mention this because the name Jesus is the same way. When we think of the name Jesus we always think of Jesus Christ the son of Mary. But the name was not unique to this Jesus. It is used often in the Old Testament. And in fact there were three very important men in the Old Testament all who prefigured Christ, one each in an office.

The first example is Joshua. Who was not called a King but that is what he was. He led the people into the Promised Land and destroyed their

enemies before them. So also will Jesus be our Joshua to go before us and destroy our enemies and lead us into the land God has promised for us.

Second we have Hosea, and if you look in your old testament you will find the book of Hosea, who was a great prophet and spoke the word of the Lord.

And finally we have in Haggai 1:1 Joshua the son of Jehozadak the high priest, who served as high priest after the Babylonian captivity and rebuilt the temple of the Lord. And Jesus himself compares himself to this Joshua for He said, "destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days."

This then is the gift we receive from the Father a son and more than a son. **"Unto you a child is born."** Yes and much more than a child. Jesus who is our prophet, priest and king. However unlike those other Jesus', this Jesus' service will never come to an end.

This congregation is well aware of how difficult it can be. You get a pastor or a teacher to serve you, but then their service comes to an end and you have to find another. But this Jesus' will serve as prophet, priest and king forever. There will be no end to his service and no need to ever go look for another.

Luke 1:34³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

Sometimes we might think that Mary's response here sounds very similar to Zacharias and maybe we even wonder why Zacharias is rebuked and Mary is not. But actually Mary's response is nothing at all like Zacharias'.

In his unbelief and doubt Zacharias demands more of God, "give me a sign" But Mary in joy at what had been given to her desires to learn more about it.

We use the example of giving your spouse a present on Wednesday and we can use that again. Imagine you give you wife tickets to Hawaii.

Now Zacharias' response was akin to, "what proof do I have that we are actually going to go."

Whereas Mary's response was akin to, "what day are we leaving. This is awesome I want to learn more."

Zacharias response was also very self centered, "What sign will you show me, so that I may know . . ."

Having received the gifts of God we ought to rejoice in them and desire with Mary to know more about them.

Sometimes with Zacharias we have tendency to think, what do I get out of this? How does this help me?

Now there is an incredible amount of "For me" in God's gift, and so much that is directly applicable to my life. But that should not be our attitude towards God's gifts. We should not treat God's gifts like a bowl of mixed nuts where we pick through them only looking for peanuts because that is all that we like.

Rather we ought to with Mary rejoice in His gifts to the point where we want to know everything we can about it.

When we study the two natures of Christ, or the exodus of the People of Israel, it may not have an immediately effect on my life. But that isn't always the point. Rather these are the wonderful works of our God which He did by His grace for His people. This is His gift to us and we want to study it and learn it inside and out because in it the love and glory of God is revealed.

Notice that this is always Mary's attitude. Again and again and again in scripture we are told "Mary kept these things and pondered them in heart." Mary received God's gift with great joy and being filled with that joy she desired to learn everything she could about that gift. She soaked up every piece of knowledge and pondered, meditated upon it in her heart.

This is not only the attitude of Mary but also the attitude of the angels

1 Peter 1:12 in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look.

Even angels desire to look into the things that God has done for us. But if you were to ask them what effect does this have on your life? Absolutely none. But they desire simply to see the marvelous things that Christ has done.

This is how a gift ought to be received.

Luke 1:35-37 ³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.* ³⁶ "Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. ³⁷ "For with God nothing will be impossible."

First we see the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit which is reference back to creation in Genesis 1:3 "the Spirit hovered over the face of the deep" So also here we have a new creation. The Spirit creates life. He created life in the first week of creation. He creates life in us and here also He creates life which is the new man Jesus Christ.

It was necessary that Jesus be a new creation. So that he could be a new Adam. Therefore the Spirit came upon Mary to create a new Adam.

³⁷ "For with God nothing will be impossible."

This is actually a bad translation. Here the NIV is much better

Luke 1:37 For no word from God will ever fail

But an even better translation is "no word of God is without power."

It's one thing that God can do anything. That's good but that isn't what the angel says. No word of God is without power. Every promise of God is fulfilled. Every passage of scripture is a pipeline to God a source of strength.

This goes back to what we were saying before. We should treasure every word of God and seek to dwell into as the glorious gift that it is.

Luke 1:38 Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Now there is a confession of faith. I give myself fully to you O Lord due with me whatever seems good in your sight.

Mary doesn't actually use the word servant, she uses the word slave. With these words she isn't just accepting this gift she is accepting whatever the Lord will give to her. Perhaps she already understands that it's not all going to be roses and sunshine. Perhaps she already understands that she might even lose her fiancée because of what the Lord is asking of her. But it doesn't matter she is ready to receive anything the Lord gives to her.

"Thy will be done" in my life. WE don't pray to the Lord, "here is a list Lord give me what I want. No, we pray "thy will be done."

The Lord's will is to save us from our sin and deliver us into His kingdom. So we want His will in our life not our own.

Receive the gifts of the Lord. We don't always know what's coming in that box. It might be nothing but a pair of socks. It could even be broccoli. Whatever it is we already rejoice in those gifts because they come from the Father of love.

James 1:17-18 ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. ¹⁸ Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.