**YOU HAVE FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD**

**Luke 1:26-38**

**Key Verse: 1:30-31**

But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

Today is the first Sunday in December. Finally, we are in the last month of the year 2020. The year 2020 has been such a memorable year for all of us because of the global pandemic of COVID-19, civil unrest, the presidential election and so on. I have been watching the local and national news almost every day because of so many events affecting our daily lives. My university campus was shut down in March until the summer because of the pandemic. As the fall semester was nearing, there was a heated debate on the reopening of universities and colleges in New Jersey and many other states. This fall, my university opened only partially and my department has been offering courses in online mode or HyFlex mode practicing strict social distancing and wearing masks. Thankfully, several COVID-19 vaccines are on the way, and we are beginning to see some hope that can finally lead us out of the long tunnel of the pandemic. However, we must remember that we can find true hope only in Jesus Christ, our savior, not science and technology from this world.

Today’s passage is about God’s invitation for Mary to become the mother of Jesus. God’s invitation or calling is a great blessing and privilege but it also brings us sufferings and troubles. God called many great ancestors of faith such as Abraham, Moses, and David to use them as his servants, but the calling of Mary was a special one because God’s work of salvation through Jesus Christ was possible through Mary’s full and absolute obedience to God. May God help us learn about God’s divine invitation for Mary and her full acceptance through her absolute faith from today’s message.

Let’s look at verses 26 and 27. “In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, 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.”

When Elizabeth, a relative of Mary, had been pregnant for 6 months, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary who was living in Nazareth, a small country town in Galilee. Who was Mary? Mary was a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of David. Mary was a normal teenage girl who was engaged to Joseph the carpenter. The Bible does not provide any detailed background information about Mary and it seems that there was nothing special about Mary’s social status.

Look at verse 28. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” It must have been very surprising when an angel suddenly appeared to Mary when she was alone especially with some incredible words for her. “Mary, you are highly favored. The Lord is with you!” Probably, no one had ever regarded Mary so highly like this during her entire life. If we receive this kind of unusually honorable message from someone, we would think it is probably a phishing scam. But the angel Gabriel’s message to Mary was not a scam but genuine.

The message delivered by Gabriel was however too much for a country teenage girl like Mary to accept. Please read verse 9, “Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be”. The angel Gabriel realized that Mary was overwhelmed by God’s message. In verses 30 to 33, Gabriel provided a more detailed message from God. “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him 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 Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Gabriel said that Mary would conceive and give birth to a son who was to be called Jesus. What a shocking message to Mary who was still a virgin. However, this event was prophesied in Isaiah 7:14, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel”. Immanuel means God with us.

What kind of person would Jesus be? Please read verses 32 and 33. “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 Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end”.

Jesus would be great and would be called the Son of God. After Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, there was a voice from heaven, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17). In Matthew 16, when Jesus asked his disciples a question, “Who do you say I am?”, Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” In Matthew 27, when the Roman centurion and soldiers saw the earthquake and all that had happened after Jesus’ death on the cross, they were terrified and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”. Truly, Jesus is the one and only Son of God who was sent to the world by God because he so loved the world.

In verse 32, the angel Gabriel also said, “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David”. In the Old Testament, God promised to send the Messiah from the line of King David. In 2Samuel chapter 7, God’s word for King David came to the Prophet Nathan, “The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, 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”.

The Prophet Isaiah also prophesied in Isaiah 9:6-7, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever”.

Both Mary and Joseph were descendants of King David, so Jesus is rightly the son of David. Jesus born from the line of King David is the true king who rules over the Kingdom of Heaven forever. In human history, there were a number of powerful kingdoms such as the Roman Empire, Mongol Empire, and British Empire as well as powerful kings such as Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and Napoleon. However, no kingdom on earth lasted forever and no king in the world was able to establish the throne forever.

In the Book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar was so proud of his powerful Babylonian Empire. As he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” However, God immediately punished the most powerful human being at that time, King Nebuchadnezzar and he became insane and lived like a wild animal for seven years. At the end of God’s punishment when the king restored his sanity, he praised God, “His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.” King Nebuchadnezzar finally realized who was the true King and what was the greatest kingdom. Jesus is our true king who rules over his people in his eternal Kingdom of Heaven forever and ever.

What was Mary’s response to this amazing message of God? Look at verse 34. “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”. Do you remember what happened to Zechariah when he asked the angel Gabriel a question after hearing the message about his wife’s pregnancy, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.” Because of his doubt and unbelief, Zechariah had to go through silence training. So did the same angel Gabriel also discipline Mary for raising a question to God’s message? No, the angel Gabriel did not punish Mary as he did with Zechariah. Why not? Is it because Gabriel was biased toward women or he was more generous to a teenage girl than an old man? No, it was because Mary’s question was reasonable, and not out of doubt. The pregnancy of a virgin is against science and laws of the nature. There had not been such a case in human history. So Mary’s question was a legitimate one. Mary was not doubting God’s power but requesting further explanation like a good student in a classroom.

What was the answer from Gabriel to Mary? Look at verses 35 to 37. The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on 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 unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.”

The angel Gabriel kindly explained to Mary how she would become pregnant. Unlike the normal way of how a human baby is conceived, Mary would bear Jesus through the work of Holy Spirit. In this way Jesus could be fully divine and fully human. John chapter 1 states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”. Jesus who is the almighty God became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Although Jesus became fully human, Jesus was sinless unlike other humans. Hebrews 4:15 states, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet he did not sin.” Because Jesus was born through the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was not under the power of sin and death, so he was able to defeat the power of sin and death. As a result, Jesus became the first fruits of resurrection. Many people are skeptical about the virgin birth of Jesus, but we must remember that God is above all science and he created the whole universe and all the laws of nature. We can believe Mary’s virgin pregnancy when we accept God as our Creator who is almighty. Genesis 1:1 declares, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. In verse 37, the angel Gabriel also proclaimed, “no word from God will ever fail.”.

What was the response from Mary? Please read verse 38. “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her. Considering her circumstances, it must have been a really hard decision for Mary to accept God’s mission to become a mother of the Messiah. Accepting this mission could totally ruin her sweet dream of new marriage life. Mary was engaged to Joseph, and she was still a virgin because she and Joseph were still physically separated. If Joseph heard that Mary became pregnant, how would he react? According to Matthew 1:19, When Joseph found out Mary’s pregnancy, Joseph was going to divorce Mary quietly because he did not want to expose her to public disgrace. However, Joseph changed his mind after an angel of the Lord appeared to him in his dream. God helped Joseph and Mary keep their marriage. However, what was Mary going to do when the people of her town found out her pregnancy, which would be considered the consequence of adultery? She could be misunderstood and falsely accused by people and be stoned to death according to the Jewish law. However, Mary was ready to endure all misunderstanding, accusation, and judgement from people to carry out the privileged mission of God.

The angel Gabriel told her about many great things about Jesus, who would be her own son, but was that all her mission as the mother of Jesus would be about? We know that being a mother of Jesus Christ meant not only great blessing and privilege but also great suffering and hardship. Being a mother of even normal children is a difficult task, but it was especially a tough one to be the mother of Jesus. Later, Mary delivered Jesus in a stable where livestock animals were living because there was no guest room available for Mary and Joseph in the town of Bethlehem. When Jesus was growing up, Mary learned that Jesus was a very special child who became filled with God’s wisdom and grace. Mary was with her son when he performed the first miracle that changed water into wine in Cana of Galilee. Mary witnessed her son’s painful death on the cross. Jesus loved her mother until the last moment of his death on the cross and asked his disciple John to take care of her. A sculpture called Pieta in St Peter’s Basilica depicts Mary cradling the dead body of her son, Jesus. It shows not only Mary’s deep grief for the death of her son but also her submission to God’s will. Probably, the most heart-breaking moment that any mother can ever face would be the death of her own son. Although Mary, the mother of Jesus, is one of the most respected women by all Christians, her life was full of suffering and hardships. However, she was obedient and faithful to God and endured all her sorrow and pain as the mother of Jesus, so that Jesus was able to complete his work of redemption. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was the only human who was with Jesus from his birth to his death on earth. Mary was surely a blessed woman. May God raise up many women of faith like Mary who are fully obedient to God as his servant.

As God chose Mary, a normal teenage girl in a small country town, Nazareth in Galilee as his servant according to his sovereignty, we were also called by God to carry his mission to evangelize university campuses. We were chosen not because of our human backgrounds but because of his sovereignty. Do you remember the moment when you were called by God? Do you remember the time when you accepted God’s calling? When you accepted God’s invitation to his mission, did you understand what it really meant for you and your life? When I accepted God’s calling in my freshman year of college, I remember that I had a mixed feeling. On one hand I was joyful and thankful but on the other hand, I felt burdened for responsibilities as his servant. While living as God’s servant since then, there were moments of suffering and struggling, but God has been always faithful to his promise for me and his words never failed in my life. We are all favored by God and we have been called to be his servants according to his purpose. May God help all of us to be his faithful servants and may your words be fulfilled through our obedience.