

*UNEDITED DRAFT*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Today we continue to prepare our hearts for Jesus' coming as we consider the second appearance of an angel before the birth of Jesus. For four hundred years, God had not spoken to a prophet or done any miracles. It was more than 500 years since an angel appeared. Now, all of a sudden, surrounding the birth of Jesus there are a total of four appearances of angels. Clearly, something incredible and unprecedented is happening in human history.

Last week was all about anticipation: waiting for something that we desperately need. Zechariah and Elizabeth were waiting to have a child. But what they really needed was a Savior. They were given a son, and that son would prepare the world for what was truly needed the Savior.

Today we'll look at the appearance of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary. If last week's word was "anticipation," this week's word is "grace."

As we noted last week, Luke – the man who wrote this account – is a master historian. He doesn't interject his commentary or opinion or embellishments. You can almost hear the sound of a professional reporter in his tone. Listen:

**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.**

An angel appeared! To a virgin! Announcing a miraculous birth would take place! And Luke carefully reports only the facts. That exactly what he promised to do at the beginning of the book where he says: "**Since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account.**"

The facts are notable. "In the sixth month" refers to the 6 months of Elizabeth's pregnancy. We heard last week how God gave Zechariah and Elizabeth the promise that a son would be born to them in their old age – John the Baptist. Well, 6 months passed after that angel's appearance when this angel appears.

His name is Gabriel. Only two angels are mentioned by name in the Bible: Michael is who identified as an archangel – a sort of leader of angels – and Gabriel, who is a special messenger angel of God.

By the way, in the Bible, when you see a name ending in "el" the name includes something about God. "El-ohim" is the word for God. "Gabriel" means "God is my strength." Michael means "Who is like God?" Daniel means: "God is my judge." Nathaniel: "God has given." Samuel means "God has heard." Israel: "God strives. Contending with God. Wrestle + God."

So God sent Gabriel to Nazareth and he quickly adds (a town in Galilee). In Luke's day, no one had heard of the Galilee. To call it a town was a stretch... there simply was no Greek word for village. Archaeologists estimate the population was about 400 at the time of Jesus. No one had heard of it, so Luke has to also report the location of it. It was just a small, poor village supported primarily by agriculture. If you were God, is that the place you would have chosen for

the birth of your Son? For that matter, if you were making up a story about a great King, would you pick Nazareth for the setting? But the strange choices don't stop there.

The angel appeared to a virgin named Mary who was pledged to be married to a man named Joseph. Virgin means she was not yet married and that she had never had sexual relations with a man. We don't know how old she was. The pictures you see today make her look like a woman in her mid 20's or early 30's. But the cultural norm back then was for girls to get married when they were 13 or 14 years old. Plus, growing up in Nazareth Mary and Joseph would have been very poor... a fact confirmed by the sacrifice they bring when Jesus was presented at the temple. They gave two doves, which was not the typical offering... it was the exceptional offering allowed for those that were extremely poor. So here is an early teen, poor, small-town girl who has an angel appear to her with an incredible message.

Now all that is an educated guess about Mary. But how did Luke describe Mary? He didn't. He gave her name and that was all. Earlier in this chapter, he took time to describe Zechariah and Elizabeth. They were upright in the sight of the Lord and observed his commandments blamelessly. What about Mary? I don't know. Nothing is said about her. Why is nothing said about her? Because this story is not about Mary. Luke does not want us to give attention to Mary. This story is about Jesus. Luke wants all attention to go to Jesus. So we need to be careful when it comes to Mary. We need to know who she is. We need to honor her appropriately. But we also must be careful about going too far and not give her honor that belongs only to Jesus. So let's pay careful attention to what the angel says:

Here's what the angel said:

**The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you [to whom the Lord has shown kindness] who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."**

Some in history have translated this, "Mary, full of grace." What is implied is that Mary herself is a source of grace, and can dispense grace. But that's not a possible translation. The verb is passive. The angel said, "Greetings, you to whom the Lord has shown kindness." Mary was a recipient of God's kindness just like you and I are. Mary in no way deserved the kindness that was about to be announced, otherwise "favor" would not be the word to use. The angel would have to say, "Greetings you who are most worthy!" But he doesn't say that. Let's go on:

**Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.** This would not be a troubling or confusing greeting for someone that was holy and perfect. And by the angel's response we also know that Mary was frightened – the typical response of all human beings. If she was holy, she would have no fear. If she were holy, Gabriel's greeting would be an expected greeting. "Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you." "Yes, yes, he is. And yes, yes I am highly favored. So what can I do for you Gabriel?" But that's not how it went down!

All of this to say: Mary is certainly to be honored by us as the mother of our Lord. But it was an honor she was not worthy of... an honor bestowed on her purely by God's grace and God's choice. She herself was a sinner... which she herself acknowledges a few verses later when she acknowledges that this baby would be God *her* Savior. She needed forgiveness and God's rescue more than anything else!

Now, I've already done a great disservice to this text by spending too much time talking about Mary, because she is not at all the focus here, as we will see from the angel's announcement. But we do we give Mary more attention than is right? Reverence, adoration, praise, prayers, requests... Mary would be greatly offended to know people give her those every

day. She would correct them, “It’s not me, it’s my son! Look to him! Trust him! Pray to him! He is the one who gives you access to the Father, not me!”

Okay, let’s continue and give proper focus. Gabriel continues:

**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.”**

There is the heart of the matter! It’s not about the mother, it’s about the Son who would be born. And so much is revealed about this Son! All the important details about his person and work are included here.

- 1) Mary would **give birth** to the Son. In other words, he is the son of a woman. In other words, this son of Mary would be true man. In our second lesson today we learned why that is so important. As true man Jesus would be under the law. In other words, he would be obliged to keep the whole law of God just as we are obliged to keep the whole law of God. God was sending a Savior and a Substitute to do what we cannot. But he actually did have to do it or he would not be a suitable substitute. He was true man.
- 2) This son’s name would be **Jesus**. Jesus means “The Lord Saves.” It’s the same as the old testament name Joshua. It was a name describing the work this Son would perform. He would save people from their sins.
- 3) He will be great and will be called **Son of the Most High**. In other word, he would be true God. Being the Son of the Most High God, he is the same essence as the Most High God. “All the fullness of the Deity (godhead) lives in bodily form.” This child was not just man but true God from eternity. As true God, the blood he would shed would be sufficient payment for the sins of the world.
- 4) He would be a **king**. Throne of his father David. Reign in the house of Jacob forever. Kingdom no end.

And now the wrap up:

**“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”**

Note: Mary’s response is not: This can’t be true! Rather it is, how will this happen? Mary knew a thing or two about the birds and the bees. She knew how pregnancies happened, and she knew it was impossible for her to get pregnant. She had never been with a man. So she’s looking for an explanation. And that’s what she receives.

**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.**

In short, it would be a miracle. The conception of this child that would happen inside her would be a miracle worked by God himself. There would be no human male involved.

And to bolster her strength, the angel says:

**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.”**

God gives Mary a hook for her faith. Elizabeth was pregnant by a miracle from God. So Mary’s pregnancy was not something too difficult for God either. Nothing is impossible with God.

And finally, the response of faith:

**“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.”  
Then the angel left her.**

Mary believed the Lord. As unlikely as it seemed, and as huge the implications this would have for life: Mary believed.

I told you at the beginning, today’s word is grace. Mary received it. A poor, lowly, undistinguished, engaged, sinful young woman from nowhere received special favor from God as he chose her to be the mother of the Lord. And that same grace belongs to you and me. We are spiritually bankrupt, unimpressive, poor performers, nothing to offer God. We should be written off as insignificant. But God chose you to bestow grace upon you. How do I know? Because you’re here. You’re listening. And God is speaking to you today. He’s telling you that you are highly favored by God. So highly favored, that he sent his Son to you too. His son lived for you and died for you. His Son rose from the dead so you would know that you are forgiven and that grace truly is yours. The Holy Spirit has also come upon you to create something inside of you – new life; faith! God’s undeserved favor – grace – is yours too. It’s yours because that baby Jesus was born of the lowly Virgin Mary. Her Savior. My Savior. Your Savior. Go today knowing God’s grace goes with you! And with his grace always comes peace and joy.

Amen.