

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Favored and Called of God

by Dan Trygg

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from 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. And the virgin's name was Mary.²⁸ And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!'"

Luke 1:26-28

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,⁴ even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him. In love⁵ predestining us for adoption through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,⁶ unto the praise of His glorious grace, which He graced us in the Beloved One."

Ephesians 1:3-6

As I was reading through the story of Gabriel's visit to Mary, I was struck by the parallels in her life and the life of every believer. Often people let their imaginations run wild concerning who Mary was, what she was like, and how special and significant she must have been. Much of that is mere speculation, not being stated anywhere in the text, or in any of the ensuing NT documents. It would appear that Mary was simply a devout young Jewess, a peasant woman, not anyone significant in her own right. Nevertheless, *she was the one whom the Lord chose for the purpose of bearing His Son into this world.* She and Joseph were chosen to nurture, instruct and care for this Child from heaven, until He was called to His mission. I don't want to take anything away from these two courageous and godly individuals, whom the Lord chose for this monumental and important task, but, as I read the story of Mary's visitation by the angel, I was impressed by how we are all called in a similar fashion to follow the Lord's purpose for our lives. Allow me to share these observations with you, and make some comments as we go along.

The first statement that the angel Gabriel made to Mary was a declaration of her "favored status".

"...and entering toward her, [the angel] said, 'Greetings, one having been favored (lit., "having been graced"), the Lord ('is' or 'be') with you.'" As you can see from the more primitive and literal translation I made from the Greek, the angel used a verbal form of the word for "grace" or "unmerited favor". The significance of this word is that it states that the favor which God had for her had nothing whatever to do with her performance. This word talks of grace or favor shown to someone who has not earned it. It is unmerited, unearned. She did not deserve what God was going to do in her life. The other thing about this particular verbal form is that it implies favor which God had determined toward her at some point in the past that has ongoing effect. In other words, He has favored her, and His attitude was still the same toward her. If what I am saying is accurate, ...that she had not really done something heroic, ...or that she was not some super-spiritual person that could have felt that God was obliged to work on her behalf because of her super-righteous life..., then her puzzlement at this greeting makes more sense (vs. 29). She did not see herself as better than others, or more deserving of God's attention and favor. That is why this greeting was puzzling. Remember, she was a young woman, maybe as young as 14-16 years of age. She had not yet made her mark in the world. She had not shown herself to be anyone outstanding, or dramatically different. She was probably still being tucked into bed by her mother and father. Her days were probably spent at home, doing household chores with her mom and other women. She had not lived long enough, or done anything, to deserve what the angel was about to tell her. Yet, the angel declared, "You are having been shown grace by God."

Did you know that the same word is applied to us? In Ephesians, Paul writes about how God determined ahead of time that those who would be in Christ would be set apart to Him and would be adopted into His family. Why? Because of His great love, ...not something we have done to earn special privileges. All of this showcases His grace, which He freely bestowed upon us (lit., "He graced us" – vs. 6). In other words, **all of us who have come to Christ have been recipients of the unearned favor of God.** The angel could say to each one of us, just as he did to Mary, "Greetings, one having been favored, the Lord is with you." Of course, that is what "grace" means, "undeserved favor". God showed His graciousness to us by sending Jesus for us. We had not done anything to deserve that. Quite the contrary, we were enemies of God, sinners in rebellion and disregard of Him (Rom. 5:8-10).

The second declaration of the angel was the phrase, "the Lord is with you". The word "is" is not actually there, so the phrase could be understood as referring either to the present, or to the future ("the Lord will be with you"), or even as a declaration, "the Lord be with you". Again, Mary's reaction of fear and confusion indicates that she was not used to thinking of God being "with her". Who was she, after all?

In the same way, Jesus has told us that He would be with us all the days of our time on the earth (Matt. 28:18-20), and the Holy Spirit has expressly come to “be with [us] forever” (Jn. 14:16,17). Possibly we have become accustomed to those words, but *do we really believe they are true?* **Do we really know, trust and act as if God were with us as we live out each day?** If an angel appeared to us, and told us, “The Lord is with you”, would that surprise us? How would that knowledge affect the way we live?

The next phrase that the angel utters is, “Do not fear, for you have found grace with God.” This is a second assurance to Mary that she was in God’s favor. God was pleased with her, not because of any particular thing she had done, but because of *His magnanimous heart.* **The angel was saying, “Mary, God is for you.”**

In like manner, the NT declares to us repeatedly that God has shown His favor and grace to us. God wants us to know and be assured that *we* are favored by Him because of *His magnanimous heart, ...not* because of something *we* have done (Tit. 3:5-7; Eph. 2:8,9). **God is for you** (Rom. 8:28-32). **You do not have to fear Him, because He loves you, and has grace to cover your weaknesses and failings.**

The fourth statement to Mary is a declaration of what God intended to do with her. He lays it out for her. “You will conceive in your womb, and you will bear a son, and you will call His name Jesus. This One will be great. He will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of David His father. And He will reign upon the house of Jacob unto the ages, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” The angel basically told her that she would become the mother of the *next and greatest King of Israel.* **Note the future tense. These were not things Mary could see or understand from her current vantage point.** All she was able to see was what she had known to that point in her life. **How she could become the mother of the Messiah was certainly beyond comprehension.** Sure, she was from David’s lineage, but not from the family line of the kings (the genealogy in Lk. 3:23-37 is Mary’s, while that in Matt. 1:1-16 is Joseph’s), and Joseph did not seem to be harboring any political aspirations.

The prophetic statement by the angel would have stirred up all kinds of questions.

Often, when God approached people in the OT, He spoke words of destiny and calling. The first thing He said to Abraham was, “Leave your country, ...and go to the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation,...” (Gen. 12:1,2). When He appeared to Moses, He said, “I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people out of Egypt” (Ex. 3:10). When the angel approached Gideon, he said, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.” Then he proceeded to call Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites (Judg. 6:12-16). Samuel was sent to anoint David to be king, when he was but a shepherd boy (I Sam. 16). **In each case, there was no visible means by which God would be able to accomplish His great purpose through these people. They were, for the most part, just regular people.** In fact, **usually they were the most unlikely people you would expect God to call** to do these monumental tasks, yet He chose to use *them*. How about *you*? **What does God want to do with your life? The Bible says that He has plans for us** (Jer. 29:11). It also says that God is searching, looking for those whose hearts are fully committed to Him, so that He might show Himself powerfully through their lives (II Chron. 16:9).

The next thing uttered by Mary, ...which was also in the mind and upon the lips of these other people who were mightily used by God..., was a question, “How will these things be...?” Mary was a virgin. Was God talking about a future child she and Joseph would have, or was there some *other* plan? **She had to ask. Her response was a submissive questioning, not a doubt or a challenge to the angel.** Her uncle, Zacharias, had challenged this same angel, basically saying, “Show me a sign, so I will know this is true.” He was rebuked for his unbelief (cf. Lk. 1:18-20). **Mary’s response was more of a marveling, “God, how are You going to do this?” She did not doubt, but she was curious.**

We should not be surprised if we are judged as “a nobody” by the world, and yet God would call us to do great things. He *loves* to do that (I Cor. 1:26-31)! We should not *doubt*, but **it is natural to be curious. “Lord, how are You going to do this?”**

God’s response? “The Holy Spirit will come upon you.” Isn’t that the way God worked in the lives of the great heroes of faith? (Cf. Ex. 3:12; 4:12; Judg. 6:12,16; I Sam. 16:13.) Isn’t that really what it is all about? **We can’t do it, so God must empower us.** We can’t make it happen, but *God* can coordinate the events, introduce us to people, and give us what it takes to succeed in His plan. How else can you explain the incredible lives of the people in the Bible? Happy coincidences? No! **There is a God who empowers and guides His people. That God is available to you!!** The Holy Spirit is the promise of the Father for all of us who believe in Jesus (Acts 2:38,39; Gal. 4:4-7).

Finally, Mary responded in yielding faith, “Let it be to me as you have said.” Yielding faith is *not* the same as *passivity*, however. Often it means *stepping out* in a new direction, out of one’s comfort zone. For example, Abram had to leave all he was familiar with to find God’s will. **Like Mary, we must first yield to God’s calling. Then, as we diligently follow Him and His leading, He will cause His purpose for our lives to come to pass.**