

God's favored one

December 21, 2014

You might have been your parent's favorite because you were obedient, smart, and good looking. Or you might be the one who was not in the category of the favorite of your parents, your teachers, or your school friends, as a matter of fact, even your cat didn't like you.

If we tell the truth, we all would like to be someone's favorite and we want to be liked. But how about this? How would you like to be called by an angel of God that you have found favor with God? That would be totally cool, don't you think? It would be like having the ultimate "Get-out-of-Hell" card. But in reality, it had nothing to do with the person, rather everything to do with God.

Yes, as you can tell, we are going to learn more about one of the main characters of the Christmas nativity scene – Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Many people practically worship her and even pray to her as if she is God. But she is neither God nor the Messiah. And it is biblically wrong, no matter what their church head guy and rule insist. If she could, she would tell those people not to worship her, rather worship the One who deserves all of our praise, adoration, and worship – Jesus the Messiah.

A. A VISIT OF A HEAVENLY MESSENGER

Luke 1:26-38 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. 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." 34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" 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." 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.

Nazareth was a village seventy miles north of Jerusalem. It was a tough town, known for its corruption and low morals due to the Roman soldiers' garrison during this ancient time. When Karen and I toured Israel in 2002, it certainly was not the most memorable place. It was one of those "Hole in the wall" places, like Black Canyon City, Salome, and Mammoth, AZ. If you blink your eyes, you'd pass by them.

When angel Gabriel came and addressed to Mary, he had three things to say to Mary in v28:

1) She is highly favored.

2) The Lord is with her.

3) She is blessed.

All this was certainly true of Mary, who has the most unique privilege among any person to ever live. However, we must notice a very important point that we should not miss.

Mary was not favored because of her own virtue, rather God favored to choose her so that she could be the mother of Jesus. Listen, in God's selection of individuals for His work, it absolutely has everything to do with His sovereign will, and it absolutely has nothing to do with human godliness, intelligence, and capability.

Don't ever, ever, ever think that you are chosen by the Lord because of whatever you think you are good at. Please get that out of your head if you've been thinking in that way.

We find a rather old word that we no longer use in v27 – "betrothed", because the vast majority of people in the US in the 21st century don't go along with arranged marriage anymore. Its definition is "to arrange for the marriage of." Mary is to be betrothed to Joseph. That means that she is about to have a wedding soon with Joseph. Among the Jews at that time, the engagement was almost as binding as marriage and could be broken only by divorce. In fact, the man and the woman were called "husband" and "wife" even before the marriage took place. Since Jewish girls married young, it is likely that Mary was a teenager when the angel appeared to her.

What the Lord God asked Mary to do here through angel Gabriel was not an easy task. Nowadays a woman or young girl getting pregnant before her wedding would not bring any big news in town. But it was a completely different story.

You have to admit one thing: This girl Mary had a complete trust in the Lord that she was willing to take shame of being accused of the adulteress; being misunderstood by Joseph whom she loved; and being executed by a mob of people. Think about it, who would believe that this Mary has a Baby who is going to be their Messiah and she is having Him by the Holy Spirit. After all, they lived in Nazareth, a low moral town.

Mary knew exactly what the angel was talking about because she was a woman of the Word of God. When he said she will conceive in her womb and bring forth a Son, she knew he was quoting from Isaiah 7:14.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

The angel told her that the power of the Highest, the Holy Spirit, will overshadow her. The word 'overshadow' means "to cover with a cloud," like the cloud of Shekinah glory in the temple when king Solomon dedicated it to the Lord or the cloud of transfiguration Peter, James and John saw in the Mt. Hermon, a.k.a. the Mount of Transfiguration.

Mary then responds with an affirmation of faith. She was taking the risk of becoming known as an adulteress and shame to go with that for the rest of her life. "Let it be to me according to Your word" should be the proper response of every believer of Jesus.

Mormon people claimed that this is when God had a sex with Mary and she was pregnant with Jesus. That is a crude and ignorant theology that came from Joseph Smith was a pedophile and a polygamist. Even the New York Times, which tends to be anti-Christianity, did a report on Joseph Smith, who took as many as 40 wives, some already married to other men and one only 14 years old.

B. THE BIRTH OF THE MESSIAH

Luke 2:4-20 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke 2:17-20 Now when they [the shepherds] had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Nine months after the initial visit by the angel Gabriel, the time came for the Messiah to be born, but not in a clean and plush palace surrounded by royalties, rather in a dark, dirty, and smelly cave that was turned into a stable and surrounded by the shepherds who were considered as bottom feeders of society, and animals.

I read a book, "God came near" by one of my favorite authors, Max Lucado. There is a chapter that was titled "Mary's Prayer". I will read it to you:

God. O infant-God. Heaven's fairest Child.
Conceived by the union of divine grace with our disgrace.
Sleep well.

Sleep well. Bask in the coolness of this night bright with diamonds.
Sleep well, for the heat of anger simmers nearby.
Enjoy the silence of the crib,
for the noise of confusion rumbles in Your future.
Savor the sweet safety of my arms, for a day is soon coming
when I cannot protect You.

Rest well, tiny hands. For though You belong to a King,
You will touch no satin, own no gold.
You will grasp no pen, guide no brush.
No, Your tiny hands are reserved for works more precious:
to touch a leper's open wound,
to wipe a widow's weary tear,
to claw the ground of Gethsemane.

Your hands, so tiny, so white
– clutched tonight in an infant's fist.
They aren't destined to hold a scepter nor wave from a palace balcony.
They are reserved instead for a Roman spike
that will staple them to a Roman cross.

Sleep deeply, tiny eyes. Sleep while You can.
For soon the blurriness will clear
and You will see the mess we have made of Your world.
 You will see our nakedness, for we cannot hide.
 You will see our selfishness, for we cannot give.
 You will see our pain, for we cannot heal.
O eyes that will see hell's darkest pit and witness her ugly prince...
Sleep, please sleep; sleep while You can.

Lie still, tiny mouth. Lie still, mouth from which eternity will speak.
Tiny tongue that will soon summon the dead,
 that will define grace,
 that will silence our foolishness.
Rosebud lips – upon which ride a starborn kiss of forgiveness
to those who believe You, and of death to those who deny You – lie still.

And tiny feet cupped in the palm of my hand, rest.
For many difficult steps lie ahead for You.
 Do You taste the dust of the trails You will travel?
 Do You feel the cold seawater upon which You will walk?
 Do You wince at the invasion of the nail You will bear?
 Do You fear the steep descent down
 the spiral staircase into satan's domain?

Rest, tiny feet.
Rest today so that tomorrow You might walk with power.
Rest. For millions will follow in Your steps.

And little heart... holy heart... pumping the blood of life
through the universe: How many times will we break You?
 You'll be torn by the thorns of our accusations.
 You'll be ravaged by the cancer of our sin.
 You'll be crushed under the weight of Your own sorrow.
 And You'll be pierced by the spear of our rejection.

Yet in that piercing,
in that ultimate ripping of muscle and membrane,
in that final rush of blood and water, You will find rest.
Your hands will be freed, Your eyes will see justice,
Your lips will smile, and Your feet will carry You home.

And there You'll rest again this time
in the embrace of Your Father.

C. APPLICATIONS

1) If the Lord leads to take a risk in faith, take it. Because without risk, there is no faith.

2) People can abuse, commercialize, even ignore the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ. The earthly life of Jesus is the greatest display of God's love. Those who accepted Jesus into their hearts will enjoy His love in heaven, those who reject Him will embrace the judgment of their choice in hell.

3) If you are a born-again Christian, you're favored by the Lord; He is with you; and you're blessed among people. It has nothing to do with you, but it has everything to do with the Lord, His grace, mercy, and love. If you must, boast in the Lord.