



MARY Christmas – TouchPoint for December 16, 2020

Luke 1:26-38 *In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.”*

But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Hail, favored one. The Lord is with you.” And, “Your relative Elizabeth... has also conceived a son.”

Wow! What an incredible thing to hear. The Lord is with you. The Lord has found favor with you. Who wouldn't want that?!

But then, as Paul Harvey would say, there is the “Rest of the story.”

“You Mary, are so favored by God, and God is going to be so with you, that you are going to be 14 years old, unmarried, and pregnant.”

You know, I wonder if Mary's first thought wasn't, 'If this is what being favored means...Remind me not to get on God's bad side.’’

And yet, there is something powerful in being regarded, in being favored. After all, it's not something the world actually showers you with. In fact, the world and especially our society frowns against it. You don't just show favor on someone for no reason. In fact, you don't even show favor on them when they show up and try something new. I mean, just for the fun of it... when you are all gathered together for your Christmas meal, throw out the words, “Participation trophy” and see what kind of reaction you get...

OK. Don't do that – this is supposed to be the season of “peace on earth, good will to all.”

“Hail, favored one. The Lord is with you!”

These words are first spoken to one who is **NOT** highly regarded by her society. She is basically a piece of

property to be traded from one man, her father, to another, her future husband. It would be a hard stretch to say that a young teenage girl, living in first century Palestine, is someone that is favored.

And yet, here are the words, *“Hail, favored one. The Lord is with you!”*

There is something over and over again in the Biblical story that just won't go away. And that is that this God of ours won't stop blessing, favoring, choosing people who just don't seem to deserve it. From Abraham and Sarah, to Jacob and his wives and mistresses, to Moses the murderer, David the rapist, Peter the denier, and Paul the persecutor. This list goes on and on. One right after another God seems to favor and be with those who by any sort of standard, should be on the bottom of the list rather than the top.

God chooses. God looks with favor upon. God chooses to be with those who the world lightly regards. In fact, this is where God seems to do God's best work. In and through these people. These are the people who live out of God's promise. These are the people through whom God chooses to tell His story of love and grace. These are the people God chooses to bear and give birth to his saving grace in our world. This is what makes this story so powerful. It never comes in the way you expect. It never comes by the people you expect. It never comes through the means you expect.

This is why the Lutheran tradition has never been big on inerrant, infallible leaders or books. It isn't that Lutherans don't think God can't make things inerrant or infallible – it's just that the biblical story doesn't point to that. You see, if the only way God can communicate to the world is through inerrant and infallible people or their writings, then what chance is there for you or me to be communicators of God's grace?

If the only way God can communicate to the world is through inerrant and infallible people or their writings, then what chance is there for you or me to have Christ born in and through us this Christmas season? I will tell you. Zero. None. Zip. Nada.

And that is the point of this after all isn't it? That this one who was born in and to Mary also be born in and to us.

That this one who chooses to take on flesh in Mary and the person of Jesus also takes on flesh in us.

If all this season is about is some baby in some far away land who came to be in a miraculous way and you have to believe it or else, what good is it. If the Christmas story isn't a continuous story that still happens to this day in you and me and in the birth of every child, then we are a sad lot.

To use words from John's gospel about the Christmas story: If the Word does not continue to 'become flesh and dwell among us' then we have nothing more than a dead faith.

Why is Mary important to remember, especially at this time of year? Because she is you and me! And we are her! We are all Mary! And maybe what we need to have is a MARY CHRISTMAS rather than a Merry Christmas.

We go about our lives, sometimes difficult, sometimes smooth. We go about our lives, sometimes joyful and sometimes painful. We go about our lives with little regard from the world. In fact, we are most appreciated by society when we don't make waves and stay below the radar.

And then, from out of nowhere come the words,

“Hail, favored one. The Lord is with you!”

And not only that, but you have been chosen to carry and give birth to the Christ in your world...in your community...in your circle of fellowship.

And so, it isn't just the Christ child being born in us. We are being born into something new. Mary is born into something new. Mary is changed in the process. She doesn't stay the same. So too with us. We do not stay the same as bearers of the Christ. We can't stay the same. The Mystery is giving birth to us as bearers of the Christ. We are born anew, born again. So, Christmas isn't just about the birth of the Christ child, but about a new birth for us. A birth of us becoming Mary.

How can this be? Who am I? It sounds a lot like Mary in the gospel reading for today... or Moses at the burning bush.

We are always so sure God doesn't have it quite right. We are always so sure we need to point a few things out to God about our inadequacies. After all, we are either too young or too old. Too new to this or too set in our ways. We are after all, neither inerrant nor infallible. And certainly, there must be someone else better suited.

And again, the words come, *“Hail, favored one. The Lord is with you!”* And in addition, *“your relative Elizabeth.”* So not only is the Lord with you, but your relatives as well...which would really send me over the edge because I know my relatives.

And that's probably why the angel Gabriel needed to add, *“For nothing will be impossible with God.”* Because while I may have a sliver of hope that I am still redeemable, my relatives are a whole other story.

There is something over and over again in the Biblical story that just won't go away. And that is that this God of ours won't stop blessing, favoring, choosing people who just don't seem to deserve it. From Abraham and Sarah, to Jacob and his wives and mistresses, to Moses, David, Peter and Paul. This list goes on and on. And today you are reminded once again that your name is on that list.

Here in this meal we hear the good news that God has favored us with his body and blood.

Here in this meal we take in the presence of Christ and he is born in us.

Here in this meal we become Marys to the world, bearing the Christ out into our communities.

In the Lukan story, Mary's name is not mentioned in the original greeting. Our brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic tradition have added her name and made famous the phrase, *“Hail, Mary, full of grace (or 'favored one'). The Lord is with you.”*

I like the idea of adding the name. For these are words that are not just meant for Mary, but for you and me.

So *“Hail, (insert your name here), full of grace. The Lord is with you.”*

And may you have a MARY CHRISTMAS.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

Be Still, know that I am God

Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel

O, Come, O, Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel. That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Of the Father's Love Begotten

Of the Father's love begotten, Ere the worlds began to be, He is Alpha and Omega,

He the source, the ending He. Of the things that are, that have been,

And that future years shall see, Evermore and evermore!

O that birth forever blessed, When the virgin, full of grace,

By the Spirit blessed conceiving, Bore the Savior of our race; And the Babe, the world's Redeemer,

First revealed His sacred face, evermore and evermore!

Let the heights of heaven adore Him; Angel hosts, His praises sing; Powers, dominions, bow before Him, and extol our God and King! Let no tongue on earth be silent, Every voice in concert ring, Evermore and evermore!

Christ, to You with God the Father, Spirit blessed eternally, Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving, And unending praises be: Honor, glory, and dominion, And eternal victory, Evermore and evermore! Amen.

The Meal

Lo, How a Rose E're Blooming

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming. From tender stem has sprung! Of Jesse's lineage coming, As those of old have sung. It came, a blossom bright, Amid the cold of winter, When half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, The Rose I have in mind; With Mary we behold it, The virgin mother kind. To show God's love aright, She bore to us a Savior, When half spent was the night.

This Flow'r, whose fragrance tender. With sweetness fills the air, Dispels with glorious splendor The darkness everywhere. It came, a blossom bright, Amid the cold of winter, When half spent was the night.

Benediction

For Unto Us a Child Is Born

For unto us a child is born, Unto us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

