



Luke 1:29–33

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 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, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s de-

scendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.’

Reflection

Our passage today follows on from yesterday’s. Let me read them both together to you. Luke 1:26–33,

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.’ 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of

greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 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, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.’

Luke began his biography of Jesus Christ with the story of Zechariah, a priest serving in the Temple in Jerusalem. On the greatest day of Zechariah’s life, the day he was chosen by lot to burn incense in the Holy Place in the inner sanctum of the Temple – a once in a lifetime opportunity – on that

day, Zechariah's faith had failed him. He was burning incense at the altar in the holiest place in all of Jerusalem, behind the curtain in that room stood the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat understood to house the presence of God, making that room the very intersection between heaven and earth. The angel Gabriel appears and announces the coming of the Messiah and the coming of a child who'll prepare the way for the Messiah, a child to be born to his wife Elizabeth in her old age. There could have been no greater news for Zechariah in his public or private life, as God in his infinite grace bends to bless the world and bless this faithful elderly couple. And yet, in the greatest moment of his life and his faith combined, Zechariah doubted.

Today we find a young teenage girl from a remote country town in exactly the same situation. Her name is Mary, and she is about to become the mother of God. Now if you're of good Protestant stock the phrase I just mentioned most likely set off alarm bells. So much controversy rages over the place and function of Mary in the Christian religion. But it was the early church, before the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant divides, who took to calling Mary *theotokos*, which is Greek for 'Mother of God'. This term in its original usage did not call attention to Mary's greatness, and it certainly didn't mean that Jesus derived his deity from her! It simply means that the child she bore is God incarnate. This woman had the most holy task of any woman in history.

And so we move from the Holy Place in the Temple in Jerusalem to the lowly home of Mary whom God in his sovereignty bends to bless. Gabriel's greeting in the original language is filled not with merit but with grace,

‘Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.’

‘Chaire kecharitomene.’ Chairōs, the word for grace repeated and alliterated. Not merit but grace. God in his sovereignty bends to bless not a priest in the Temple in Jerusalem but an uneducated peasant farm girl to whom God gives the most holy task of any woman in history. And here we have right from the outset the Gospel in action. God's unmerited favour richly bestowed on a nobody, like you and I. From

nothing to the woman with the holiest task in history. From a sinner destined to darkness, to unimpeachable holiness and eternity with God in heaven. Not by any merit on our own part; only through God's amazing grace.

Zechariah had been filled with fear at the angel's appearance. Mary experiences the same. Verse 29,

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

The customary angelic phrase follows,

'Do not be afraid, Mary,

Angels always say that in the Bible be-

cause (forget Cupid) they're supernatural warrior-messengers, members of the armies of the Lord. In other words, they're fearsome. So after the requisite 'Do not be afraid', Gabriel continues,

'... you have found favour with God.

That word 'grace' again. Three times in two sentences. Just in case we missed it.

And then the pronouncement that would give Mary the most holy task of any woman in history.

31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 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, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.'

Since Genesis 3 and God's promise to set the world right again by sending one who would crush Satan and remove his taint from the world, the Messiah (or 'Christ' in the Greek), God's anointed king, had been promised. Thousands of years in the waiting, every few hundred years prophets speaking about him, building greater expectations and a clearer picture of the one to come. For instance, a thousand years earlier, the prophet Nathan, said these words to King David,

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed

you ruler over my people Israel. ... Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth ... “The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: 12 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. 13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. 14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son ... my love will never be taken away from him ... 16 Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.” 2 Sam 7:5–16 (abridged)

David, another humble peasant farmer, that God lavished with his grace. And now one thousand years later God's promise to David and to the entire world is about to be fulfilled, through Mary. Verse 32,

32 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, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.'

The one promised to Adam and Eve (Gen 3), to Moses (Deut 18), to David (2 Sam 7) and all the prophets of old; the Suffering Servant (Isa 52–53), the prophet like Moses (Deut 18), the one who would reign on the throne of David forever (2 Sam 7),

God's holy one, the Messiah (Dan 9), the one through whom the whole world will be blessed (Gen 12), the Son of the Most High God (Ps 2) will be born not to a king and queen in a palace in Jerusalem but to a farm girl and a carpenter from a small rural town of even smaller regard.

Think & Pray

Meditate over humility and grace this morning. Think of God choosing Mary. Think of God choosing you. Think of the holy task you've been given just as God bent down to give Mary hers.

Humility flows from grace. But so does great joy. Humility because we've received God's lavish and completely unmerited kindness – something we could never

earn or deserve, given to us as a free gift. And joy too flows from grace; when grace properly sinks in. Because grace means that there is nothing you can do to make God love you more; and nothing you can do to make him love you any less. Let me say that again. Grace means that there is nothing you can do to make God love you more; and nothing you can do to make him love you any less. Meditate over that thought for a moment. And then close in prayer however you are led today by the Holy Spirit.