

Pastor's Message – 12/24/23
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 1:46-55

Throughout this 4-week season of Advent, we have witnessed the light of God's grace in Zechariah's hope, in Isaiah's peace and in Elizabeth's joy. Now on this fourth Sunday of Advent, we consider how the light of grace shines with love in the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Mary's story is unlike the other stories we have heard this Advent. She did not come from a prestigious family of priests like Zechariah or Elizabeth. She had no prophetic gifts or eloquence like Isaiah. She had no pedigree of any kind. We also learn that Mary was poor. After Jesus' birth, when it was time for Mary's rite of purification, she did not make the sacrificial offering of a lamb, as those of more means could afford, but offered instead from the option of the poor—a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. And even though she was engaged to a man whose lineage could be traced back to King David, that man, Joseph, was just a simple carpenter from Nazareth. In a world where all things of distinction and power and wealth seem to matter, Mary has none of that. She is a humble, poor, and lowly young woman.

Mary's story begins while she is still living at home with her family as a young virgin. The light of God's amazing grace would shine upon her. The angel Gabriel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." This greeting calls Mary "favored one"—one full of grace!

Mary is troubled and fearful. She did not understand what sort of greeting this might be. And in the midst of this moment of grace, Mary pondered.

We should not mistake Mary's pondering for distrust. She faithfully receives the promise of grace that she has been chosen as a "favored one." Her pondering is always a sign of her faith seeking deeper understanding. As we will see, Mary's pondering is characteristic of her story. She seeks to understand the word of God for her life—and for the lives of others, not the least of which is the life of her own son, Jesus.

Seeking to calm her troubled spirit, the angel says, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." There's that word of Amazing Grace again – our theme for this entire year!

The angel continues, "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" (Luke 1:31-33).

But Mary is not done pondering. She asks a question, a question that needs an answer—a *good news* answer: *How can this be, since I am a virgin? (Luke 1:34).*

Indeed, how will God's gracious Son of promise be conceived—and particularly in the womb and life of this humble, lowly, poor, young virgin?

Gabriel does not deny her an answer. "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"

(Luke 1:35-37).

Did Mary grasp all of this? Did she connect the significance of her yet-to-be-born child, Jesus, with the audacious claim that “nothing will be impossible with God”? (Luke 1:37).

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
 Would one day walk on water?
 Mary, did you know that your baby boy
 Would save our sons and daughters?
 Did you know that your baby boy
 Has come to make you new?
 This child that you delivered, will soon deliver you

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
 Will give sight to a blind man?
 Mary, did you know that your baby boy
 Will calm the storm with his hand?
 Did you know that your baby boy
 Has walked where angels trod?
 When you kiss your little baby
 You kiss the face of God
 Oh Mary, did you know?

Oh, Mary, did you know?
 Mary, did you know?

The blind will see, the deaf will hear
 The dead will live again
 The lame will leap, the dumb will speak
 The praises of the Lamb

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
 Is Lord of all creation?
 Mary, did you know that your baby boy
 Would one day rule the nations?
 Did you know that your baby boy
 Is heaven's perfect Lamb?
 That sleeping child you're holding is the great, I Am.
 Mary, did you know?

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Jesus' name means “God saves” or “God makes a saving place.” And Jesus will make a saving place in the life of Mary and in the lives of us all. And as we trust that this promise of

grace is “making a place” in our own lives, we trust that “nothing will be impossible with God.” The light of Jesus’ gracious love will go far beyond all our limited imagination and pondering.

God and sinners get reconciled in this light of Jesus’ gracious love. Sin, death, and the judgment of the law are conquered by this light of Jesus’ gracious love. Upon all that brings darkness upon this world, Jesus’ gracious light of love will shine.

Jesus’ light of love shines upon a powerless humanity trapped in the darkness of powers and principalities beyond their control. Jesus’ light of love overcomes all the hatred, prejudice, and ruthless indifference with regard to the lowly. Jesus’ light of love overcomes the darkness of death and judgment. All the darkness that seems to reign over our lives is overcome by Jesus’ love that will now reign. Nothing, absolutely nothing, will be impossible from all the grace that comes from this light of love found in the little Lord Jesus.

For all of her pondering in life, Mary, whose name means “beloved,” will find favor forever. Her child Jesus, the light of love, will give her and each one of us a new name in the light of heaven. There we will be called “beloved.” There the light of Jesus’ love will grant us grace eternally.

His mercy is for those who honor him from generation to generation (Luke 1:50).

The promise of God through, Jesus, brings mercy to one and all. His light of love keeps shining for us. The mercy mission of Jesus continues even today, as it has for over two thousand years since his birth and for thousands of years before. For his loving mercy is “from generation to generation.” And through all time and through all generations, Jesus, the child of Mary, is the everlasting child of love who brings Amazing Grace to all.