

The Wonder of Christmas - Unexpected Favor

You can't look at the wonder of Christmas and not talk about this moment that God showed His unexpected favor to a fairly unknown, young lady.

The wonder is in the why, in the how, in the when, in the where...and in the who. And we can all relate to the who. This girl named Mary. Somehow, God chooses her to be used for His purpose.

We relate with Mary because somehow God chooses us for His purpose.

But have you ever known God to force His will upon someone? Have you ever seen Him make someone say yes?

God chooses people but then there is a requirement for us to say yes in order to be used.

Do you want God to use you?

If so you need to realize - your role will be affected by your response.

Christmas is about what God has done. But what God did involved human response. There is no real Christmas story that does not involve the process by which God comes to people and act on their response.

When God shows unexpected favor to Mary, in her response we discover how to be used by God.

Luke 1:26-27 (NKJV)

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.

God sent a messenger angel to a small town in Galilee.

Not Jerusalem. Not Jericho. But to Nazareth. A small town on a hill in the mountains of the Middle East. It's almost like choosing St. Elmo or Brownstown instead of NY or LA.

But not only does Gabriel go to this little hilltop town, he goes to this young unknown girl...a virgin named Mary who was betrothed to a man named Joseph. It is similar to being engaged...but more binding. It was generally a 6 to 12 month period before the wedding, in which they were often referred to as husband and wife...and could only be separated by divorce. And they were not to have sexual intimacy...as such, Mary was a virgin. So it's rather untimely to become pregnant. It's socially scandalous.

Why was the angel Gabriel here? God sent him.

The work of God appears to be...
Wrong place. Wrong people. Wrong timing.

So the first thing we learn about How to be Used by God

Don't expect God's work to fit our expectations.

We develop lots of ideas about the way things are supposed to be... what is usual...what we can expect. We expect our life stories to play out according to what others have defined...what we want... what we are comfortable with.

How many of us assume that our lives are not part of a grand story...of any work of eternal meaning. We may dream about it...live vicariously through some drama...but our lives feel routine... mundane.

But God is NOT going to be bound by our narrow comfort and expectations.

If we want to be used by God... we have to understand that God's work will not always fit our expectations.

We will have to look at Mary...and learn as she did...that the work of God ...

May not be easy for others to understand.

May be untimely.

May bring hardship... and heartache.

Luke 1:26-28 (NKJV)

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.

We don't know what Mary was doing when this encounter took place...all we know is that her initial reaction is fear. She was troubled.

I can see why. She's over washing some laundry or something and a presence invades her space...someone sent by God who knows her by name! Don't act like you'd be chill if it were you!

She's being confronted by God. Is He for me or against me? Am I being judged or blessed?

It turns out, she's being favored. Unexpected favor.

Do you know why she was chosen? Do you know what the bible says about it? Nothing.

There's no specific reason we are told. It's NOT because Mary was something special. She was just a girl. She wasn't perfect. She was human. She wasn't anymore worthy to be the mother of Jesus than any of you ladies here. She needed a savior just like all of us.

This wasn't about her qualities...it's about God's purpose...and He showed her favor.

It's the same for you and me. It's not about you...what you have to offer. God has unexpected favor for your life. He wants to use YOU. Not because of what you can do...but because of His purpose for your life!

But like Mary...to move forward with Jesus, you have to move beyond fear. Fear of the supernatural. Fear of the unknown. Fear of surrender. Fear of the time, place, people not being "right" in the eyes of man.

We will never serve the grace of God by hiding in fear.

Many of us are still a bit in hiding mode. We are not really sure we want God to see us. It feels a little safer there.

No you are not deserving...but finding favor with God begins when you are exceedingly aware that you should not be.

God is calling us each out... out from fear...into living in the work of his favor.

Luke 1:31-35 (NKJV)

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.

No big deal...God's work doesn't fit your expectations, and you have to move past the fear, but hey...God's going to do something through you that's never been done before.

You'll have a Son and name Him Jesus.

What a name! **The Lord Is Salvation!**

He's going to be the Savior. He's going to rule a Kingdom. His reign will not end.

He will be the Son of the Most High...Son of God...God will be the source of His conception.

In the midst of this, Mary responds with a question. "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

Mary knows what is normally possible and what is not. She's thinking "virgin" and "birth" don't usually go together.

And the angel explains it will be the very Spirit of God at work.

Church, it's always the Spirit of God at work. In the creation of every life. In the unexpected. In the favor of God. In every miracle. In every transformation. Every healing. Every deliverance. Every blessing.

Man and woman may do the scientific work, but it's God who creates life. He puts the breath and heartbeat in that creation. He puts the spirit and soul in that body.

We have to trust in God's Spirit to work beyond the natural.

We all will wonder...how am I suppose to be used by God? Not by my limited nature. I can do some good things...but I am only one person...only bear so much influence?

God not only agrees...Jesus told his own disciples not to go out into the world until the Holy Spirit came and empowered them. That Spirit will fill them...with God's desires... and confidence...and guide them.

Sometimes it can be a lot to take in...and I'm sure it was a lot for Mary to take in...There is no way she can understand how all this is possible.

Luke 1:36-37 (NKJV)

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."

God knows it is hard to join a reality no one else shares.

So he lets her know...you are part of a larger story...You Are Not Alone.

Her and her cousin Elizabeth have each been approached with the impossible.

Elizabeth is old and barren... Mary is likely around 15 years old...hasn't even begun her marriage.

So they couldn't be much more different...but they've both been shown favor. They are both being used by God. They are both part of a MUCH bigger story that they can't even begin to understand...

We have to realize that we are one piece of a beautiful picture. It's not about us...it's about Jesus!

We may think the others in the story are dealing with something different. Their story is just not the same. But we will find that they share something vital...they share the reality of God at work.

If we want to be used by God...we will find that there is a deeply personal dimension... but there is also a shared dimension. On one level it is ultimately personal...but never entirely. We were created as individuals...but never to be isolated.

Luke 1:38 (NKJV)

Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

What a statement. It may be the most defining statement at the heart of the events we call Christmas.

Between "How can this be?" and "Let it be" the impossible becomes a reality, the never before heard of will forever be spoken of, and the veil between divinity and humanity has fallen.

With these words the way is made for God to enter our world.

With these words God the Son...who will bear the name Jesus.. comes as savior.

This is the Incarnation... which means the becoming of flesh...God became flesh.

This is not God indwelling flesh...but God becoming flesh.

John 1:14 - The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

What will it take for you to accept the unexpected favor of God today? It's The Wonder of Christmas. That God would choose you. That He has a plan for you.

- It won't fit into your expectations.
- You'll never reach it while hiding in fear.
- Do you trust the Spirit to work beyond the natural?

- You're part of a bigger story...and you are not alone.

Can you move from "How can it be?" to "Let it be"