

**Luke 1:26-38 CEV An Angel Tells about the Birth of Jesus**

<sup>26</sup> One month later (after Elizabeth had hidden her pregnancy for five months) God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee <sup>27</sup> with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. <sup>28</sup> The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed (lit., favoured)! The Lord is with you."

<sup>29</sup> Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. <sup>30</sup> Then the angel told Mary, "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, <sup>31</sup> and you'll have a son. His name will be Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He'll be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. <sup>33</sup> He'll rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end."

<sup>34</sup> Mary asked the angel, "How can this happen? I'm not married!"

<sup>35</sup> The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God's power will come over you. So your child will be called the holy Son of God. <sup>36</sup> Your relative Elizabeth is also going to have a son, even though she's old. No one thought she could ever have a baby, but in three months she'll have a son. <sup>37</sup> Nothing is impossible for God!"

<sup>38</sup> Mary said, "I'm the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you've said." And the angel left her.

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Last week we were thinking about being sent like John, the baptising witness, to point to the light of the world, to point to Jesus. The theme of sending continues in today's reading from Luke.

God sends the angel Gabriel to Nazareth with a message for Mary. The message for Mary is she's to be the mother of a very special baby.

If we put the details of this reading into the format of John 3:16 it would sound like this. God loved the world so much, he sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a woman named Mary, who was engaged to be married to Joseph, to tell her she was going to be the mother of God's only Son, who'd give eternal salvation and life to all who believed in him.

God loved the world so much he sent his Son and Mary was chosen to carry and deliver this precious child, this precious gift, to the world. What an incredibly important role Mary played. She said, "I'm the Lord's servant. Let it happen as you've said."

The Lord's servants.

Gabriel served God by carrying and delivering a message to Mary. Mary served God by carrying and delivering a baby boy. They are two outstanding servants. They did what God asked them to do. Each, in their own way, served God.

Gabriel told Mary she was favoured by God and God was with her. God was pleased with Mary. This is before she has a chance to say a word? Before she even asks, with an element of disbelief, how this could be possible. Before she feels the first movements of the child growing secretly inside her, God is pleased with her. She's in God's good books, highly favoured by God.

Why? Is Mary unique? Has Mary done something to earn God's favour? What did God see in Mary to make her suitable to be the mother of God, the Son? There could only be one mother of Jesus so why did God choose Mary?

We could speculate and come up with an impressive list of attributes but the only thing we actually know for sure is she was willing to be involved. She was willing to be involved in what God was doing in the world and in her. She was willing to be the Lord's servant.

Isn't it interesting! Gabriel is sent by God with one of the greatest messages ever delivered to a human being. Gabriel is sent to Mary, a child of God. Mary was created in the image of God. She was a child of God but she still has much to learn about the one who sent Gabriel and the one who'll develop inside her. So she just wants to be a servant. And she is, but she's much more than a servant, she's a dearly loved child of God.

God partners with Mary to bring salvation to the world. Mary was a willing partner in God's plan for the world.

Was God's favour based on her willingness? No! God's favour preceded her willingness. God's favour gave birth to her willingness. God's favour brought about her willingness not the other way around.

Mary isn't unique. God's favour always comes first. God's grace and love are always there for us long before we believe in God or his grace and favour.

So my dearly favoured friends, none of us can take the place of Gabriel or Mary except maybe in a Christmas play, but we can, each in our own way, serve God. We can, if we have the willingness, each in our own way, partner with God.

And what a partner. If we think about this thing we call 'life' as a dance, and I'm sorry if some of you think you don't like dancing. But imagine being chosen to learn to dance and to be the dance partner of the best dancer in the universe. Imagine dancing with the creator of dance.

Friends, we're invited to live in partnership with the author of life. How amazing is that?" How can this be," we might want to say with Mary. The answer is the same as it was for Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God's power will come over you." Wow! Where can we sign up for a deal like that? Who could refuse to live life in partnership with the creator of life?

Mary is the servant mother. The mother who served all creation by carrying another servant. A more important servant. The most important and greatest servant of all. Gabriel said, "He'll be great, he'll be a king like David, he'll rule forever and his kingdom will never end." Doesn't sound like our idea of a servant, does it?

But he was and is the servant king, the king who serves. And this one who was carried and nursed by Mary taught her about servants and children. He told a story, which she no doubt heard, about a son who went away and became lost. And in his lostness he decided he'd come home and offer to be a servant. But his father saw him coming and in gracious forgiving love, he embraced him and restored him to the family as a son. Not as a servant but as a child.

Mary is not just servant of God but a child of God. A servant child. We aren't just servants of God, we're children of God. As children of God we want to live for God, we want to serve him. But remember and never forget, God wants children not servants. He wants us to be children who serve.

Am I just splitting hairs? No. Servants or slaves serve because they have no choice, because they're made to serve, they're bound to serve. Children are free to serve. Children serve willingly. Children partner with God. God serves us because we're his dearly loved children and we serve God because he's our dearly loved Father. It's a loving partnership or relationship.

No doubt Gabriel knew and knows this loving partnership. Mary learnt about partnering with God as a child of God.

We learn from God. We learn about God's love for us. We learn we're dearly loved children. We learn to serve God and our neighbours with love. God's love gives birth to love in us. We're willing to partner with God because he loves us. We're willing to partner with God because he's such an amazing and wonderful partner.

God's favour is with you and for you and his favour and love gives birth to your willingness. Amen.