

Greetings Favored One, the Lord is with you

Wow, isn't that a great greeting. Hmm... But it caused fear because it was totally unexpected and felt undeserved. What do you think about that greeting – can it be for you also?

Good morning all – we are getting close to Christmas and we pray all is well with you and yours. Going forward on Sundays the 8:30 am service will be mask required for the entire service – this has been working great for school kids and several families would like us to adopt that for a service on Sunday – the 8:30 folks graciously agreed. Thank You!!! The 10 am service will be masks to and from but once seated may remove mask. You can also join us live at home using Facebook Live at the 10 am service or whenever is convenient for you online. We will not change our 6 foot seating separation.

Christmas Eve Candle Light Service is almost upon us. Here is our plan as of now: 3 services 3:30pm, 5pm and 6:30pm. We are making masks required the entire time of the services – even singing to minimize risks. We will use an online program SignUpGenius to have folks sign up (see link on email). If you can't use that to sign up please call the church and leave your preferred time and number of people attending. (402-296-2662). We are leaving a few slots open for walk ins and overflow. I will also be using Facebook Live for the 6:30 service so you can join us at home.

Here is our PRAYER OF THE DAY

Father God,

There is no miracle as grand as birth. As we prepare for the coming of your son, Jesus, create in us new life. Transform us so that we may reflect the light of your son, and become beacons of goodness, kindness, compassion, generosity, honesty, patience, and peace, for the sake of the one whose name brings deliverance and life to all the world, Jesus Christ, infant king. **Amen.**

Sermon: Favored One

We have been hearing from the prophets of old how God is going to do a new thing, an amazing thing – we are going to begin to see it unfold in our text today. We will hear the phrase – 'the Lord is with you', and hopefully we can begin to realize – that changes everything!!! God has just done an amazing thing in Elizabeth's life – she who was barren has conceived a child – that changed everything for her. Hopefully we too can realize we are the favored ones now. Let's see.

Luke 1:26-45 (NIV)

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 favored! The Lord is with you." There it is – a great greeting but look at her response.

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 favor 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 forever; his kingdom will never end." Did you notice greatly troubled – Wow. I'm sure she never expected an angel to talk with her and of course reveal this amazing thing that God will with her. I'm sure she was thinking - **who me?**, also. Remember God has chosen us too. We don't like the unexpected – but with God, we need to learn to expect the unexpected. We've seen that time and time again in the scriptures – so be ready for the unexpected ☺ Me a pastor is a great example of the unexpected.

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." Love that reminder – nothing will be impossible with God – believe it – trust it. The Holy Spirit at work – God's power with us.

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her. What a great response – I pray we can say the same each time God calls us.

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" WOW - Elizabeth knew what was going on, the Holy Spirit taught her – Jesus has told us the very same thing – that the Spirit teaches us all things (John 14:26). Elizabeth's baby leaps in the womb – the Holy Spirit with John the Baptist who would have a big role in this. To prepare the way of the Lord – God doing what God said God would do – and to baptize Jesus. We too have been baptized with the baptism of Jesus, received the Holy Spirit and, as I said before, that changes everything.

Elizabeth uses the word blessed many times – we too are blessed. Paul tells us we have received every Spiritual Blessing – Wow, thank you Lord.

Overcome by Elizabeth's greetings, Mary could not help but sing praises about God's promises. In her song, Mary now claims the title of being "blessed," one that had been given to her by both Gabriel and Elizabeth. In her proclamation of God's deeds, she begins by describing how God has acted in her own life (verses 47-49) and then branches out to how God has acted in the world (verses 50-55). Our Scripture and Mary's song together are about God's working in the world, even before Jesus' birth. God promises "with-ness" to Mary and by extension to all creatures of the cosmos. God with us also. Thank you, Lord.

Just like what Joel and Isiah said in past weeks, Mary echoes – God changes everything with his mighty deeds; his mercy is extended; the humble are lifted up; the hungry are filled; and his promises endure forever. Thank you, once again Lord.

Once more in this Advent Season we see God at work with and through people and he has things for them to do. Not easy – remember Mary is only engaged and not married and now is pregnant. Not good in those days. What will people think; what will her parents do; what will Joseph do?? Life just got turned totally crazy.....yet her response.....let it be as you say.....and she sings praises to the Lord. Let us in these crazy times continue to sing praises to the Lord – for God is with us. You might have noticed a lot of ‘thank you, Lords’ today – that’s because God did all this for us – amazing and wonderful. Thank you, Lord!!!

Let us Pray: Gracious Father – We praise you and we thank you that we can call you Father – that you called us your children and you draw us to yourself. Thank you for the gift of your Son and the Holy Spirit to teach and to guide. Help us learn what you want us to learn as we journey through the bible. Help us hear and trust in your promises. Help our unbelief. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart willing to follow your will in our lives. Help us be the children you want us to be. Help us to share the Good News. Help us to love you and love others. Help us to pray for others. We lift up the healthcare workers – keep them safe. We lift those who have the virus – heal them. We lift up the researchers – may you give them wisdom to find a cure and vaccine quickly. We lift up our leaders – grant them wisdom to deal with this for the good of all they serve. Help us be conscious of care for ourselves so that we can care safely for others around us. Help those who are at a higher risk to be safe but to reach out to our larger family so that we can serve them. We thank you Lord for all that you have done and are doing. Praise and blessing to you – in Jesus name we pray and all God’s children said.... Amen.

BLESSING: Sending message from St. Teresa of Avila

"Christ has no body now, but ours. No hands, no feet on earth, but ours. Ours are the eyes through which Christ looks compassion into the world. Ours are the feet with which Christ walks to do good. Ours are the hands with which Christ blesses the world." † AMEN.

Verse of the Month

⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

Song for this Sunday is “Mary did you know” from Nativity movie scenes