

“Congratulations, You Who Are Favored”

Luke 1:26–38

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Introduction

Good morning, everyone.

As of today, we have entered the third week of Advent. At last, next week will be our Christmas worship service. We are spending these Advent days with growing joy over the fact that Jesus came into this world for us. At the same time, the year has gone by very quickly, and we are about to welcome a new year.

Therefore, today, from the passage of Mary’s annunciation, I would like for us to think together about “grace,” to count the grace that has been given to us, and above all, to once again confirm Jesus Christ, who is the greatest grace of all.

Now, let us read today’s Scripture passage. It is from the New Testament, the **Gospel according to Luke**, chapter 1, verses 26 through 38. I will read **Luke 1:26–38**.

The Meaning of the Words “You Who Are Favored”

Today’s sermon title is “Congratulations, You Who Are Favored.”

As we see in verse 28, these are the very first words spoken to Mary by the angel Gabriel, who was sent for the annunciation.

“Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you.”

However, rather than rejoicing at this greeting, Mary was greatly perplexed. Verse 29 says that she wondered what kind of greeting this might be. For Mary, this event was not something she could immediately understand as a blessing; it was completely unexpected and utterly incomprehensible.

As we read the Bible, it seems that there is a common feature among those who were called by God and encountered Him. That feature is this: *they hardly knew that the day they would meet God was coming.*

How about you? On the day you were converted, the day you came to know Jesus personally as your Savior—did you know in advance that that day would come? In most cases, we encounter God at an unexpected time and in an unexpected way.

Here, I would like us to focus on the words “you who are favored” in verse 28. In the original language, this expression is written in the perfect tense. That is, it indicates something that happened in the past and continues into the present.

Furthermore, this word is in the passive voice. Mary did not obtain grace as a result of accomplishing something. Rather, apart from her own will or effort, by God’s sovereignty, she had already been placed in a state of having received grace.

In verse 30, Gabriel says, “You have found favor with God.” Whether Mary was aware of it or not, she was already placed within God’s grace. That was God’s declaration.

The same is true for us. A Christian can be described as “one who has received grace unilaterally from God, not by one’s own achievements or abilities, and despite being undeserving.”

Also, if you look at the footnote for the phrase “Greetings, you who are favored,” you will see that it can be translated as “Rejoice.” In the Korean Bible, this passage actually includes the phrase “Rejoice.” It was also a greeting commonly used at that time.

The joy of this world is often born when “we accomplish something,” “our wishes come true,” or “we gain some advantage.” But the joy the Bible teaches us is different. The reason we rejoice is this: *because the Lord has given us grace.*

And at the center of that grace, as even the angel says, is this: “The Lord is with you.” Is this not the greatest grace that has been given to us?

In Confusion and Fear

Verse 29 describes Mary being greatly troubled by Gabriel’s appearance and greeting. I think this is a very natural human reaction.

In a rural town called Nazareth, a young girl—said to have been about twelve years old—suddenly has an angel appear before her and say, “Congratulations.” And on top of that, she is told, “You will conceive and give birth to a child.”

There was one problem. At that time, Mary was in a situation where she must not become pregnant. Culturally, legally, and personally, this was a scandal and an event that could even put her life in danger.

We tend to think, “Why didn’t God send the angel when Joseph was with her?” or “It would have been better if He had appeared to the whole town and explained everything.”

But God appears to one person and speaks to one person. He values a one-on-one relationship. Mary, too, was suddenly placed at the center of a scandal. There is a scene where Jesus protects a woman caught in adultery, but at this point, the Jesus who would defend Mary had not yet been born.

Joseph was also afraid. Matthew chapter 1 records that he decided to send Mary away secretly without exposing her to public disgrace. At this time, many thoughts must have crossed Mary’s mind, and she must have carried many fears.

Are Doubts and Questions Unbelief?

Then, in verse 34, Mary asks the angel, “How will this be, since I do not know a man?”

These words are neither rebellion nor rejection. Rather, they are a question that arises precisely because she wants to believe God. Doubt and unbelief are different. Unbelief is denying God from the beginning and closing one’s heart. Doubt, however, is a question born from the struggle of wanting to believe but not being able to understand.

Many people who appear in the Bible directed such “questions” to God. Abraham, Moses, David, and the psalmists all continued to ask God, “Why?” and “How long?” And God is not One who rebukes such questions, but One who listens to them.

The same thing happens in our faith lives. There are events we want to believe but cannot fully believe, trials we cannot understand, and times when we pray yet see no answer. A faith that can easily explain everything may, in fact, be very superficial. True faith is to continue standing before God while carrying what we do not understand.

Asking God questions is not unbelief. Rather, “thinking we already understand” or “presuming to decide God’s will ahead of time” is what can actually distance us from God. Mary did not hide her fear or confusion; she presented them as they were before God. Here we see a personal relationship with God.

Three Graces Given to Mary

After hearing the angel’s explanation, Mary confesses in verse 38: “Behold, I am the Lord’s servant. May it be done to me according to your word.”

Within these short words, we can see three great graces given to Mary.

① The Grace of Being Chosen by God

The first is the grace of being chosen by God. Regarding Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, verse 6 of chapter 1 introduces them as “both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.” They were admirable people in both faith and character. But what about Mary? What is written about her is simply that she was “a virgin in the town of Nazareth” and “betrothed to Joseph.” No special achievements of faith or spiritual accomplishments are recorded.

God’s choosing is mysterious in this way. Mary was not chosen because she desired or prayed to become the mother of the Savior. Rather, a young girl who was unprepared and seemingly insignificant was chosen.

The same is true for us. We cannot fully understand the reason God chooses us. But even if we do not know the reason, the certainty of His choosing does not change. This, too, is grace.

② The Grace of Being Given Faith

The second is the grace of being given faith. Mary did not obey because she understood everything. Even when she confessed, “May it be done to me according to your word,” she did not know what her future life would hold. And yet, she was given the strength to believe God’s word.

In Luke 1:45, Elizabeth says to Mary, “Blessed is she who has believed that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

Augustine also said of this passage, “Before Mary conceived Jesus Christ in her body, she conceived Him in her heart by faith.”

It is not by our own strength that we can confess Jesus as Lord. **First Corinthians 12:3** tells us that it is only by the Holy Spirit that we can say, “Jesus is Lord.” Faith itself is grace given by God.

③ **The Grace of Being Led into Obedience**

The third is the grace of being led into obedience. Mary’s confession in verse 38 is a confession of entrusting her entire life to God. The words “I am the Lord’s servant” express an awareness of belonging—knowing to whom she belongs. And the words “May it be done to me according to your word” reveal Mary’s resolve to live in obedience to God’s word.

However, this obedience was by no means a safe or easy path. Misunderstanding due to pregnancy during betrothal, the eyes of those around her, Joseph’s inner struggle, the flight to Egypt after Jesus’ birth, and later, the pain of watching her Son walk toward the cross—all of these awaited her.

Even so, Mary continued to offer herself to the Lord. Romans 12:1 exhorts us in the same way. Are we not also invited, in this Advent season, to offer ourselves as living sacrifices pleasing to God, whatever our circumstances may be? And the power that makes such obedience possible is also given by God as grace.

Conclusion — Living as Those Who Are Favored

“Congratulations, you who are favored. The Lord is with you.”

These words were not spoken only to Mary two thousand years ago. They are words spoken likewise to each one of us who has been saved through Jesus Christ.

In our lives, many events we cannot understand, and realities that confuse us more than make us rejoice, will continue to occur. Anxiety, fear, and doubt may fill our hearts. Yet, in the midst of all that, God declares to us, "The Lord is with you."

In this Advent season, let us wait expectantly. Even if circumstances do not immediately change, even if we cannot see the answer, the grace that God is with us has already been given.

Because we do not understand, we ask God; because we are afraid, we draw near to God; because we are weak, we cling to God's grace. Through such a walk, we are further shaped into people who live as "those who are favored."

May each one of us, in this Advent season, fix our eyes on the grace that has been given to us and walk in the joy of "the Lord is with you."

Let us pray.

Luke 1:28