

Advent Series: Not a Silent Night

Sermon #3: “Mary Full of Grace”

Scripture: Luke 1:46-56 (to be read during the sermon)

Source: Rev. Adam Hamilton at the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, MO

<http://www.cor.org/worship/sermon-archives/show/sermons/To-a-Maid-Engaged-to-Joseph/>

Opening Video Clip

PP#1: *Image fitting the song* “Santa Clause Is Coming to Town”

“He’s making a list, checking it twice...gonna find out who’s naughty or nice...Santa clause is coming to town.”

So, have you all been trying to be nice? Have you been working hard at being good? “He knows if you’ve been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake!” Right?

You know, now that I’m a parent, I think I know the origin of this song. I can’t prove this historically, but I think it was written by parents who have kids home on school break, as they get more and more annoying, while the stress of the season—preparations—escalates higher and higher. Parents use Santa not bringing presents as a threat to get their kids to bring it down to tolerable! Better be good. Good kids get presents. Brothers who irritate their sisters, don’t.

I’ve sung this song. I’m not too proud to parent this way!

You’ve got to earn your presents.

PP#2: Not a Silent Night ~ Christmas Through the Eyes of Mary

“Mary Full of Grace”

“When the angel came to her, he said, ‘Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!’” - Luke 1:28

Well, this Christmas, we’re looking at Christmas through the eyes of Mary. No one saw Christmas like Mary did. We’re trying to understand what Christmas meant for Mary, hoping we can get a better look at what Christmas means for us, too.

We started out at the end of Mary’s life. What Christmas meant for her then was that her Son was born to give life eternal. She would see Him again! He rose again to defeat death. Easter and Christmas go together.

Then we looked at what Christmas meant for Mary as she watched her Son hang on the cross. During that horrible experience, Mary must have thought a lot about Christmas. Only Christmas made it make sense. He was born to be the Savior, to save people from their sins. All this she *heard* at Christmas. Now she was *seeing* it. The cross and the cradle go together.

Last week we saw how, at the age of 12, Jesus shocked Mary, and everyone else, with His words at the Temple. He was God’s Son. He was King and Lord. And in her mind, Mary saw Christmas: how the shepherds and magi worshiping Him. Christmas means to worship this Jesus.

Now, today, I know I said we were going to look at Christmas night itself. But I’m actually going to slide just a bit before that night. I think we need to look at something else first. We need to look at when the angel told Mary she was going to become the mother of Jesus.

So, for today, “It was not a silent night.” “Mary Full of Grace.” Luke 1:28 “When the angel came to her, he said, ‘Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!’”

PP#3: *Image of Gabriel appearing to Mary*

In that time and culture, women were married very young. Only one in four women lived to be 40. So, when a girl became able to bear children, her parents tried to get her married off quickly. They would arrange a marriage, and bind their daughter, somewhere around 14 years old, in a legal and binding covenant of engagement. She would continue to live with her parents, as they would plan the marriage and future life for their daughter. But it would require a legal divorce to break off this engagement. Then, after about a year, the girl would be married, and go to live with her husband.

So, Mary is probably around 14. She is legally engaged to Joseph, but living with her parents. And then, one day, Gabriel appears to her. He tells her that God has chosen her to bear the Messiah, the Savior to the world, and that this Savior would be God's Son. She would bear God's child, and bear God as a child! Her response? "Let it be as you say." Or as we would say today, "OK, I guess!"

Now, Mary probably knew about the coming of the Messiah. She had heard the stories and the scriptures. She probably didn't know too much about it, though, as she was probably not well educated. She probably couldn't read. Her expectation in life was to bear as many kids as she could before she died. But she seemed to have a good grasp of her faith and the main Jewish teachings.

Well, to me, this begs the question: Why would God choose Mary? What about Mary did God find special and unique? God, who made all of creation, was coming into her to be born as a baby. Her Son was to be the Messiah for all people who would ever live on the earth. Whom would God trust His precious Son to? What mother would God choose? Think about that!

I mean, we can see no credentials. She wasn't royalty. She probably couldn't read. She didn't belong to any special family. In fact, her home town of Nazareth was so insignificant it didn't even appear on Roman maps! What about her made her special enough to bear God's baby?

We may be puzzled. But Mary seems to know. Let's turn to what she says.

PP#4-5: Luke 1:46-56 "The Magnificat"

Mary said,

"With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.

He has looked with favor on the low status of His servant.

Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored
because the mighty one has done great things for me.

Holy is His name.

He shows mercy to everyone,
from one generation to the next,
who honors Him as God.

He has shown strength with His arm.

He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.

He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away empty-handed.

He has come to the aid of His servant Israel,

remembering His mercy,

just as He promised to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants forever."

Reader: Luke 1:46-56 “The Magnificat”

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PP#6: *Another image of Gabriel appearing to Mary.*

Why does God choose Mary? Mary’s answer is that God chose her because she has nothing to qualify her or make her worthy. “He has looked with favor on the low status of His servant.” She’s saying that it has nothing to do with her. It has everything to do with God, who chooses lowly, insignificant, undeserving people to do amazing things. From now on, she says, people will consider her blessed, because of the amazing things God did for her. And then, she goes on and on with how amazing God is and all that God has done and continues to do. It’s all about God.

It always has been. He pulls down the high and mighty and arrogant and proud, and lifts up the lowly. He fills the hungry and empty, comes to the aid of those in need. He remembers His mercy.

Throughout the Bible we see story after story like this. Remember Garth Brooks’ song, “I’ve Got Friends in Low Places”? This is God! Abraham: a nobody from Ur, old and beyond prime. Sarah, too old to have kids. Covenant bearers! Moses, a stutterer—just like I am!—sent to go speak to Pharaoh! David, the youngest, scrawniest of kids, a shepherd, not even important enough to be invited to a family gathering: anointed king! The disciples...they weren’t the ones from seminary or trained in preaching or theology. They were fishermen, tax collectors, blue collar people.

Why?

So they could never say, “God chose me because *I...dot...dot...dot.*” None of them could claim any inherent qualifications or credentials. Each and every time, those who knew them well and saw them doing God’s work, concluded, “Well, it must be all God!”

Each and every time, everyone said, “Look what God has done!”

PP#7: “Mary, Full of Grace”

1. God favors the humble

“Everyone, clothe yourselves with humility toward each other. God stands against the proud, but He gives favor to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under God’s power.” -1 Peter 5:5b-6a

So, Mary looks at Christmas and sees something amazing about God. She sees that God favors the humble. He chose her—and she herself knows all too well—for no good reason! Mary sees a glimpse of *God’s true character* at Christmas.

She also sees it in the Baby she births. God, humbling Himself to become a lowly baby. Philippians 2:7 says, “He emptied Himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings.” Mary is blown away by God’s own humility! God is humble, chooses the humble, and favors the humble. And through this Jesus, she sees God’s calling for His people to also be humble. Later, Jesus put it this way, “The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.” (Matt. 20:16)

Peter 5 “Everyone, clothe yourselves with humility toward each other. God stands against the proud, but He gives favor to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under God’s power.”

So, this Christmas, as we worship the newborn King, that worship means we are to be humble before God. Christmas is a call to humility. Be careful of the pride that seeps in, for God opposes the proud!

Think of it this way, you can become humble by your own choosing, or you can let God do it for you. And trust me, God’s way usually involves something painfully embarrassing!

PP#8: “Mary, Full of Grace”

1. God favors the humble

2. “Full of grace”

The angel appears to Mary and the first thing he says is, “Greetings, you are highly favored.”

Now, the word for “highly favored” is *charis*, the Bible word for “grace.” This word appears 170 times in the New Testament. It’s a favorite word in the Bible. 86 times it’s translated “grace.” But it can also be translated “favor” or “good will” or “loving kindness.”

PP#9: ke-CHARI-toe-mene = “full of grace”

But only once it is rendered ke-CHARI-toe-mene, and that is right here, when the angel speaks to Mary. The Roman Catholics get this very right! Anyone here memorize this? Something like, “Hail, Mary, full of Grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.” The best translation is “full of grace.”

Mary is full of grace. Is it because she a graceful person? No better than others, remember. She is full of grace because God is pouring grace into her, making her full of grace.

PP#10: “Mary, Full of Grace”

1. God favors the humble

2. “Full of grace”

“You were saved by faith in God, who treats us much better than we deserve. This is God’s gift to you, and not anything you have done on your own. It isn’t something you have earned, so there is nothing you can brag about.” Ephesians 2:8-9

What is grace? Of these 170 times, it can be a greeting, a blessing, a prayer, a gift, an attribute. But through them all, *grace is always good, and it is always something we don't deserve.* Grace comes from the kindness of the giver, to someone who doesn't deserve it.

And, as Mary learns most vividly at Christmas, God is gracious! God is kind, loving, compassionate, forgiving, and wants good things for you. God wants to bless. This is whom Mary sees God to be at Christmas. God is full of grace. And in that grace, chooses Mary.

I imagine Mary, feeling very fully pregnant, rubbing her bulging tummy, and hearing “full of grace” ringing through her head. She was full of God's grace; she was full of God, who is grace!

Ephesians 2:8-9 puts it this way, “You were saved by faith in God, who treats us much better than we deserve. This is God's gift to you, and not anything you have done on your own. It isn't something you have earned, so there is nothing you can brag about.”

PP#11: *Image for the movie Fred Claus*

Grace has the power to bring change. Grace can change the one who receives grace. There's a movie called “Fred Claus.” It's about Santa's brother who comes to work at the North Pole. He looks over the list, checking who is naughty and who is nice. And he starts doing research. He notices a difference between naughty kids, and kids doing naughty things. And the kids deemed naughty, he discovers over and over again, did naughty things because something was sour in their lives. They were struggling...someone hurt them...something bad happened to them. And so, Fred Claus gets to thinking. Aren't they really the ones who really need to receive a present the most? What if something nice happened to them? What if they experienced grace! How that could change them! And so Fred Claus gives presents to naughty kids, and they begin to change.

Now, I know this is a movie, but it's not too far from the truth! Grace does have the power to change those who receive it. Jesus went to the naughty kids. Remember them? The prostitute, the cheater, the liar, the extortionist. And their lives were changed when He showed them grace.

Think about your own experiences. When has someone, showing you grace, changed you...changed your attitude, your reaction, how you treat others? Think of a time when you were gracious to someone else, and you saw it lead to a change in them. It's true, isn't it?

This is why gift-giving is a key part of Christmas. The gifts we give at Christmas are not so much toys and things, but grace! Grace has the power to change a heart.

PP#12: “Mary, Full of Grace”

1. God favors the humble
2. “Full of grace”

“The Word became flesh and made His home among us. We have seen His glory, glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.”

And here's the Christmas secret: giving grace to others also changes you! Giving grace is also a powerful change agent! Actually, you *must* give it. If you receive grace, and you don't give it away, it turns into pride. Unshared grace becomes something we take for granted, and we begin to tell ourselves we deserve. Remember, God brings down the proud!

There are people who don't deserve grace from you. People who don't deserve even the time of day from you. They've hurt you, were rude to you, ignored you, forgot about you, disappointed you. Who are they in your life? Perhaps you will see them this week? Perhaps you didn't send them

a greeting. This Christmas, fight against that pride, and send them a Christmas card. You still have time. Tomorrow...your three kind deeds can be to send three Christmas greetings...a card...a gift...a plate of cookies...a phone call...to folks you don't want to because you don't think they deserve your cheer. You will find that although it may bring a change in them, it will certainly make a change in you. Be full of grace.

PP#13: "Mary, Full of Grace"

1. God favors the humble
2. "Full of grace"
3. Blessing and pain

One more quick point. What did it feel like for Mary to be pregnant with Jesus? Remember, she was 14. She had never been pregnant before. She had all those feelings women who are pregnant have. Like when she felt the life move within her, and it slowly dawned on her that it was really happening. And what kind of a mother would she be? Could she take care of the baby? What would it be like? She was scared, fearful, had all kinds of expectations. And then, being the mother of God's baby! Woosh! She must have felt so inadequate. Be careful! Be careful!!

She must have spent many hours dreaming what it was all going to be like. But I am sure, she never imagined it to be like it actually was. Heading to Bethlehem right when the baby was due. What? A stable, far from home. What? Just she and Joseph, freaking out! God's baby! How do you do this?!

That was true for all of her parenting. It was never like she thought. She was blessed, but it was all very painful, too. The birth. His growing up. His suffering. His death. Blessing and pain, together.

So, here' the last Christmas lesson. In life, blessing and pain go together. That was true for Mary at Christmas, and for the rest of her life. That's true for our lives, too, right? But the Christmas lesson is that God always brings blessing out of pain. Even when you're blessed, it's not a silent night. But it is a night so worth it!

This week, this Christmas, journey with Mary. Humble yourself before God. Praise God for all He has done, and continues to do, for you. Don't give pride a foothold.

Be full of grace. Extend grace. Three people, tomorrow. Celebrate Christmas by being a blessing. "He knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake!" Be nice, not to earn a present, but for goodness' sake, to be full of goodness, full of grace!

And thirdly, trust God through the pain in your life. Trust God to work His blessing.

Merry Christmas!