You are to call him Jesus

Luke 1:26-38

Key verse 1:31

*“*31You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.”

Hello! Good Morning. How are you? It’s been already in the middle of December and there are only two more weeks left for this year. Are you ready for X-mas and New Year? It is the joyous time to celebrate the birth of Our Lord, Jesus. Then, why do we celebrate for X-mas? Do we celebrate it because we receive the special gifts or presents and take a day off? Yes, that is true, but more than that. Today’s passage is a part of Christmas story given by Luke, the historian and physician. Do you know who Luke is? He was a gospel writer who wrote for his name sake, Luke’s Gospel and the book of Acts. We know a few things about him based on the Bible; he was the only gentile, probably Greek, among four Gospel writers, his home town was Troas, one of the Asia Minor harbor city. He was an Apostle Paul’s faithful companion and he was a lay missionary like us, so his day job was a physician who took care of the sick patients. He was also a historian, so we can see that he carefully investigated Jesus’ life from the very beginning, the birth of Jesus and its background. The first part of this chapter we can see the story regarding the birth of John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Jesus. As we may know, it happened in the Jerusalem temple when his father Zechariah was serving for his duty as a priest. Today’s passage is the second part of the story regarding Jesus’ birth. This includes the angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary, who lived at the sleepy town called Nazareth in Galilee. She was a country girl pledged to marry a young man named Joseph. This event is beautifully described here and it is so important in church history that this whole story is specifically called “Annunciation, which means ‘Angel’s announcement to Mary’ of Jesus birth.” So today’s message is about this “Annunciation”.

Frankly, I have had a hard time to prepare for this message because I have habitually studied this passage many times, in fact, in almost every Christmas. My heart was busy these days and I struggled to digest this passage and accept one word. I pray that God may give us the Holy Spirit so he may open our hearts this time.

I’d like to think about first, what the favor of God means to us?, second, who the baby Jesus is and what his kingdom would be like and thirdly, what does it mean that Jesus came from the Virgin Mary?

I pray that God may give each of us the Holy Spirit and accept one word of God through this passage.

1. You who are highly favored (1:26-31)

Look at verses 26-27 “26In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.”

This story is the continuation of the first story about the birth of John the Baptist. In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God had sent his angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a small town in Galilee, about 90 miles northeast of Jerusalem, to a girl named Mary. Who was Mary? She was pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. We don’t know what age she was, but I guess she may have been about 16 or 17, a teenage girl because at that time, betrothal or pledge to marry was done even as early as 12. Here, betrothal or pledge to marry was little different from current concept. It is more than engagement.

According to the Jewish custom at that time, the marriage process was little complicated and it was three-step process; the first phase, the engagement was a formal agreement by the fathers. The second step was betrothal, pledge to marry involved a formal ceremony, witnessed agreement to marry and the giving of a bridal price by the groom’s family or all necessary presents exchanged. At that point the bride legally belonged to the groom’s and could be called his wife. If you want to break this betrothal, you have to do a formal proceeding of divorce. About a year later the actual wedding ceremony followed, and the groom took his bride to his home. It is during this second stage that the angel Gabriel visited Mary. What was the angel’s message? Look at verse 28. “28The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” What was Mary’s response to the angel’s message? When the ordinary man or woman encounters with the angel, it would be a terrifying experience, but the message was also so strange. Look at verse 29. “29Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.” Mary was stunned and was greatly troubled at the angel’s words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. Mary really liked Joseph as Sarah Segalese did at the first sight since she met Troy. Mary had made a personal commitment to Joseph. So Joseph meant everything to her. Mary's heart was filled with Joseph. She was full of dream and hope for the future with Joseph. She didn't need anyone else's favor, not even an angel's or Lord’s. The angel said that Mary was not just favored but she was highly favored by the Lord. Mary wondered what kind of favor this might be. She looked very quiet, but her heart was in a great turmoil. To a young girl, Mary, the angel's message was completely unexpected. Here the key word of Gabriel’s message was she was highly favored by God. What does it mean that the ordinary teenage girl Mary was highly favored by God. Look at verse 30. “30But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.” The angel explained more to her, however it is still puzzling to her.

The Greek word for favor, “charis,” has the same meaning as the word "grace." It means something precious given to somebody free without charge. The recipient generally does not deserve of this favor. Who else found favor with God in the Bible? Look at Genesis 6:8 “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” All people on earth were utterly corrupted and sinful. Every inclination of men was so sinful that God finally decided to destroy all the people on earth by the flood. At that time, only Noah found favor with God and he and his family were saved by the ark of covenent in the midst of God’s terrible judgment. Was Noah sinless at that time? I don’ think so. Although Noah walked with God, he may not have been saved without God’s special favor, or charis. Since Adam’s fall, God promised to send the Messiah to save his people. The God the Son knew the Father’s heart and He volunteered to go as a human body from the eternity to this world. The God wanted to send his one and only son to this world as a baby and He had to choose one woman as his human mother from all women in the world. It is indeed a great favor and privilege for any human being to be the Mother of God among so many, many girls or women. If God would announce for this job description, probably so many more qualified women would apply for this. I don’t see any special merit in Mary deserved to be the Mother of God. Yes, I know that she was beautiful, pure virgin, she was obedient, thoughtful, gracious and faithful. However, though these characters are very commendable, these were not that unique or special to be the mother of Jesus. She even did not apply for this position. Then, what is it? God’s favor is eternally mysterious, one sided and based on God’s absolute sovereignty. We can’t say anything about God’s favor and only God knows why He chose Mary to be the Mother of the savior of the world.

Did you find favor with God? Missionary Augustin, did you find favor with God? I don’t know you guys, but yes, I do. I’ve never wanted to be a missionary. In fact, I don’t like to be called “missionary” because it makes me to feel to be bound like a fetter and this title does not seem to fit with me well. I am not comfortable when somebody calls me missionary. I’ve never accepted this title in my heart, though I have been called since I came to America and I got a formal certificate plaque to prove it. But whether I like it or not, I still remain as a missionary by his grace. Many of us here have found favor with God; that’s why we are here. Otherwise, we may watch football in Sunday as many others do or something else which more stimulates our senses or increases our pleasures. The favor is just like grace, but this favor changes one’s life according to God’s plan as we see in Mary’s life. How did God’s favor change Mary’s life?

Let’s see what is the content of God’s favor to Mary? Look at verse 31. “31You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.” The angel Gabriel told what would happen to Mary. Wow, though she was a virgin, she will conceive and give birth to a son, and she will name him Jesus, which means ‘the Lord saves’ or the Savior. His son will be the savior of the world.

What does God’s high favor to Mary mean?

First, it means that she will be revered forever as the Mother of God throughout the history. She will be called the most blessed woman in the history and every man and woman will respect and call her name. God the Son had the perfect man and the perfect God, so he has a human body, so Jesus’ body should have had a DNA, but if he did, all of his DNA came from Mary because Joseph did not contribute to him at all. Jesus had her milk and grew up in her bosom and she was the only woman claimed to be the mother of God. When Mary later realized how blessed she was, she praised God from her deep heart. Look at 1:46-49. 46And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord 47and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,48for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.

Second, God’s favor has its price. It means sometimes we suffer loss, misunderstood, insulted and personal sacrifice in a short term. It means that the Virgin Mary will conceive the baby before the wedding and give birth to the son. It means that Mary would become an unwed mother. Although it was a great privilege and honor to be a mother of God, God’s favor means personal pain and suffering to sacrifice her dream and ordinary life with Joseph. The virgin birth of Jesus means that she would break Joseph’s heart and possibly her marriage dream would be called off. She would be mocked to be an adulterous woman by villagers and danger to risk her life because adulterous woman could be stoned to death at that time. As a mother she would see that her son be misunderstood, mocked, insulted and eventually her son would die on the cross.

Many of us have found favor with God. Is the personal sacrifice and pain in a short term comparable with God’s favor? Look at Romans 8:18. “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” I know some of you receive God’s favor. Some people received high favor and others have found just favor, but without God’s favor, we can’t be here. Shepherd William has an envious career as a Google senior manager in his young age, and his wife Sarah is beautiful like a Hollywood star and more than that, he has doubly blessed with 6 beautiful kids, and he has a big house with a swimming pool. He may have achieved, so called, the American dream. He can enjoy all of these and more. But he has received a God’s favor to be a Bible teacher and campus shepherd. In his busy schedule, he volunteered to devote himself to the early morning prayer, to take care of young students and to serve the Sunday message. I wonder how he can handle all of these, but apparently God’s favor is not in vain.

I know that a 25 year old beautiful American girl from Mississippi received God’s favor and she came to Korea more than 50 years ago. At that time, Korea was so poor after the Korean War and a half of the people in the nation starved and were malnourished. She taught the Bible to the Korean college students in English and many students came to learn English rather than the Bible, but as the time went by, many of them began to accept Jesus and I am one of them. She was so busy to take care of the Korean students that she did not find the time to get married. She indeed found favor with God. God’s favor is mysterious one and it is a great blessing to those who obey and accept it.

1. You are to call him Jesus (31-33)

Who is the baby Jesus and what would his kingdom be like? Look at verses 31-33. “31You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.”32He 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, 33and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end”

First, to call him Jesus. The baby will be called Jesus, which means the Savior. He will save us from the bondage of sin. Look at John 1:14. “14The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Since Adam’s fall, men became sinful and destined to die because of their sin, however, they did not even know what condition they were in. God was merciful and wanted to save them from their sin and death. God the Son was the creator God in the beginning. However, He volunteered to come to the world as a baby and dwell among the sinners and He became flesh and became a helpless baby in the woman’s womb to be with the sinners. The baby Jesus from the body of Mary is the Savior to save us. He is indeed full of grace and truth.

Second, he will be great because he will be called the Son of the Most High. He is great, which is the great understatement. He is not just great, but the greatest of the greatest because he is the son of the Most High God. There are so many great men and women in the human history. King Alexander who became a king at Macedonia at the age of 20 and had conquered most of the known Western World at that time in a short period and his army had never been defeated in his life time. So people call him Alexander the Great. However, he died of malaria at the age of 33 and after his death, all of his kingdoms were crumbled. In the ancient time, the Chinese emperor claimed that he was the son of the Heaven, but their dynasty did last just a few hundred years. Look at verse 32b. "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David..." David was the most revered king in the history of Israel. He became a shepherd king whose heart with God. He loved God with all his heart, all his soul and all his mind and all of his strength and he reigned his people with love and justice. So God promised him. Look at 2 Samuel 7:11-13. “‘11The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: 12When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. 13He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

God was so pleased with King David. However, David was just the shadow of Jesus, who is the real King of love and peace. God promised David that from his root the Messiah would come (2Sa 7:12). Joseph, who was the man Mary was pledged to marry, was a descendent of David and he was the legal human Father of Jesus. So Jesus came from David’s family as a David’s descendent. All the kings of the world live for a brief time and die. But Jesus became the eternal King as God promised.

Third, his kingdom will never end. Gabriel talks to Mary about the kingdom of God. Look at verse 33. "...and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." The prophet Daniel wrote in his prophecy concerning the eternal kingdom of Jesus our Lord. Look at Daniel 7:14. “14He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

The kings and kingdoms of the world are temporal, for they are like pieces of wood, clay, bronze, iron, and so on. There is nothing eternal in this world. The kingdoms of the world all crumbled like a beautiful palace eaten by the termites. Only the kingdom of Jesus is forever. The kingdom of God is our final destination.

1. How will this be? (34-38)

Look at verses 34 “34“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” Mary still has difficulty comprehending the angel’s message. She asks, *"How will this be?"* She learned the biology 101. She knows she cannot have conceived a child, since she is a *virgin.* It is a good question!

How did the angel answer to her question? Look at verses 35-37.

“35The 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. 36Even 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. 37For no word from God will ever fail.”

The angel taught Mary that It is the work of the Holy Spirit. God's creative power will overshadow Mary and she will conceive the baby. For there is nothing impossible in God. The angel pointed out the life within the womb of a hopeless, elderly woman, Elizabeth, Mary's relative. Elizabeth was barren in her old age, but by the grace of God she became pregnant.

In the passage, the author declares repeatedly that Mary was the virgin; Jesus was born from the Virgin Mary by the work of the Holy Spirit.

We can see here the God the Trinity work; God the Father has prepared for the man’s salvation plan, God the Son obeyed and came this world as a baby, by the work of God the Holy Spirit. Here how can we know Jesus’ birth by the Virgin Mary? Look at verse 37. “37For no word from God will ever fail.” For there is nothing impossible in God.

We know and believe it because nothing is impossible with God the Almighty. We believe by faith, “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1) Did you see that any word from God has ever fail? Never. Look at Isaiah 7:14 “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

“Immanuel” means “God with us”. God has already promised the Prophet Isaiah 700 years before Jesus was born. At that time, all of Judah were so fearful because of uncertain future. They were threatened by the very powerful enemies and at the brink of total destruction. At that time, the king was Ahaz and he had no faith and he was trembled like a tree in the windy day. So all nation was trembled. The prophet Isaiah encouraged the king Ahaz that he should have faith in God and seek the sign from God. But king Ahaz refused because he did not have faith. Prophet Isaiah said God would send the baby from the virgin, which is the sign. It is the sign God is with us. That is the sign that God the Almighty will give us the Savior from the Virgin. It means the merciful God would be with us the sinners. He will be with us. He won’t leave us to be alone in this terrible world. Jesus from the Virgin Mary is Immanuel God.

Biologically, it is not possible, but it is our confession, a part of the Apostles creed. This is the sign from God the Almighty, who is with us. The Almighty God came as a baby to be with us. Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. Yes, this is the foundation of our faith, that Jesus was born from the Virgin Mary and the Almighty God, who created the heaven and the earth, has no problem doing that. However, this will be the stumbling block to those who calculate this and that and try to understand it. However, I believe that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary and He is the son of God, who is with us and saves us.

What was Mary’s response? Look at verse 38. “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.” Most people is ready to obey God’s command only if they fully understand it. So we try to understand first, but in general, it is impossible for us to understand God’s plan and when Mary thought about its immediate consequence, she would not like it. What should we do when we have found favor with God? When we receive God’s favor, we have two choices; either we give thanks to God and accept it with Amen or become rebellious and run away like Prophet Jonah. God called Jonah to deliver the message of repentance to the city of Nineveh, which was the enemy’s capital. However, he did not want to see the enemy to repent by his message and be forgiven by God. He did not like it at all. So he ran away to the opposite side to the end of the world. Should we run away like Prophet Jonah? It won’t work if you read the book of Jonah. God will find you even from the belly of fish in the deep sea. Look at verse 38. 38“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Amen. Then the angel left her.”

She probably did not fully understand what would happen to her. However, she knew she is the Lord’s servant and has to obey her Lord any way. Then, she knew that the Almighty God would take care of everything; she did not know how, but He would take care of her broken dream or Joseph’s disappointment. God would also take care of her humiliation or her terrible pain. She just prayed that His word may be fulfilled as he said. So we can see that when we receive God’s favor, first accept and obey, then think about and may understand it or sometimes may not understand at all. That does not matter whether we understand or not. We just pray that may your word to me be fulfilled. Amen.

In conclusion, we see how God’s high favor fell on one nameless country girl, Mary for his redemptive history. We learned that the baby Jesus is the Savior of the world and the son of the Most High and his kingdom will never end. I pray that the word of God to each of us may be fulfilled. Amen

One word: He will be called Jesus