

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Highly Favored Part 2

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Scripture:

Luke 1: 26-38

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."

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."

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^[a] 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 no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Transcript:

Holy Spirit help us in these next few minutes to think about these verses and live according to them in a way that makes us more brave. Pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Well, we are in the middle of a sermon series on all the reasons Christmas gives us not to fear. Today is worship through music, as you know. Last week we did worship through music in a new hope modern style. This week we're doing it in a sanctuary style. All together, both of them, the whole church, so that everyone can experience the diversity of worship styles that God has brought to this church.

Last week I started a sermon on Mary, who is told that even though she is unmarried and is a virgin, she's going to have a miraculous pregnancy and give birth to the savior of the world. She says yes. That took a ton of courage. Because, back then, to be pregnant and unmarried, at best, would make you a social outcast, or could even have you be executed because that was the penalty for that. God is giving Mary a gift as well. She gets to play a leading role in God's salvation history. There are big blessings when we do what God tells us to do. Freedom, joy, a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in life. Last week we talked about the way that Mary got this courage was because she had experienced God's favor in a way that empowered her to choose favor over fear. And, as a result, she got the amazing blessing of being the mother of Jesus. That was part one of the sermon. Today is part two of the sermon.

My second point, which last week I told you was the most amazing sermon point ever. I may have exaggerated a little bit. That's called a cliffhanger. It's a literary device to get you to come back. But it's still a good point. When God calls us to do some thing that is uncomfortable or bigger than we think we can handle, or just when life throws you some kind of challenge and you don't know how to handle it. Remember this, we are limited by our experience, but God sees only our potential.

When the angel says to Mary that she'll become the mother of Jesus. Mary says, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" That is a good question. And it's very similar to what we say when we face a challenge that seems bigger than we are. How can this be, since I am too young, or too old? How can this be, since I am in financial troubles? How can this be, since I am an addict? How can this be, since I'm not someone with a lot of credentials or a fancy

degree or things like that? How can I do this? This is beyond me. I don't have what it takes. It's like when I was a kid and played little league, the coach put me in right field. It took me a while to realize that coaches always put their weakest players in right field because, in little league, the ball never gets to right field. And right now some of you're going, "Hey, I played right field." Now you know. How can this be, since I can't catch a fly ball?

The angel says to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the most high will overshadow you." In other words, it's not about us. It's about what God can do through us. It's not Mary's ability that produces this miracle. It is her availability that does it. And the phrase, "God's power will overshadow you," conveys a sense of God's power working through us. But also people use that language of overshadowing to talk about how God's presence is all around us as well. Guiding us, protecting us. When we face challenges, often we feel inadequate to the task. I can't tell this person about Jesus. What if they think I'm weird or ask questions I don't know the answer to? I can't make a difference in my school. I can't stop the bullying or end the loneliness. Who am I? Nobody even knows who I am. I can't fix inequities in my workplace. I'm not the boss. I'll get fired.

I don't have what it takes. You're right. You don't have what it takes. And you're wrong. You do have what it takes. You don't have what it takes, but God does. So if you have him, you have what it takes. We see that ... Did I just hear an amen from the choir? That was a ... It didn't even come from the assemblies of God people. It came from the Presbyterians. That's amazing. We see the limitations of, thank you. We see the limitations of our circumstances. God only sees our possibilities, what we can do through him.

Think of it this way. What if a baby measured its future potential by its past? Right? Think if a baby did that. I can't walk. I've never walked before. I'm just a baby. I can't talk. I've never talked before. I can't do calculus. Nobody can. But babies know their destiny isn't taken from what they can do or what they've done in their past. Babies know their destiny is taken from what their parents can do. We are not limited by our past or by our circumstances. It's about what God can do through us. I don't have what it takes, but my father does. And this tells us something about the God who comes to us in Jesus. It shows us that he loves the humble.

Ever notice that? He's always choosing the humble folks. He never chooses the fancy people. Because he himself is humble. Left the glories of heaven to come as one of us at

Christmas time, born in a barn, died on a garbage heap. He himself is humble. He is God almighty, but he is not an elitist. And you are who he says you are. And you can do what he says you can do through his power.

Dr. Tony Evans is pastor of a really big church. He tells a story of how, when they were first starting out, they didn't have a building. But they finally found a building and they had to raise \$200,000. They only had 30 days to raise it. They were so new, the church was so new, no bank would lend them any money. Dr. Evans said that they were too young, too new, too broke. The unholy trinity. They started praying and fasting and seeking God. One day, Dr. Evans was meeting with a friend of his named Bob in Bob's office. They were brainstorming how they could raise this \$200,000. As they were talking, one of Bob's coworkers, also named Bob, stopped by to say hello. He just stayed there as Dr. Evans and old Bob was talking. He just stood there and was listening to their conversation. Dr. Evans said he was irritated at him. Then new Bob started to ask all these questions, and new Bob started talking. Dr. Evans said that really irritated him. Because he didn't have a lot of time to raise this money and new Bob was a distraction.

Well, after 45 minutes of new Bob talking and asking questions, he finally took out his checkbook and wrote a check for \$200,000 and gave it to Dr. Evans. Okay. That is so God, right? This person who is annoying you turns out to be your biggest blessing. The result is Dr. Evans' church grew and their ministries have helped thousands of people. Kids getting tutors so they can do well in school and get out of poverty. Hungry people fed. And thousands of people have found Jesus because of their ministries.

God called Dr. Evans to do something that was way bigger than he was. But it wasn't about what Dr. Evans could do, it was about what God could do through him, and through new Bob. God gave him favor, in the least likely way, from an unlikely source.

What are you facing? What challenge looks really big for you, too big for you? Or what may God be calling you to do that is uncomfortable or feels scary or it just seems so big? Whatever it is, it's not bigger than God. So, as we continue to worship through music, let God speak to you through the words of these songs, the feelings that it creates in you. Let God talk to you, to empower you to move in faith not fear.

I said last week that I think one of the bravest people in the Bible is a teenage girl named Mary. And God tells her in this text that she is highly favored, highly favored. But that does not mean what Americans think it means. What does it mean to her? She gets to be pregnant and unmarried, the penalty for which was death. She gets to give birth in a barn, surrounded by dirty animals all over the place. Then she has to be the mother of Jesus. No easy task that. Not because he was bad, but because he is perfect. Can you imagine how irritating it would be to have a perfect kid? Like you can't even send him to his room. You can't send the son of God to his room, right? Go to your, oh, nevermind. And on top of all of that, she has to watch her special gift from God die on a cross. And this is highly favored? And yet, and yet, that first Christmas night she got to hold the God who made her in her arms, and ponder the mystery that this child that she just delivered would some deliver her from her sins. She gets to see her son turn water into wine. She gets to see him raised from the dead. And God's promise to her that generations will call her blessed. And that's what has happened. This teenager who was poor with no credentials, no degrees, nothing to recommend her to the world, yet everyone knows her name. I believe that in spite of how hard it was, and it must have been really hard, Mary spent the rest of her life saying thank you.

Thank you, God for interrupting my plans. Thank you God, for this gift that did not look like a gift at first. Thank you God, for the hardness of the call, and thank you for empowering me to say yes. Because if I had said no, I would've missed this blessing.

Don't be afraid of the gifts that God gives you. They may scare you at first. But if you keep following him, God has a way of working through those hard places to bring you to a place of blessing. You are highly favored. The Lord is with you. Jesus help us to believe that. As we continue to worship through music, in these songs, Lord, speak to us, to our hearts, to our heads, and make us brave the way you were brave. Help us to leave here a little more like you. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Luke 1:26-38

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Questions:

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions - *Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:*

- As a poor teenager, in the world's eyes Mary had no status or qualifications to play such a pivotal role in salvation history. What clues do you see in the text that may indicate why God chose her?
- What does it say about the character of God that he chose Mary for such an important role?
- How will this text shape what you think, feel, do this week?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?
- Who might you share this with?

Closing Group Prayer:

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.
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