

GOD DOES HIS OWN THING
FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 1:26-38
DEC 21, 2014

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

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

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."

³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

It may be no surprise if you don't get all you want for Christmas.

But have you ever gotten something you didn't want?

I don't just mean another coffee mug
but something really big or expensive.

Friends of ours who were missionaries in Papua New Guinea
were once given a Cassowary Bird,

which in that culture is way to bestow great honor.

Cassowary Birds grow to be several feet tall
so here was huge bird creating havoc in their house
but they couldn't just get rid of it because
that would be disgraceful way to treat such an honor.

What if gift of honor is not just high maintenance bird but baby?

baby you were expected to raise to become king?

Would you respond like Mary, wondering
what kind of greeting and what kind of a gift this was?

In fact, we have received such a gift,

gift that doesn't just take over our house for a while
but a gift that takes over our whole lives forever,

because when it comes to gifts, God does his own thing.

GOD CHOOSES US OUT OF HIS OWN GRACE.
GOD SENDS HIS OWN SON TO BE OUR SAVIOR.
GOD DOES HIS OWN WORK IN AND THROUGH US.

GOD CHOOSES US OUT OF HIS OWN GRACE.

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

Someone you are not sure you recognize comes up to you
and says, "Boy, and I glad to see you."

or you get a letter, email or phone call that begins,
"Congratulations, you are a winner..."

What is your first reaction? Maybe you are suspicious.

Maybe this is how Mary feels when greeted by Gabriel.

I don't know what she was doing when this happened,
but appearance of messenger may have been surprise.

She may or may not have realized this stranger was angel
but angel does have to say, as always, "Don't be afraid."

But the greeting itself that troubles & confuses her
seems to me like a very wonderful greeting.

Not just standard greeting: The Lord be with you.
but statement, "The Lord is with you.

And title, "O favored one, is reemphasized:
you have found favor with God.

Maybe she recalls another who was greeted in this way
in similar situation: when Israel is dominated by enemies.

Gideon, young man in unsuccessful family, was hot, sweaty,
frustrated at trying to scratch out a living

when angel appeared to him saying, "Hail mighty warrior,
the Lord is with you." and commissioned him
to lead attack against Midianites overpowering them.

His reply was "Yeah, right."

Maybe Mary suspected an equally ridiculous assignment.
if so, she was wrong, it was much more ridiculous.

Or maybe, just as Gideon knew he was no mighty warrior,
maybe Mary simply realized she did not qualify
as one who found favor with God.
This messenger must have the wrong address.
Maybe she realized how much she already failed
at the ordinary everyday things God called her to do.
But this is exactly who finds favor with God.
As she later exclaims to Elizabeth in the Magnificat,
he who exalts himself before God is humbled,
but he who humbles himself in repentance is exalted.
Whenever anyone finds favor in the eyes of God,
as Noah and Abraham, also called to do big things,
the goodness is not in the person God is looking at,
but in the eyes of God himself, who looks on us in mercy.
The same is true of each one of us.
As we reflect on things about which we have said to selves,
“this time I am going to... keep from getting angry,
or not eat that extra candy, or stay in my budget...
we may not say to selves: “God is really happy with me.”
But more important is what God says to us
because of his own goodness and grace:
“I love you. You belong to me. I forgive you.”
“Do not be afraid. The Lord is with you. You are favored.”
It is always hard to believe these words from God,
but this is the first hard task to which God calls us
and it is all because...

GOD SENDS HIS OWN SON TO BE OUR SAVIOR.

³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

God says not just, you are to give birth to a child
who is 8 lbs. or 10 or 12, which might be hard,
but you are to give birth to a child who fills the universe.
God says not: I want you to raise child who is well behaved,
but one that will be perfect in every way.
God says not: you will raise child successful in family business
but you will raise child who will inherit throne & reign as king.

In fact, unlike all other kings, his reign will never end.
God says not just, I want you to love child who will get hurt
or who will fight and die, which would be hard,
but to love a child who innocently dies for sins of others.
How in the world is Mary supposed to be able to do all this?
She is not. This is all the doing not of the child's mother,
but of his heavenly Father.
This is the point. God is giving us his own son.
Because of all the things we fail to do,
God himself must be our savior.

To save sinners who find it hard to do such little things as
- giving God the time of day to pray read his word,
- being kind and gentle without our own family members,
- using a fraction of his blessings to help others,
- saying a pleasant word to an unpleasant person.

Because of all we fail to do, God will do it all himself.
He never asks for volunteers to participate in his plan.
Jesus, the eternal son of God himself,
willingly gives up all his power and glory
to sacrifice himself for our sake.

Of all the big, powerful things the creator of universe has done
none is more incredible as this amazingly tiny, tiny thing,
that God, maker of universe, makes himself a single cell,
that God, who controls the history of all empires
makes himself a baby who can't control his own little fist.
that God, who is Lord of life and the giver of all life
makes himself weak and able to die.

This is what God does for us, but even more amazing...

GOD DOES HIS OWN WORK IN AND THROUGH US.

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

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

If you have household repair job to do or big meal to prepare,
which is harder, to do it right & on schedule all by yourself,
or to do it right & on schedule with help of a 4 year old
who has a million questions?

Questions like, "How will this be?"

But God seems to like to do things the hard way,
because even though he has to do everything for us,
he desires at the same time to do everything with us.
I think God could have given Jesus a human body without Mary,
he did it before with Adam.

God could feed our children without our hard work.

He did it when Israel was in the wilderness.

God could spread the gospel without our being witnesses.

He has angelic messengers.

But this is not how God in his wisdom chooses to do things.

Instead he does all this & more through people like us.

Nothing is impossible with God. Can you believe that?

If so, now can you believe something even harder to believe,
that nothing is impossible for God to do with us?

I don't remember being a whiney little kid, but I do remember
my mother saying to me, "Can't is your middle name."

Have we outgrown saying & thinking, "I can't"

Like a young unmarried girl who can't imagine
what God is telling her will happen,

I can't endure this, I can't stand that, I can't forgive them.

It is true. I can't. But God can and God is at work in me.

Another thing about how God chooses to do his work
is that he does it through his word.

v. 37 literally says in Greek: "No word shall be impossible"

He created the world and he conceived Jesus in Mary
with a word, the word made flesh.

And this is how he does his work in us, through his word,
his word which is living and active,
but his word which can be ignored & resisted by us
so it becomes totally unfruitful, like seed on a rock.

God's word works in our hearts to cause us to respond,

"I am the servant of the Lord,

let it be to me according to your word."

May we indeed have the forgiveness, the hope,
the ability to do what is right, eternal life in heaven,
all of which are given to us by God's word.

If we don't say this, God still does what he intends to do.
as when Zechariah, John's father doubted the angel's word,
but we, ourselves, miss out on the blessing of it,
the forgiveness, peace, hope, courage, strength, joy
that come only through believing God's word.

We have a hard time believing God's word,
so we have tendency to turn everything God does for us:
prayer, worship, sacraments, changed hearts
into something we think we have to do for God.

But by working in our hearts with his word,
God turns everything we have to do:
repentance, obedience, righteousness, love for others
into something he does for us and in us.

God did an amazing, almost unbelievable thing for Mary
and he does amazing things for us still today
because God always does his own thing.

GOD CHOOSES US OUT OF HIS OWN GRACE.

God is with us because of the favor that is with God.

GOD SENDS HIS OWN SON TO BE OUR SAVIOR,

born as tiny child because of all the little things we fail to do.

GOD DOES HIS OWN WORK IN AND THROUGH US.

Nothing is impossible with God, not even doing all he does
in and through us with his word at work in us.

May it be to us according to God's word now & forever.