

Christmas is all about the children. Boy doesn't that seem true? Advertisements are designed to attract the child's attention. Gifts are largely wrapped for the children. They help decorate the tree and the Christmas cookies. The children have their special program and events. They're driven around so they can look at the lights. It's the children that get the candy. But is there a reason? Think of the children's Christmas program. Isn't it the children with smiles on their faces saying the message of the angel to the shepherds that a Savior has been born who is Christ the Lord? Isn't it the children who talk about the manger and the baby without any questions? Children approach the story with simple unquestioning faith.

For those of you who left your childhood many years ago do you wish you could turn the clocks back for one night? Just for Christmas couldn't it be that everyone was a child. Adults are so disillusioned and matter-of-fact. We've gotten hardheaded over the years and beaten down by the world. We've learned to look at things and figure them out. We've got to explain everything. Holidays like Christmas lose some of their appeal because they're all about other things now. In many ways we've lost the ability to approach something with simple unquestioning faith.

It's not too late. We're still in preparation mode this morning. There's still time to turn things around and hear the words of the angel this morning to Mary from the gospel. Hear the words not with reasoning ears that want to explain everything the angel says, but rather with ears tuned in to the miracle behind the words.

**Be prepared to believe and receive  
A promise full of wonder  
Actions of a gracious God**

Nazareth was no boom town. Mary was no special young lady. She was pledged to a fine man by the name of Joseph, but nothing special about him either. Mary was married to Joseph but they hadn't yet moved in together. That was part of Jewish weddings at that time. It was in this nothing town, in a nothing part of the country, to basically a nothing woman that the angel brought incredible news. **"Do not be afraid Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus."** A son? Mary hadn't even thought about that yet because she wasn't living with her husband. It was impossible. This was unbelievable news for a virgin to have a baby. But even more unbelievable is who this child would be.

Both Mary and Joseph were in the family line of King David. Not surprisingly the angel announced that this child too would be part of David's line. **"The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David."** But more this child is also said to have divine blood as well. **"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."** Mary's son would in some way be God's son. He would get the throne of David. He would rule forever. These promises meant her son would be the promised Messiah. How was it the angel was speaking to her? How could she of all people be chosen? What responsibility did she have in this? The answers were none. The answers were all with God and his grace. It was a promise full of wonder that Mary was to believe.

It's too good to be true. Our reason starts questioning. How is God going to bring about the birth of a child through a virgin? That's never happened before. We've never seen it with our own eyes. So it can't be true. Then how is it that God's own son is going to be born of a sinful human being? That just makes no sense. God is to be born, of a human, and a sinful one at that. These are promises that are just too much to believe.

We can believe them though because they aren't based on anything in Mary or us. They're completely based on God's good favor. **"Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."** It's the promise of God and it contains the power to prepare us to believe. God sent the messenger, God showed his favor, we read this in God's Word, and it will happen because of God's power. God's grace is sending the world a Savior through Mary. Mary was not the only one favored by God. You too have been favored by him because the Savior is for you. We simply take the words of the angel and believe them. It may not make sense. It didn't to Mary either. But we can believe based entirely on God's favor and promise. The Lord is with us giving us a promise full of wonder.

This was completely a surprise for Mary. She wasn't expecting any of this. She was minding her own business, going about her life when suddenly an angel appeared and turned her life upside down. It was all too much to take in and believe. But Mary knew God. She knew the promises of a Messiah. And when she heard that her son would be that Messiah she was probably amazed. But she believed. She also was open to receiving. Whatever the Lord would do for her she was here to simply receive. We too prepare to receive actions of a gracious God.

Only about six months before Mary got her announcement a relative of hers got a similar announcement. Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, Mary's relative, was working when he too saw an angel. That angel gave him the announcement of the upcoming birth of his own son. But Zechariah and Elizabeth were old, well past the age you have children. So Zechariah questioned. Next thing he knew he couldn't talk for the rest of the pregnancy. Mary asked a very similar sounding question, **"How will this be since I am a virgin?"** The response Mary received from the angel indicates Mary asked still believing. She just wanted clarification. The Holy Spirit didn't give her the specifics. It would be supernatural. We confess in the creed in just a few minutes, **"conceived by the Holy Spirit."** That doesn't make it any more understandable. These are words of a gracious God that we simply receive.

Mary asked for clarification but got proof. Elizabeth was pregnant. It was impossible. But God had no problem bringing that about for Elizabeth. Mary heard what God did for her relative and realized he would do just the same for her. **“For nothing is impossible with God.”** This was a miracle to receive, not a situation to do something about. Mary wasn’t being asked if she wanted to participate. She was being told what was going to happen. She needed only to receive what God was going to give. God in his grace chose her. She didn’t deserve it, didn’t ask for it, and didn’t have anything to do with it. She was the vessel to receive what God gave by a miracle.

God’s amazing grace is on display in the wonderful actions that he took. **“The Holy Spirit will come upon 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.”** The Holy Spirit would come upon a normal human being and give her a child that would be anything but normal. Jesus shared our humanity by virtue of his birth. He came to be one of us and share our experiences. But he didn’t share our sinfulness. He was perfect in everything to make a perfect payment. **“For nothing is impossible with God.”** So every action he takes is not one we earn, but always an action we receive.

It would be highly questionable if you could explain everything about how natural birth happens. Sure we understand most of the process as it appears, but tell me how a spiritual soul isn’t there one second and then is the next. That’s a miracle. So it shouldn’t surprise us that when the second person of the Trinity came to take on human flesh the whole thing is shrouded in mystery. But it isn’t shrouded so that we get nothing from it. The Word of God promises very clearly what this Messiah was going to do. We receive the salvation he came to win without asking how or why. It happened and we can receive it joyfully.

Usually during children’s Christmas programs there are a lot of smiles. The children are smiling, parents are smiling, and God is smiling too. It’s not because there’s candy afterward, or because the program is just a prelude to presents. The children who really simply believe what they’re saying smile. **“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you.”** The parents who see simple faith in their children can smile with simple faith too. **“He is Christ the Lord.”** All can smile this morning knowing the Savior who is about to come is for you. God smiles on all with his favor, with his love, with his grace. We’re prepared to believe and receive the wonders of his promises and his gracious actions.