**Holding onto God’s Promise**

# Luke 1:26-38 New American Standard Bible

***26****Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee named Nazareth,****27****to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.****28****And coming in, he said to her, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”****29****But she was very perplexed at this statement, and was pondering what kind of greeting this was.****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 give birth to a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.****32****He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;****33****and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”****34****But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”****35****The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; for that reason also the holy Child will be called the Son of God.****36****And behold, even your relative Elizabeth herself has conceived a son in her old age, and she who was called infertile is now in her sixth month.****37****For nothing will be impossible with God.”****38****And Mary said, “Behold, the Lord’s bond-servant; may it be done to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.*

**Introduction**

I invite you to join me in listening to what God says in today’s story.

Here’s a recap of the story: In the narrative, the birth of Jesus the Messiah was announced. 2000 years ago, God sent His chief-of-staff, Gabriel the angel, to Mary a young woman who was engaged to Joseph. At the time, Mary and Joseph resided in Nazareth, a small town in Galilee with less than 500 residents *(James Strange). [In 1918, 8,000 people. In 2011, 80,410 people. 60% Arabs and 40% Christians---Wikipedia].* Gabriel told Mary that by God’s power, not by man, she would conceive a boy child. The holy child would be called the Son of the Most High and He would reign over Israel forever.

One of the best ways to understand God’s Word is to put yourself in the character’s shoes: that is, in Mary’s shoes. Had you been Mary, how would you feel and react to this awesome visit and announcement from an angel?

Let’s consider Mary for a while. She had found favor with God. Due to her faith and dedication, the Lord has chosen her to work with Him. The angel told her: without man’s help, she would conceive a child extraordinary. Her child would be called the Son of the Most High. He would forever reign over the house of David and His kingdom would never end.

That’s so wonderful, isn’t it? So far so good.

**Content**

**Here I am, Lord (v. 38).**

Take a look at how Mary responded to such awesome plan of God for her and her son: *Behold, the Lord’s bond-servant; may it be done to me according to your word* (v. 38)*.* Her response was totally voluntary and willing, we can tell.

Did you know that God never forces us to follow His will against our wish? We can always say either yes or no to His call. However, God only works with those who say a willing yes to His invitation. My prayer for all of us is that when we are invited to work with Him, we too, like Mary, respond to His call with a willing heart saying, “Here I am, Lord. Use me according to your will.”

**Fears set in heart.**

After the angel left, fears for the future began to set in Mary’s heart. She might have reasoned in her mind as follows: “It’s quite amazing that God has chosen me to work with Him. I am truly blessed and honored. But how am I going to break this news to Joseph my fiancé? I know he is a godly man, but will he believe me that I got pregnant by God’s power? Will he still accept me as his wife? What if he won’t and break the engagement? What’s going to happen to me, then?

Furthermore, how am I going to explain to my family and friends? Who’s going to believe my story anyway? I’d better hide from people for the entire nine months of pregnancy. Otherwise, they will notice my belly and eventually find out about my pregnancy. I will be lucky if I am not pelted with stones. It may even bring a disgrace to my family. Oh… how will I endure the cold stares and unfriendly gossip from townsfolk afterwards? How will my child endure the town gossip? [*Indeed, Mary and Jesus endured a persistent and malicious rumor in town that called Jesus “Mary’s son” (not Joseph’s)—a derogatory term for an illegitimate child* (Mark 6:3)].

**What being favored by God entails**

As you can see here, being favored by God doesn’t always mean that everything will be rosy and fantastic. Being chosen to work with God and for God never means an easy path, either. On the contrary, it means a narrow and rugged road, often painful and uncomfortable. In fact, the greater God’s plan is, the harder the road is that only a few people choose to take that road. Yet, when you work with God, the reward is great! God’s call is always worth saying yes to. That was the path that Mary chose to take.

Before He sent His angel to Mary, God foreknew everything she would go through in the years to come. Yet, He went ahead with His plan. So did Mary. With all those fears and worries about her uncertain future, she did stick to the course head-on.

**Holding onto God’s promise**

A reminder here about her pregnancy: other than the angel’s visit to Joseph her fiancé, God did not provide any other special protections or provisions to her. God sent the same angel Gabriel to Joseph, Mary’s future husband, to assure him that her pregnancy was from God’s Spirit, not from man. “This is happening according to God’s salvation plan,” the angel assured Joseph. “Therefore, take her as your wife (Matthew 1:20-21).” It was a huge help, but that was it.

That’s all He had done for her for the entire nine months of pregnancy. What’s that mean for us? I noticed in my life this: when God calls us to work with Him, He provides us with one or two promises or assurances about His plan that we must hold onto. For the rest, we must work with Him in trust and endurance clinging to His faithfulness till the end. E.g. My own ‘call’ to ministry. Exodus 4:10-12. These verses upheld me in times of crisis.

When things go tough, do not despair. Do not give up, either, because the Lord is with you and He will see you through. He will keep His promise. His grace and presence are sufficient for you to go on with God’s mission. That’s what Mary did in the next thirty years; whenever her heart was broken or discouraged, she held onto God’s promise given to her at the time of conception.

**Meeting God daily**

One more thing: please note here how God communicates with His people. For Mary: it was an angel. There are other means that God uses such as prophets, prayers, circumstances, dreams, and visions to communicate with His people. However, the most reliable and secure way that God uses today to reveal Himself to us is His written Word, the Bible. In the Bible, He meets us and reveals Himself to us. In the same Scripture, He points us to the directions we need to go. If the Bible is the meeting place, devotion time is our appointment time with God. If we don’t make an appointment with God in His Word, our meeting will not take place, and will not hear God’s voice. Therefore, let us not neglect the opportunity to meet with God.

Yes, all of us expect that God would somehow speak to us. Too many of us, though, seldom hear God’s voice because we never search God out in the Bible. Unless we open the Bible, we will not discover God’s will. Let us make appointment with God in the Bible so that we may live out our life according to His will and power. Let us rely on God’s directions and His will and live a life with heavenly perspective.

**Closing**

Remember, God has created you and has a plan for you. The plan that only fits you. The plan that only you can fulfill.

This morning, the same God who has called Mary invites you to work with Him. His plan for you may not be as drastic as Mary’s, yet He still waits for your answer.

Are you ready to say yes to His call? Are you willing to take a narrow path for God? Are you willing to suffer on behalf of Jesus the Lord? When you do, the reward will be great and eternal. You will never regret it.

Amen.