

Highly Favored

“In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus” Luke 1:26-31.

“Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” These words and the message that the angel brought forever changed Mary’s life. She was the one, chosen by God to bear His son, the long-awaited Messiah. It was an honor too wonderful to hope for or even imagine. But as the events of the advent unfolded, I wonder how often Mary had to remind herself of the angel’s greeting? As a young Jewish girl, unmarried and pregnant, telling Joseph and her parents the incredible story of the angel’s announcement, did she remind herself, *the Lord is with me?* Far along in her pregnancy, back aching, feet swollen, riding a donkey through the wilderness, did she recall the angel’s words *you who are highly favored?* As she lay in the dirt and stink of the stable, enduring the pangs of birth did she recognize God’s presence, did she *feel* highly favored? What about as she gathered their meager belongings in the middle of the night and tried to quiet the cries of her small son as the young family fled to Egypt to escape Herod’s soldiers, did she recite to herself, *do not be afraid?*

Her circumstances surely didn’t indicate she was highly favored. To all outward appearances she was disgraced and humiliated, a young girl who *had* to get married. She was poor and a stranger in a foreign land. Of all the scenarios Mary might have imagined about being the mother of the Messiah, the reality of being “highly favored” was probably not what she had anticipated.

But throughout Mary’s journey God provided signs of his faithfulness to help her remember that she was in His hands. He sent an angel to Joseph so that he would believe the impossible story told him by his betrothed. Shepherds left their flocks and hurried to the stable to worship her newborn son. Wise men followed a star and brought

gifts fit for a king. There were prophecies in the temple and more angel messengers. But most of all there was Jesus. That night in the stable Mary had only to look into the face of her sweet son and Savior to know that God was with her and she was indeed highly favored.

Our life journeys are also strewn with trouble. Trials come, and circumstances threaten to overwhelm. Yet God is ever faithful and gracious to provide us with evidence of his presence. Through answered prayers, encouraging words from a friend, His word touching our hearts, His life-changing work in our lives, the glory and beauty of his creation, He assures us of His great love. But most of all He gave us Jesus. Jesus, who pursued us that he might rescue us from sin, gave His life for us that we might know unending love, dwells in us that we might have abundant life. Jesus, whose presence can overwhelm any circumstance.

In spite of life's hardships and trials, like Mary, we too, have only to look to our beloved Savior to know that we are blessed beyond measure, yes, highly favored.

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