

Hail, O Blessed One!

Luke 1:26-38

December 11, 2011

The angel Gabriel came to Mary. The angel Gabriel came to Mary in Nazareth and said to her: “Hail, O blessed one! The Lord is with you!” And Mary was deeply troubled.

I’m telling you! If an angel came to me and said to me, “Hail, O blessed one,” I’d be way past deeply troubled! Especially if the angel told me I was going to become pregnant!

But it wasn’t the news of an impending pregnancy that upset Mary. She hadn’t heard that part of the message yet. It was the greeting, just the greeting.

Hail, O blessed one! The Lord is with you!

“Hail, O blessed one.” Actually, what the angel said, or what Luke says the angel said was: *χαίρε κεχαριτωμενη*. *χαίρε* is a Greek salutation, a greeting, but it also derives from the Greek word for joy, so it might be translated: “hail” or “greetings” or “joy to you.” *κεχαριτωμενη* is the passive perfect participle of the word which means to confer grace or favor, so it means: “one to whom grace has been given.” So the greeting the angel gave Mary can be translated in various ways:

Greetings, you who are highly favored!

Joy be to you, favored woman!

Rejoice, you who are dearly loved!

Hail, O blessed one!

If you are Mary, how do you feel when you hear that greeting coming from God’s messenger?

Hail to you, most highly favored lady!

But ...

Lots of “buts” come to mind, don’t they? But I’m just Mary! How is it that you are calling me “most highly favored lady?” Where does that come from? It’s more than I deserve, more than I think I can handle, because that puts me in the spotlight, right in the middle of the light of God shining on me, singling me out. I’m not ready for that kind of attention. I’m not ready for that kind of responsibility. I’m just Mary!

She's right. She is just Mary. Just another young Hebrew woman. Just another young woman from Nazareth. Just another young woman. Just another woman. Just another human being. Just like you! Just like me!

So why was she chosen? Why did God send a messenger to give Mary this greeting? What recommended Mary above all other women?

Nothing!

Was Mary chosen because she was especially pure, especially devoted, especially holy? No!

Was Mary chosen, because unlike all the rest of us, she was somehow free from sin and its effects, and was therefore a worthy vessel for God's purposes? No!

There is nothing, no suggestion of anything at all, that makes Mary worthy of this greeting from God. God chose Mary, because God chose to choose Mary! God told Mary she was blessed, favored, full of grace, because God chose to bless her, because God chose to favor her, because God chose to fill her with his grace. God told Mary she was dearly loved, for no other reason than that God chose to love her dearly.

God's love is arbitrary, absolutely arbitrary. God loves, not for any reason, not in response to anything we do, but only because God chooses to love, because God is love. God's love has everything to do with who God is, and nothing to do with who we are.

So give it up! There is nothing you can do to earn God's love. There is nothing you can do to increase your chances of hearing a favorable word from God. God simply chooses to give it!

Hail, O blessed one!

Who, me? Yes, you! You are blessed! You are favored! You are loved! You are filled, filled to overflowing, with God's grace! Can you stand it?

But there's more to the message ...

You will become pregnant and give birth to a son ... and the Lord God will make him a king ... and his kingdom will never end.

God chose Mary, but it's not just about Mary. God chose to bless Mary, but it's not just about blessing Mary.

God favored Mary. God loved her and blessed her and gave her a child, but the child was not hers, but ours. God chose to bless us, God chose to love us, by giving us Jesus, a savior, our savior. And God chose Mary to play her part in making that happen.

“Mary,” the messenger said, “God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.” In other words: “Mary, God has a job for you.” And Mary said, “I am the Lord’s servant, may it happen to me as you have said.”

It’s just Mary, still just Mary. Just another young Hebrew woman. Just another young woman. Just another woman. Just another human being, like you and like me. God had a job for her, and God has a job for you. God has a job for me. And it’s the same job: to be the agents, to be the vessels, to be the servants by whom God’s love is birthed into this world in tangible form.

God has favored us! God has blessed us! God has loved us! God has filled us with his grace, so we may be faithful servants, faithful stewards of that grace, of that blessing, of that love. Jesus, Son of God, savior of the world, living word of God, the love of God incarnate, is made visible again to the world by what we say and do. They will know we are Christians by our love. They will know Jesus by our love. Jesus is embodied ... in us.

But I’m just Tim ...

Yes, I am just Tim. Just another middled-aged American man. But I have been greatly blessed! I have been highly favored! I have been deeply loved! And I have been chosen, chosen for a purpose, chosen to fulfill a holy purpose, chosen to fulfill God’s purpose.

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.
The Lord has chosen me and sent me
to bring good news to the poor,
to heal the broken-hearted,
to announce release to captives
and freedom to those in prison.
The Lord has sent me to proclaim
that the time has come
when the Lord will save his people ...*

And you have been chosen, too. You are greatly blessed! You are highly favored! You’re deeply loved! And you have been chosen.

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon you.
The Lord has chosen you and sent you
to bring good news to the poor,
to heal the broken-hearted ...*

... to bear God's love into this world, into your world, in tangible, life-transforming, life-giving ways.

May it happen as the Lord has said. May it happen to me, Lord, as you have said. Say it!

May it happen to me, Lord, as you have said ...