**Part A Luke 1:26-38**

Something about being lowly.

**In the sixth month, 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 be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”**

**“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”**

**The angel answered, “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. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.”**

**“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.**

We’re going to talk about the application of this after the third reading, but for now, let’s just think about what this meant for Mary and for Jesus. Nazareth was an out-of-the way place in an out-of-the-way state. Think of Moses Lake. Maybe Colville. Not quite Rearden. Do you think of great things as coming from there? Mary was probably only 12 or so. She was pledged to be married. She was not a particularly important person in society’s eyes. And yet, she is highly favored by God.

What is it that made her highly favored? Had she done something special? No. What mattered was not how many great things she had done, but the great thing God was going to do through her. It was almost unthinkable. Really, since Jesus is the most important person who ever lived, since Mary was going to give him birth, she has the most important task anyone ever had. What was her job? She was going to bring God into the world.

In the Advent service we saw how some passages predicted that God himself would come and save his people, restoring them to purity and ruling over them in an eternal kingdom, the likes of which they had never seen. Other passages said that a child would be born, a son would be given, and he would accomplish this. Well, this is where those two predictions meet. It turns out that the baby who was promised was God himself come into this world. He came to save us and rule over us in the eternal kingdom we call the church. This kingdom really will last forever.

The virgin birth is truly remarkable. It should boggle your mind if you try to understand it. How this is possible we cannot know. But somehow the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Word of God, united himself to human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. He was a regular human with a regular human body. He also had a regular human mind and spirit. He started life as just a few cells and grew as all other humans grew. But his conception was without sin because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary.

And how did Mary respond to all this? I am the Lord’s servant, may it be to me as you have said. May we respond to God’s promises and callings in our lives with the same humble attitude. She didn’t ask a million questions or raise objections. He told her not to fear, so she didn’t. She just trusted and resolved to serve God as best she could. This seemed impossible. But nothing is impossible with God.

**Part B Luke 1:39-44**

Mary’s first response was acceptance and trust. But now she needed to share her joy and be with someone who could understand. So she travels to see her relative, whom she just discovered had her own miracle baby in the womb:

**At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.**

This is really amazing. Elizabeth would be six months along now, and so John was big enough to move around. And when his mother heard Mary, he jumped. Clearly, John and Jesus, Elizabeth and Mary were filled with the Holy Spirit in a special way. God was working in them a strong conviction and joy that he was working in a never-before-seen way through Jesus. Elizabeth was filled with special insight. She realized, somehow, that Mary was carrying the Lord, the Messiah. Mary must have been especially impressed that Elizabeth was able to recognize this. The fact that Elizabeth conceived in her old age, and now on top of that, she has special knowledge about Mary’s situation, would have all strengthened Mary’s faith at this difficult time. And we’ll see in the next reading, it led Mary to an amazing exclamation.

**Part C, Luke 1:45-56**

**Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!”**

These are the words Elizabeth speaks, but they really introduce Mary to us. The reason Mary is such an example is that she believed what the Lord said. Mary follows in the footsteps of her ancestors going back to Abraham whom Scripture tells us was made right in God’s eyes by faith. And so Mary shows us a proper attitude towards God’s promises. Her song is not really written for her alone, but for all of us who fear God and are objects of his mercy and grace:

**And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.**

Mary demonstrates what it is to have a humble faith. I am lowly, but I rejoice in God, for he has saved me. Her joy was not in herself. This was not like someone winning a competition. There is no pride here. But she exalts in what God was going to do for her.

This is a good example of true humility. Sometimes people have the wrong idea about humility. They go around saying, “I’m no good, I’m horrible.” People feel horrible about themselves or for themselves and think they are being humble. But actually, that is just another form of pride. Pride is thinking too highly of yourself. If you are obsessed with yourself, even if you are obsessed with how bad you are, it’s really a way of thinking you’re more important than you are. In the grand scheme of things, you’re just one out of 7 billion people. Whether you’re the best or the worst, so what? True humility is to recognize that none of is really all that important.

But the humility that God is looking for goes one step more. I’m nothing much, but God is everything. He has done wonderful things for me. He has remembered me even in my lowness. And so I am special. And you’re special. All of us, like Mary, have been chosen by God. All of us have his name put on us in Baptism. All of us are called to follow him in faith. But being special does not fill us with an once of pride. Why? Because it’s not about us. It’s about the great things God has done FOR us. The proper response is gratefulness, praise, and awe at what God has done for us.

**From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.**

It’s all about what God was going to do for her. That is why people should remember Mary. Of course, sometimes people today get confused. They think that Mary was so great in God’s sight, and that’s why he chose her. Some people even go so far as to say she was sinless. All this is missing the point. The is blessed because God, the Holy God, decided to do great things for her. The fact that she was not particularly worthy is her whole point in this song. Because God is not in the business of doing things for people who deserve it. If that were the case, he would not bless any of us. No, God is in the habit of doing great things for undeserving people who nevertheless come to him for mercy and fear his name:

God is going to work through you and me as we walk in step with his spirit and seek to obey him. And it doesn’t depend on our efforts. It doesn’t depend on our skills, or our intelligence, or even on how carefully we do everything he says. No, Mary tells us what our success as Christians depends on:

**He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.**

God doesn’t need powerful people to get things done. God doesn’t need wealthy people in order for the church to grow and the gift of eternal life to be spread. God doesn’t need the most educated people or the most sophisticated people. God can take the president of the united states and fling him down in a moment if he chooses. God could take Pharaoh, God could take Caesar, God could dispose of any world leader at any time, or even a multi billionaire. God doesn’t need their power and wealth, and in fact, often power and wealth get in the way of God accomplishing anything.

But what God wants is humble faith. The people God lifts up are the humble. God fills us up with eternal life and salvation when we come begging to him for them. All the most powerful people in the world can’t buy that even if they give every last cent they have. But you have it. You may or may not be the most educated, most successful, or most respected person in town. It doesn’t matter God has blessed you and lifted you up with eternal life. That’s all that matters. Because he has made you part of his people, Israel:

**He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.”**

In Bible class, we’re studying the history of the term “Israel”. Originally it referred to the man, Jacob, who had 12 sons and had his name changed to “Israel” which means “wrestles with God.” Later the term was applied to the northern kingdom, but by this time the term simply refers to people who believe in the true God. They are the true Israelites, as Jesus said to Nathaniel and Paul says in Romans 9. God has helped his people. He has remembered his promises and sent the Savior Jesus. Jesus has rescued us from the fear of death. He has reconciled us back to God and made it possible for God’s holy spirit to dwell in sinful people like you and me. He’s given us eternal life and promised to make all we experience in this life work for our eternal good. God has kept his promises. All the riches, all the power in the world is nothing compared to that.

**Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.**

The Bible never tells us to venerate Mary, or talk to her, or consider her sinless. But we can imitate her faith her and we can learn from her. She was a humble person. She exemplified the lowly. She was from a poor, less educated, less prestigious area in Galilee. She was just a girl, or we might say a very, very young woman. And yet when this incredibly difficult task was laid upon her, and this amazing message was transmitted from God, she accepted it in humble faith.

Mary represents any of us whom God calls to bear Jesus. We don’t bear him literally, but we carry his name on us and we are all called to share him with the world. “She brings no outstanding credentials to the task and lives on the edge of the nation. She brings nothing on her résumé other than her availability and willingness to serve. But those characteristics are the most basic ones anyone can offer God. So he puts her to use in his plan, taking her through a process for which she has had no training or preparation. He simply promises to be with her in the journey, and she responds by being willing to go on the ride. The angel, faithful in his task, wants Mary to know just how favored she is. With God’s grace behind her, Mary knows that she can do what God asks.” – Block

Just like the angel told Mary how favored she was, I think it’s my job to make sure you realize how favored you are. We are God’s special possession. We are called to do great things in this world. Just like Mary, we are called to bring the divine into this sinful world. There’s nothing more remarkable than that. Jesus took on flesh. But now the spirit of Jesus is in our hearts. Through us God’s spirit goes out into the world. Through us all his goodness is to be made known to sinful flesh. Just like it’s amazing that the Son of God could become man, it’s amazing that now God wants to work through us. But he does.

How can God possibly work through you, you might be wondering. I wonder that too. Many of you might think, “What do I have to offer God? Who would be interested in what I say or do?” Yet all God asks is that we trust and obey his plan for us.

When you share your faith with someone, God doesn’t need you to be an eloquent speaker. In fact, you can be a bumbling idiot. It doesn’t matter. You can still share your faith. God will keep his promise and use you to be the salt of the earth. Jesus didn’t say, “You might be the salt of the earth, if you want to be, and if you do a good job.” He just said, “you are.” God doesn’t need you to be skilled, he just needs you to believe and serve him in humble faith.

When you volunteer to help at church, even if things do not seem great and glorious, you are highly favored. Yet even our modest efforts bear fruit, because whenever we tell people about Jesus, God promises that he is at work, convicting people’s hearts. When you take the time to be a Christian parent, and you put your limited time and energy into teaching your kids about God, you might feel like you’re not doing enough or you’re not good enough. God doesn’t need you to be a brilliant teacher. He just needs you to share the simply truths you’ve learned with your kids. His Word is divine. Just share it. The Holy Spirit does the rest. He breaks into human hearts through the word, whether we share it eloquently or not. And if you’re rusty on those truths, that’s why God provides you with Bible classes to attend and the ability to read. All he asks for is our humble faith. He provides the plan, he provides, the power, he provides the results.

Look what great things God did through Mary. What did she do? Only believe. She didn’t have to come up with a plan. She didn’t have to perform at a certain level. She just had to trust God knew what he was doing and serve him as best she could. That’s what God calls us to today. Whatever your income level, your education level, your family background, where you’re from, what kind of an accent you have, when you believe in Jesus and you humbly wait for God to fulfill his promises in you, you are blessed and highly favored in his eyes. And just like God led Mary to compose this song, may God lead us to realize how favored we are in his sight and express ever increasing praise and gratitude to God our Savior.