

**The Honorable Mary**  
**Luke 1: 26-38**  
**Luke 1: 46b-55**  
**December 19, 2021**  
**Rev. L. Bryan McClain**

Question for the Day: Who are we that we matter to God?

I am of the firm opinion that few people have a strong sense of self-assuredness and confidence that insecurities have little relevance in their lives. They are the kind of people who will say things like, "Once I thought I was wrong, but I was mistaken," and mean it. In my mind, they are the kind of people who will run for president, never thinking for a minute they could lose.

They are the people who seem to always have it together no matter what. But they are also the ones who seem to find themselves caught in the middle of a scandalous affair or a significant Ponzi scheme, or because of their celebrity status, they believe they are somehow invincible from the laws or the court of or the courts of public opinion.

But for the rest of us, we may be more like Mary. Or at least we feel as though we can identify with her, not as the mother of Jesus, for surely that does elevate her, but I think most of us can identify with how she must have felt about herself when the angel came to have a chat with her. Even men may resonate with the same self-assessment that Mary may well have had of herself.

That is to say, I think most of us will honestly ask the question, "Who am I that I matter to God?" The angel came to Mary with these words: "Rejoice favored one, the Lord is with you." I think most of us have heard enough sermons that we get the "the Lord is with you" part.

After all, that is what we hear in the name Emmanuel – the Lord is with you. Jesus came to show us that the Lord is with us. We comprehend, at least on some level, that Jesus died to save us from our sins, or we recognize it in those times where our life was spared, or our family was kept safe, or we avoided an embarrassing situation. We get that the Lord is with us.

It is the other two lines the angel says that have caught my attention this morning and raise questions for me to ask of myself and to put to you that you may reflect on the same.

**"Rejoice favored one."** Like Mary, we may wonder what sort of greeting this might be. In other words, we may ask ourselves, "why is Mary favored?" What did she do to deserve that status? Taking this strictly from Luke's Gospel, all we know about Mary is that she is a virgin, nothing more. She was not the president of the women's club or the youth group; she did not

save anyone in the heat of battle or anyone's life so far as we know. And so far as we know, she had not inspired anybody with great speeches and words of wisdom.

We have good reason to believe that Mary was only a teenager and barely that. When I think about her qualifications to be the favored one, I have to ask why. But then I realize one very important fact. At one time, we were all like Mary. We were at one time in our life young, innocent, and not much experience, still wet behind the ears as they say.

Could it be that God singled out this young girl not only because she was pure and innocent but because she represents us all? Because she was a poor Galilean? Could it be that she represents not only the intellectual but also the average? Could it be that Mary, faithful as she must have been, also struggled with what it meant to be faithful? What it meant to understand God?

Perhaps Mary looked at her own plight of being a female Galilean Jew and wondered if this was all God meant for her. She might not have been very old, but she is old enough to know that she would not be anyone's princess, no debutante, or bell of the ball.

This also gets me thinking about her home life. "Greetings favored one." She wondered what kind of greeting this might be. Why did she wonder that? Had she never been considered the favored one before by anyone? To that very point, how many of us have felt like we were never considered to be favored by anybody, not even by members of our own family, our mothers or fathers, or our teachers?

When you come from a large family, every kid feels like someone else is the favored one. My brothers and sister all thought I was spoiled. But I had a similar opinion about them. They got to do things I couldn't. They got away with things I wouldn't. Who was Mary in her family? Did her parents love her, or were they pushing her out the door?

Here is what I think God is saying to Mary and to all of us who very rarely, if ever, feel like we are favored by anybody. **You matter**. You matter to God because no matter who you are, no matter where you come from, no matter what sex or what age, you have a special gift to offer that gives you an important role to play in this thing called life.

In the Advent Bible study, "Gifts that won't break", one of the gifts God offers to us is the gift of encouragement. How often are you encouraged each day? Once, twice, three times a day or more?

Or are you never encouraged? Do you hear more insults, more ugly names, more criticism, more sarcasm than words of praise or words of hope? When someone pays you a compliment or greets you with a favor, do you have to stop and wonder what they meant by that? Are they talking to me? And how often do you encourage others?

There is something very special about Mary. She is the quintessential average girl. And God has come to her to say as if to say to all of us; Greetings favored one. You are special, and God is going to honor you.

**That is the second thing that Mary is told. That God is going to honor her.** How is God going to honor this average young girl? With a medal? With a certificate of appreciation? A dinner and plenty of guests to roast her? How about with a lottery ticket or a cash prize?

**No, God is going to honor this average young girl by placing within her very being a child who will be..... WOW!!! A child who will be....** It is with a high calling and a responsibility that God honors Mary. For Mary, God filled in the blanks. And he was going to do for Jesus what he had just done for Mary. He was going to fill him with encouragement. He was teaching Mary how to encourage her Child, even before he was born.

God tells her, "This Child is going to be the savior of the world. This Child was going to be called the Son of the most high. This Child was going to be called Jesus – "God Saves." This Child was going to be filled with more potential than Mary could ever imagine having; potential she herself had, but like most children born into poverty, being born to parents so busy trying to put food on the table they forget to encourage their children, or they just don't know how, Mary did not realize she mattered until God spoke it to her, Greetings favored one, God is honoring you today."

Now I'm not saying that you give in to a child's every whim or that you fill them with false hope. Not every child born is going to be or have the personality and the qualifications to be world-famous.

Now, I used to think that no one born in the US would ever be the King or Queen of England until Meghan married Harry, but I do know for a fact that no one in this life will ever be able to fly like Peter Pan and never grow up. We all must grow up.

But how do we grow up? How are we taught to see the world? How we teach our kids and grandkids to view themselves can be the difference between a harsh reality destined for failure and a life filled with reasonable confidence or somewhere in between. The result really does lie with what we do with the honor that is given to us, just as it was given to Mary.

The honor Mary was given was to be entrusted with a very precious gift from God – A Child. What did Mary do with the honor of being told she was going to have a child and that it was going to be.... All of these great things? Did she dismiss it? Hogwash!, Did she laugh and say, "Are you serious?" Or "You gotta be joking."

No, she said, I am the Lord's servant, let it be with me just as you have said.

Folks here is a key point that I want you to get. We know Mary conceived the Holy Child and named him Jesus. And he would go on to do great things. We know this from our faith and from our Christian history.

But just as the honorable Mary represents all of us at some point in our lives, so too the honor Mary receives in conceiving this Holy Child represents the honor God wants to bestow on each and every one of us. It is the Child of God waiting to be born in us, a child who has so much potential, the Child within each of us that is meant to be special, gifted, the Child in us who will be called..... Who will be called.....? Well, you will have to fill in the blank. All I can tell you is The Christ Child is waiting to be born again in you. What you do with that is up to you.

Will you disregard it? Will you laugh at the thought of it? Or will you say, "I am the Lord's servant, let it be with me, just as you have said?"

Today's word is Honor. Can anybody tell me what they think honor means and how one is shown honor? In other words, how does someone receive honor?

The bible tells us that God is going to honor Mary. Did she receive a medal like this? (Show one of my medals) did she get a fancy meal with lots of presents like it was her birthday? No God honored her by entrusting to her care, His Only Son. He showed her honor by trusting her with his most precious possession. God honored her because she was willing to be an obedient servant to his plan.

God trusted that little Mary was going to be a responsible, caring, and loving mother, even as she and Joseph would face many obstacles and hurdles along the way but still encourage this little Child just as God encouraged Mary. That's what I think, what do you think?

I want to leave you with these questions as we go into this final week of Advent, preparation, getting ready for Christ to come; Do you know that you matter to God? Do you realize that God wants to honor you? If you do, then what does being honored mean to you?