



Title: Christmas Faith

Theme: The Faith of Mary, Submission to God's Will

Series: The Cast of Christmas

"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." (Luke 1:26-38)

Submission to the Lord's will is an absolute essential before a Christian can grasp the truths surrounding the Christmas story

Little information is given about Mary in the Word of God. However, what is said is striking and sets before every Christian a Biblical example of true submissiveness to God's will. Submission to the Lord's will is an absolute essential before a Christian can grasp the truths surrounding the Christmas story.

I would propose to you that there are several simple truths that the Holy Spirit of Christ would like to place deep within your mind and burn deep within your spiritual heart.

Just what are those truths and how can they be a blessing to the children of God?

Truths worth grasping this Christmas season

One truth worth grasping this Christmas season is that no matter where you live and no matter what circumstance you find yourself in, the Lord can reach into your life and make you a valuable part of the building of the kingdom of God. Our text says, "God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee." (Luke 1:26)

There is much that the Holy Spirit of Christ wants you to grasp in today's message. In this first division of the message He wants you to grasp the significance of Nazareth. This city is not mentioned in the Old Testament. It was the home of Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:39) and Nazareth was where the angel announced to the virgin the birth of the Messiah. (Luke 1:26-28) Nazareth is where Jesus grew to manhood (Luke 4:16) and where He began His public ministry in the synagogue. (Matthew 13:54) (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Easton's Bible Dictionary) Those are powerful truths to cling to.

Unfortunately, Nazareth around the time of the birth of Christ had established a rather poor reputation in morals and religion. (The New International Dictionary of the Bible) This why we read of Nathaniel of whom Jesus said, "...[was] a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false," saying this, "Can anything good come from [Nazareth]?" (John 1:47,46)

Many Christian historians tell us that by the time of the birth of Christ, Nazareth had become an unimportant town. (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia) Nazareth and the people living in her were despised by Romans and Jews. Nazareth of Galilee bordered Gentile and heathen nations and those living in her were considered a conquered people. (The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible)

Evidence of the citizen's spiritual condition in Nazareth is found in their treatment of Christ during His ministry. The Bible says that He returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 4:14) The Bible says after Jesus was finished teaching in the Synagogue on a Sabbath day, after reading from the Book of Isaiah, "[The people] spoke well of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His lips..." But, then they begin to question, "...Isn't this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4: 16-22) After Jesus had spoken more to them they "...drove Him out of town, and took Him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw Him down the cliff." (Luke 4:29) It was because of their lack of belief that Jesus could not do many miracles in Nazareth. (Matthew 13:58)

Symbolically, the significance to all this is that Nazareth in Jesus' time represented no reputation for religion or anything significant. Jesus having His connections to Nazareth shows us symbolically that He desires to show His favor on the Gentile world. Jonah, Elijah and Elisha were very much conversant in Galilee and were known to be great prophets to the Gentiles. This shows us that God is just as able and willing to send His message to an area that is not willing to receive the message as well as to a place that is searching for God.

God had sent His messenger to Nazareth as well as He did Jerusalem, where Gabriel foretold to Zechariah of the birth of John the Baptist which came about as the result of Divine intervention. (Luke 1:5-25)

God's messenger, Gabriel was entrusted with a Divine message to Mary, to Zechariah, and also to the Prophet Daniel. The purpose of Gabriel being sent to Daniel was for the purpose of giving meaning to visions. In Daniel 9:21-23 we read of Daniel saying, "While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for His holy hill-- while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision: (Daniel 9:21-23)

There is so much for Christians to grasp this Christmas season if they will die to self, cast off the business of this world, and meditate upon the lives of those physically involved in the life of Christ.

Gabriel means "man of God" and it can mean "the strength of God." (Who's Who in the Bible; The Complete Word Study Dictionary) Let the Holy Spirit place these truths deep within your heart. As part of Gabriel's message he told Daniel that he was highly esteemed, (Daniel 9:23) he told Mary that she had found favor with God (Luke 1:30) and Elizabeth said, "In these days [God] has shown His favor [to me]. (Luke 1:25)

No matter whether you are doing the work of a prophet like Daniel, offering worship in the house of God doing the Lord's work like Zechariah, or living a faithful life before God like Mary and Elizabeth, the Lord can get His message to you anytime and any place you are when you need it. While you are serving the Lord in the church or out in the work place where there seems to be no interest in the work of God, or even be a hostile attitude to the true works of Christ. God can still get His message to you and it will strengthen you to accomplish your part of the Great Commission and in everything the Lord has called you to do.

Benefits of a circumcised heart

Those who have the faith of Mary can enjoy the Lord meeting them right where they are and they can enjoy the benefits of a circumcised heart. Romans 2:28-29 says, "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code..." (Romans 2:28-29)

Mary was a virgin, representing that which is pure, that heart that is sold out to the will of God and willing to die to self for the purposes of God. She represents that heart that is hungry for God.

Circumcision of the spiritual heart has always been on the heart of God. It is not only a New Testament revelation for mankind but found in Old Testament several times. (Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25-26) The Bible is clear on what God can and will do. Deuteronomy 30:6 says, "The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love Him with all your heart and with all your soul and live." (Deuteronomy 30:6)

Mary, who is a representation of a heart after God gave birth to a Son who walked upon this guilty sod, remained sinless, and got victory over sin and death so you and I do not have to be enslaved to sin and eternal damnation, but rather eternal life in Christ.

Many do not know and have true Christmas joy because they try to live by outward circumcision, outward showing of religious acts. They listen to the Word of God, they try to obey God's Word while punishing everyone with their attitudes and religious piety. Still, they are unable to get a joyous victory over sin, the world and the lies of the devil. Christians who have true Christmas joy have revelation and illumination of what the Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 2:11, "In [Christ they are] circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ. (Colossians 2:11)

This circumcision allows them to have spiritual fellowship with the Holy Spirit of Christ. Romans 8:10 tells us, "But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you." (Romans 8:10) The Holy Spirit takes the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, (Ephesians 6:17) and washes the heart with the written Word. (Ephesians 5:25b) Jesus Christ was born to die so that we may have life abundantly. This is enjoyed by accepting Jesus Christ to be both Savior and Lord and by allowing Him to sanctify us as the Holy Spirit brings life to the Written Word of God in our hearts.

The Bible is a better cleanser than that which is advertised on the radio or television. It takes out and can keep out the soiled spots in the heart.

I taught my sons, Derek, Caleb and Josiah how to properly clean a horse stall. They had to dig down deep to find that spot where urine lays deep and hard to find, but if left alone will work its way to the surface with a terrible acid smell that makes your eyes water, burns the skin of horse flesh, and causes hoof disease. All national champions have someone who properly cleans their stall, keeping out those impurities that can prevent a horse from achieving all it can.

I have done farrier work in some the best horse barns in the world, and no matter how well they clean the stall one day, it begins to get a nasty smell and needs to be cleaned the next day.

When Christians become born again it is like having our hearts all cleaned up, but because of the sinful nature that is in all of us, we need a constant cleaning so we can remain in a healthy condition, thus becoming champions in and for Christ. Just as a dedicated horseman does what it takes to enable a horse to achieve the goals set before it, the Holy Spirit of Christ remains in the child of God, constantly cleaning the spiritual heart with the Word of God. The child of God that has the faith of Mary becomes all the Lord desires for him to be. Their heart cry is like the Psalmist who wrote, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your Word. I seek you with all my heart: do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:9-11)

Just as Christ was humble enough to be born in a stinky stable and I can tell you all stables have a smell, no matter how well they are cleaned every day. The Holy Spirit of Christ takes up residence in the stable of our hearts and contends with the smell of the flesh that daily needs to be cleansed.

His purpose is to circumcise our hearts and make us like Christ, to become useful in proclaiming the truths of Christmas all year round. Christians who have the faith of Mary know this truth of being in Christ, "Such a confidence as this is ours through Christ before God... He made us competent as ministers of the new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit..." (2 Corinthians 3:6) The second greatest benefit of a circumcised heart is to be found competent in our service to the Son of the living God, the first and most important benefit being a pure heart in God's sight. That it may be said of us as the Bible says about Zechariah and Elizabeth, "Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly."

"Highly favored" with God

Mary was the physical mother of Jesus Christ the Son of God who enables us to enjoy the new covenant found through the shedding of His blood on the Cross of Calvary. Another truth worth grasping this Christmas season is that her faith enabled her to enjoy being "highly favored" with God. Our text says, "The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.'" (Luke 1:28)

This spoken blessing into her life did not come from abroad, but from the very throne room of God and the term "highly favored" (*kecharitomene*) is an active verb meaning to have shown kindness to. This is a divine grace freely given to whom the Lord wants to give favor to. Great Greek scholars tell us that the perfect passive participle of the verb (*charitoo*) is only used here in Luke 1:28 and again in Ephesians 1:6 where it is wonderfully translated in the King James Bible as "made us accepted in the beloved."

Abbott-Smith defines this Greek word as "...endued with divine grace to the full..." or in other words cause us to find favor. (Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament; The Complete Word Study, New Testament; The Greeks-English Dictionary: Word Meanings in the New Testament)

Let's bring this theological teaching down to earth. Just as Mary was highly favored to be the natural mother of Jesus Christ, Christians through being born again are highly favored by God to have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of Christ living in them. Having Christ as Savior and Lord is the greatest Christmas present that anyone can ever have. Ephesians 1:5-7 in the King James Bible says, "Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Ephesians 1:5-7)

The idea worth grasping here is that God has extended His favor or grace to all born again Christians in Christ just as He did Mary. (Word Meanings in the New Testament; The Complete Word Study, New Testament) Mary was the bearer of the physical Son of God, He being God in the flesh - Christians have the Holy Spirit of Christ living in them. Romans 8:9 says, "And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." (Romans 8:9) The same chapter says if you have Christ living in you, you have eternal life.

It is imperative that we understand that it was not Mary's faith that caused God to move on her behalf, it was whom she had faith in, God. She had to believe the Word of God spoken to her was truth worth grasping. Her heart after God enabled her to receive divine revelation that was full of explanation and promise. The truth that was worth grasping for Mary was and is for us, "The Lord is with you." (Luke 1:28)

These are the very words that came from the angel of the Lord who appeared to Gideon who said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." (Judges 6:12) This is the very promise made to soldiers of Christ we read about in the Book of Matthew in the giving of the Great Commission. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20) The word "always" (pantos) means continually and forever with us in our work with the Lord and in everything involved in our lives. Jesus will not leave us to do the work of God or to live out our lives down here all alone depending only on man's flesh. He is literally involved in everything that affects our human lives and souls. (The Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament) What greater truth is worth meditating upon this Christmas season?

Christians who grasp this truth live a life like that of Mary, believing the Word of the Lord, enquiring for revelation through the written Word and walking in the favor of God.

Walk in submission to the Lord's will for them

The last truth worth grasping this Christmas season is that those who have the faith of Mary walk in submission to the Lord's will for them. The Bible records these words of Mary, "I am the Lord's servant... May it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38)

The first desire in the child of God who wants to enjoy the favor of God in his life is to die to self and surrender to the will of God in his life. The key word here is "servant." The New American Standard Bible has a great translation by using the word "bondslave."

Being a true bondslave (*doule*) meant Mary belonged totally to the Lord and gave Him full permission to work His will in and through her life. This heart attitude enabled Mary to worship the Lord in soul and spirit. Mary said, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1:46-47) Her submissiveness enabled her to gain understanding and direction from the Lord.

Christians can choose to have understanding of God's will for them as well as Mary did. Romans 12:1-2 says, "offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:1-2)

Christians who get the most out of what the first Christmas opened up for the children of God grasp the truth of servant-hood. Servant-hood frequently appears in the Gospels, especially in the parables. (Matthew 18:23-35; 21:33-44) For Jesus, the concept of servant-hood is the way of expressing a right relationship with God. Jesus says no one can serve two masters, (Matthew 6:24) nor is anyone above the plan Christ has for those who follow Him. (Matthew 10:24) A faithful servant of Christ does as the will of Christ directs him. (Matthew 24:45-46)

Jesus presented Himself as a servant when He washed His disciples' feet at the Last Supper. (John 13:1-20) He told His disciples that He did, "not come to be served but to serve." (Mark 10:45) The Apostle Paul tells us that Jesus was in the form of God, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant. (Philippians 2:7) On the basis of His own example as well as throughout Scripture, Jesus encouraged His disciples to be servants to each other. (Mark 10:44; John 13:14)

Based on the truth of Mary's statement to Gabriel, "May it be to me as you have said" and that she was a surrendered servant, Christians are to live in a way that says to everyone who sees or reads about their lives that they are servants of God and Christ. (1 Peter 2:16; 1 Corinthians 7:22; Ephesians 6:6) The Apostle Paul, James, Peter and Jude describe themselves as being servants of God. (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; Philippians 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1)

Christians who have the faith of Mary have changed their allegiance. Rather than serving the flesh and the world, as before, they are becoming servants and bondslaves to God and Christ. There is no greater gift of love that Christians can express to the Lord than to become a bondservant to the Lord and His will.

Christians who have the faith of Mary will receive Holy Spirit revelation to what the Lord is calling them to do. These revelations of God often come in times when so few people are seeking or even caring to see God do a real work. Just like the people who lived in Nazareth. Christians live a life of true faith and they seek the Lord, expecting Him to meet them right where they are.

Christians who have the faith that was found in Mary allow the Lord to circumcise their hearts. Those who have a heart after God find themselves highly favored by God, not only in receiving salvation but in proclaiming the Name of the Savior of the world to all who observe their lives. Lastly, those who have the faith that Mary had in the Lord express a life that is in full submission to the Lord's will. They express a life that says "Let it be to me as you have ordained for me to fulfill my part of the Great Commission, in proclaiming the truths of Christ.

I think of the life of Missionary Don Nelson, one of our missionaries who had received divine revelation from God to build a radio station in Alaska. At that time so few people were hearing the call to go to Alaska and many who lived there showed little interest in having a Christian radio station. In the wilderness he heard God's call and he prayed through to completion that vision. Even though so many stood against him, the Lord planted a Christian radio station that is still proclaiming the Gospel, not only in Alaska, but in Russia as well.

Don Nelson knew the Word of the Lord had spoken to him, he expected and experienced some opposition, yet he prayed through saying, "I am submitted to the will of God." He was able to stay steadfast because he knew that the Lord was with him, the favor of God was upon him.

Christians are highly favored with God and they need only to be submissive to the will of God in all seasons of their lives and they will enjoy the blessing of having God with them.

Let us pray!!!!