Ave Maria

(Christmas message to Mary)

Luke 1:26-56

Key Verse: 1:35 “The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on 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.”

Luke starts his Christmas story with an angel’s visit to Mary. We call this ‘annunciation’, which means ‘announcement’. The angel announced the birth of Christ to Mary. Let’s see how and why the angel visited Mary, what his announcement was, and how Mary responded to the angel’s message.

First, Greetings, you who are highly favored! (26-38) Six months had passed since the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and announced the pregnancy of Elizabeth, his wife. Now 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. (1-2) Mary was an ordinary teenage girl like one of our daughters, who was engaged to Joseph, a descendant of David. God sent his angel Gabriel to Mary with a message. Look at verse 28. “***The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you***.” The words, ‘Greetings! Mary” is translated in Latin, which is “*Ave, Maria*!” Franz Schbert, a German composer, wrote “Ave Maria.” Many famous singers including Luciano Pavarotti sang Ave Maria. A Hollywood movie maker made a romantic movie based on Ave Maria. But to Mary the angel’s greeting was not romantic at all, but frantic. Look at verse 29. “***Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be***.” Mary was troubled because of the sudden visit of the angel who brought her an unusual greeting. In Greek version (*charitao*), the words, “are highly favored!” means “well accepted by God.” The angel said to Mary that she had been accepted by God. Accepted by God for what? At that time Mary was preparing for her marriage. She did not need any favor from anyone but from Joseph. She wished nothing disruptive would happen to her before her marriage.

What was God’s favor for Mary? The angel comforted her not to be afraid and he continued. Look at verse 31. “***You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus***.” God’s favor for Mary was to conceive and give a birth to a son. What a favor for a virgin who was waiting for her marriage! The angel taught Mary even the name of her coming baby, which is Jesus. Mary had been shocked and more troubled by the angel’s message. However, the angel explained to her what kind of a baby she would conceive and who the baby really is. Look at verses 32-33. “***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 Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end***.” There are two things the angel mentioned about the baby Jesus. First, he is the Son of God. Second, he is the Promised Messiah. John the Apostle declared the birth of Jesus in this, “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us..*.” (Jn 1:14) John said that the Word, the Creator God, the First Cause of the whole universe, appeared as a man, a baby in a manger in Israel. Long ago the prophet Isaiah prophesied about the baby Jesus as a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. (Is 9:6) The baby Mary would conceive is not an ordinary baby, but the Son of God and the Promised Messiah, who would be born as the descendant of David and Jocob, and whose kingdom will never end, but last forever. Jesus fulfills the prophecy of God who promised to send the Messiah as an offspring of a woman. (Ge 3:15)

What was Mary’s response? In verse 34 she said, “***How will this be since I am a virgin***?” Mary’s question was reasonable and understandable. How can a virgin conceive and give birth to a son without any human involvement? Biologically and reasonably, it was impossible. We often ask the similar questions as Mary did. How could the Red Sea be divided in two? How could Jesus walk on the water? How could he feed five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish? We ask these questions based on our reason, logic, and experience. But God works beyond our reason, logic, experience, science, natural law, common sense, and so on. If God works only in the range of our understanding, he is not God. Our God is the Almighty God who works beyond our reason and knowledge! He makes miracles and nothing is impossible with Him! Amen!

How did the angel answer Mary? Look at verse 35. “The angel answered, “**The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most Hight will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.**” When the Holy Spirit comes on Mary, she will be overshadowed by the power of the Almighty God, and then she will conceive and give birth to the Son of God. The angel’s message was that the Virginal Conception is the work of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, without being involved in any human relationship. Then, the angel reminded Mary of a good example. Look at verses 36-37. “***Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail***.” Elizabeth was the mother of John the Baptist and the wife of Zechariah, a priest. According to Luke 1:1-24 she was old and not able to conceive. But the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, while he was praying, and promised him with Elizabeth’s pregnancy. As the angel said, Elizabeth became pregnant six months ago. It was a miracle!

The angel concluded his message by saying, “*No word from God will ever fail*.” I like the old version, which says, “*For nothing is impossible with the Lord*!” Indeed, nothing is impossible with the Lord God Almighty. To God the Almighty who created the heavens and the earth, who opened the Red Sea as the dry land, who fed two million of Israelites in the desert for 40 years, who made the dried bones into a mighty army of God, make a virgin conceive and give birth to a son is nothing. As the angel said, “For nothing is impossible with the Lord!” Amen!

I believe that this year each person and each family experienced one miracle after another when we prayed and lived by faith. Some experienced God’s miracle in their sickness. Others testified God’s miracle in their financial turmoil, and still others in their relationship with others. Personally, I experienced God’s miracle in my ministry. Even a few years ago I didn’t have confidence in discipleship at Wash U, and it looked like a mission impossible. Whenever I came back home from outreach with empty hand, my confidence disappeared. But I did not give up because I am a missionary. I visited campus more often and prayed earnestly saying, ‘Your kingdom come and Your will be done.” God began to show his miracle little by little after the pandemic. I met Carsen Codel while I was walking on Wash U campus. He was raised up from a Christan parents, but at the college he began to follow Buddha. But since he studied the Bible with me, he began to change. Faith in Jesus and in the word of God began to grow like a mustard seed. Now he began to follow Jesus, not Buddha. Through the change of my Bible students, I have faith that nothing is impossible with God when I trust and pray. I have hope that even my son Sam will be changed someday. I believe that someday he will confess that Jesus is the Lord and Savior from his mouth when I do not give up and pray. Nothing is impossible with the Lord! Amen!

What was Mary’s answer to the angel’s message? Look at verse 38. “***I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.***” Mary did not say, “I am a future bride who was pledged to be married.” or “God’s favor for me sounds great, but not now.”, “Elizabeth is Elizabeth, but I am Mary”, but she said, “I am the Lord’s servant.” Mary saw her life from God’s perspective. She saw herself as God’s servant who is ready to serve and to please her master. She thought about the things of God more than the things of men. She chose to belong to God rather than belong to anyone. Mary accepted her servantship to the Lord. This was the reason why she answered this.

Let’s go back to the angel’s message about Jesus. The angel said that Jesus will be conceived by the Holy Spirit when the power of the Most High overshadows her. Someone may ask why Jesus had to be conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by Joseph. Jesus should be conceived by the Holy Spirit because he is the Son of God. The Son of God should be conceived by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Son of God, and he is also the Son of Man. He is fully God and fully human. Jesus should be born of the Virgin Mary because he should be the Son of Man who becomes an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (Heb 2:17) The only sinless blood of Jesus who is conceived by the Holy Spirit can redeem sinners from our original sin. (2 Co 5:21)

Second, spiritual counselling (39-45) After the angel left her, Mary didn’t go to Joseph for counselling. But she went to Elizabeth instead. She remembered the angel’s message. She also believed that she was the Lord’s servant and that her pregnancy is the work of God. She wanted to make sure of the angel’s message about Elizabeth. How did Elizabeth respond to Mary’s sudden visit? Look at verses 41-45. “***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. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her***!” As soon as Mary greeted Elizabeth, the baby in Elizabeth’s womb who is John the Baptist, responded first. He jumped with joy in her womb because he saw the mother of the Messiah. Then, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and encouraged Mary by saying how blessed she was and how God fulfilled his promise through Mary. Elizabeth confirmed and blessed Mary’s decision of faith.

In the time of our spiritual need, we must seek godly counselling or advice from godly men and women. This is because godly matters should be understood and resolved in godly way. Unbelievers do not understand the world of faith. They only make us more confused, and make things go from bad to worse. Mary chose Elizabeth more than anyone else because she was a godly woman as the Lord’s servant.

Third, Mary’s song (46-56) As soon as Mary heard Elizabeth’s encouraging message, her joy burst out like pouring water from a broken dam. Look at verses 46-47. “***And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,***” Where did such her joy come from? Her joy came from her obedience. Her joy came from gratitude. Above all her joy came from Jesus who would be born of her. Mary explained the cause of her joy from verses 48-55. We learn two reasons for her joy: first, God’s mercy for her personal condition through Jesus. (48-49) Second, God’s mercy on her national situation through Jesus. (50-55) Mary knew that she was just an ordinary and humble woman in a small town and in a small country. But God chose her and raised her up to be a mother of the Messiah. She will be called ‘Blessed” for all generations. She also had the sense of God’s history. She praised God who had kept his promise for the Messiah who would come as an offspring of a woman and descendant of Abraham. The main point of her praise and song is the faithfulness of God who kept his promise for the Messiah.

Every year without exemption we celebrate Christmas. The angel Gabriel visits each of us and greets us as he did to Mary, “Ave Maria! (hail, Mary!) Ave Joseph! Ave Kit! Ave Connie! and so on. God wants us to conceive Jesus in our hearts. Are you ready to prepare a room for him? Remember that nothing is impossible with the Lord and you are his servants. May Jesus be born newly in your heart during this Christmas season!