

**One Word Describes the Christmas Season Best – Grace!**

If you were to capture the essence of the Christmas season in one word, what would that word be? Would it be “peace”? Would it be “hope”? Would it be “joy”? Those are the most common ones. But if you believe that Jesus is the reason for the season, if your Savior, Jesus Christ, is the center of your Christmas celebration, and if the Son of God is understood as the greatest gift you have ever been given, then there is only one word that describes the Christmas season best. That word is “grace.” There is nothing that effects the Christmas spirit more than the meaning and message of God’s grace in the Christ-child.

Listen to Luke 1:26-38:

**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.**

This story is familiar to most of you. But you might wonder every time you hear the story: “Why Mary?” Why did God choose Mary to carry the Son of God in her womb? Why a lowly virgin from Nazareth? Why not a more experienced mother from Jerusalem? Why not a woman from a more renowned family? What was there about Mary that God chose her to be the mother of Jesus? Was she more special than all the other ladies in the world? Was she this perfect maiden that God simply couldn’t resist?

In our human way of thinking, many would say that there had to be something about Mary that God chose her. They would say that she had to have some special spirit about her that God would show her such favor. Others would insist that Mary had to be perfect for her to carry Jesus, literally without sin, and that’s why she was chosen. And then there are those that just assume she had a greater faith than most, and that’s why she was chosen.

To find out if any of those answers are acceptable or right, I'd suggest that you go to the person of discussion herself. Listen to what Mary said in Luke 1:47: **"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."** Right there she tells you that there is nothing special about her, nothing perfect about her, nothing greater than anyone else. How do you know? Because if there was something more special, more perfect, or greater about her, why would she include herself in the class of sinners and declare her need for a Savior? Why would she call out to God and declare him "my Savior"?

The only answer you'll find to "why Mary" comes from looking into the heart of the Gospel message. Why did God create Adam and Eve to be the first human beings? Why didn't he create someone else? Why did he choose Israel to be his chosen people? Why didn't he choose some other nation? Why did God choose Moses to lead his people? Why didn't he choose his brother Aaron? Why did God choose David to be his king? Why didn't he choose his six older brothers? Why did God choose fishermen and tax collectors to be his disciples? Why didn't he choose more qualified men? Why did God choose one of the worst persecutors of the Christian church – Saul, later named Paul – to be his missionary to the Gentiles? Why didn't he choose one of the deacons of the church?

Let's get more personal. Why did God choose you to be his own? Why are you a believer in Christ? Why are you a child of God? Why are you part of the body of Christ? Why not somebody else? The answer is "grace." That's the only answer.

And the only reason we have the word "grace" is because the only true God loves sinners, loves those who don't love him back, loves those who reject him, loves rebels, loves people he shouldn't even love. This is the love God has shown you, and it's the only love that saves. Now do you now have a deeper, more meaningful sense of what Mary meant when she said, **"I am the Lord's servant"**? What gracious favor God has shown to all of us!

But it's more than that. Don't miss God's gracious power in this story. When Mary was wondering how she could conceive a child when she is a virgin, the angel Gabriel 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."**

There is only one universal way children are conceived, but God made an exception. We state that exception as a confession of our faith every time we say, **"I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary."** And when you or I or anyone else wonders, "How can this be," the angel Gabriel explains it to us bluntly: **"Nothing is impossible with God."**

And it had to be that way. If Jesus was conceived by Joseph or any other human male, could you have any certainty that the baby Jesus would live the perfect life you need him to live in your place or be the perfect sacrifice you need for your sin? Could you really trust any normally conceived human being to save you other than God in the flesh, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary? Praise God that nothing is impossible with him!

Just imagine this, the Son of God, the Son of the Most High, the promised One of Israel, God himself was born of a sinner to save sinners, to do what no one else could do for themselves. How do you even begin to express the impact of what that means for you? One word: GRACE.

Do you remember those words we used earlier to describe the essence of Christmas – peace, hope, and joy? I want to impress upon you that the object of that peace, hope, and joy matters. If your peace is that you're determined that 2021 is going to be a better year, what guarantee do you have that it will be better? Or if your Christmas tree is what gives you hope for the future (like I heard on Good Morning America this past Monday), what happens when that tree comes down? Or if your joy is just knowing that a vaccine is coming soon and all this will be over, what promise do you have that it will be over? Please don't misunderstand the point I am trying to make. I am looking forward to the New Year and enjoy the Christmas tree and hope the vaccine is a blessing as much as anyone. But to be honest, I want something more than just a temporary fix. I want something more than a moment of peace, hope, or joy. I want something more than the best science can offer. I want something that will not end up disappointing me. I want an eternal peace, hope, and joy. I want something that defies science. Don't you too? Or does it sound too impossible? Then look at the manger where the Savior was born, of whom the shepherds glorified and praised God and to whom the wise men bowed down, worshipped and opened their treasures. Look at the cross where the Savior died, of whom the centurion declared, "Surely, he was the Son of God" and to whom we sing, "Oh Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world." Look at the empty tomb where the Savior rose from the dead, of whom the apostles fearlessly proclaimed the only way of salvation and to whom we dedicate our lives for such incredible grace. Do you see the salvation, the forgiveness, and the victory he came to bring to you? Do you see what he did to assure you of those blessings? There's the object of your eternal peace, hope, and joy. How can you be sure of this? Nothing is impossible with God. Amen.