

## **2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16**

<sup>1</sup>Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, <sup>2</sup>the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” <sup>3</sup>Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.” <sup>4</sup>But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: <sup>5</sup>Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? <sup>6</sup>I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. <sup>7</sup>Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” <sup>8</sup>Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; <sup>9</sup>and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. <sup>10</sup>And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup>from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. <sup>16</sup>Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

## **Luke 1:47–55 (UMH 199)**

### **Romans 16:25–27**

<sup>25</sup>Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup>but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—<sup>27</sup>to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

### **Luke 1:26–38**

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup>And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was

said to be barren. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God.” <sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

**The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible with Apocrypha**

The hymn we just sang, "O Come, All Ye Faithful," was written by John Francis Wade, an 18th century Catholic layman involved in the music business in France. Copies of the hymn made their way to Portugal and then to England. First written in Latin -- the original version begins with the words, *Adeste Fideles* -- an Anglican clergyman, Frederick Oakeley, translated it into English. Today it is one of the most popular Advent/Christmas hymns, and is sung by Christians around the world.

One of the reasons for its popularity is the joyful character of its words and music. "*O Come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,*" it says -- and the song has a joyful, triumphant sound to go with the joyful, triumphant words.

The hymn calls us to come to Bethlehem to behold the baby Jesus. It calls us to come and adore him. It reminds us of the angel choir that accompanied Jesus' birth -- and of the shepherds who gathered around his cradle. It reminds us that God calls us, too, to sing Christ's praises -- and to give him glory in this Christmas season.

### **The Angel Is Talking to You!**

In researching this sermon, I came across a story. The story is supposed to be true. According to this story, FBI agents conducted a raid of a psychiatric hospital in San Diego that was under investigation for insurance fraud. After hours of reviewing thousands of medical records, the dozens of FBI agents had worked up quite an appetite. The agent in charge of the investigation called a nearby pizza parlor with delivery service to order a quick dinner for his colleagues. The following telephone conversation took place and was recorded by the FBI because they were taping all the phone conversations at the hospital:

Agent: Hello. I would like to order 19 large pizzas and 67 cans of soda.

Pizza Man: And where would you like them delivered?

Agent: We're over at the psychiatric hospital.

Pizza Man: The psychiatric hospital?

Agent: That's right. I'm an FBI agent.

Pizza Man: You're an FBI agent?

Agent: That's correct. Just about everybody here is.

Pizza Man: And you're at the psychiatric hospital?

Agent: That's correct. And make sure you don't go through the front doors. We have them locked. You will have to go around to the back to the service entrance to deliver the pizzas.

Pizza Man: And you say you're all FBI agents?

Agent: That's right. How soon can you have them here?

Pizza Man: And everyone at the psychiatric hospital is an FBI agent?

Agent: That's right. We've been here all day and we're starving.

Pizza Man: How are you going to pay for all of this?

Agent: I have my checkbook right here.

Pizza Man: And you're all FBI agents?

Agent: That's right. Everyone here is an FBI agent. Can you remember to bring the pizzas and sodas to the service entrance in the rear? We have the front doors locked.

Pizza Man: I don't think so. Click.

The Pizza Man talking on the phone must have felt something like a teenaged girl named Mary felt before the first Christmas.

Today's sermon is about Mary, the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, One of the purposes of this sermon is, I hope, to gain an appreciation for this woman. Because the Bible says that she is the most respected of all women of all time.

The Protestant church has over the years, tended to downplay the importance of Mary. We don't talk about her that much. She sort of gets pushed to the side while we talk about Jesus, or Moses, or the Apostle Paul, or Mary Magdalen, or even John Wesley.

I think that this downplaying of Mary started when the Protestant reformers broke off from the Roman Catholic Church. In addition to rejecting a lot of the problems and errors and mistakes in the Church of that time, the Protestants also rejected many of the teachings and traditions of the Roman Church. In doing so, they - and we - rejected Mary because she had become so identified with Catholic teachings and traditions. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is too Catholic to suit many of us.

Hopefully we can get past the ghost of these old prejudices and regain the heritage that has been

passed down to us over the last two thousand years.

A young woman was confessing her sins to her parish priest. *“Bless me Father for I have sinned. I have decided to become a prostitute.”* Upon hearing this, the priest faints. Alarmed, the young girl whispers loudly, *“Father, Father, wake up”* The priest rouses himself and says to her *“What did you say again?”* I said *“Bless me Father for I have sinned. I have decided to become a prostitute.”* The priest, relieved, says to her, *“Thank God, my child. I thought you said that you decided to become a Protestant!”*

We know quite a bit about Mary's life. We know enough from both historical tradition and the Bible to gain a fairly broad perspective on her. We know from the book of James, a second century gospel, that her parents were named Joachim and Anna. Other authors suggests that Mary was of the tribe of David, and that seems to be historically true. The Bible does not say that Mary was a direct descendent of David, but in Luke 1:32, the Bible implies that she was of the house of David, just as Joseph was.

In the Bible, we first meet Mary when she was a young girl of about thirteen or so. For us today, that means a young girl maybe in seventh or eighth grade. In other words, Mary was just starting to become a young woman. She was probably just beginning to go through puberty. This was a very exciting time in her life. Women might have come to Mary and said, *“Mary, we hear that you have become a young woman. When are you going to get engaged, Mary?”* Or *“When is your father, Joachim, going to make arrangements for you?”* Her older brothers and sisters might tease her because she had matured to that point that she was eligible for engagement.

Mary's father arranged for his daughter to be engaged to a young carpenter by the name of Joseph. Their engagement lasted for a year. During the year that Mary and Joseph were engaged, they prepared for their wedding, just as any young couple would prepare for their wedding and marriage.

How did Mary prepare for her wedding and marriage? Most likely by sewing. Mary sewed the dishcloths, washcloths and towels. She sewed all her clothes for the wedding and marriage. She was focused on preparing for her wedding day.

Joseph, on the other hand, was a typical Jewish man. What would Joseph do to prepare for the wedding day? By building. A typical Jewish man would prepare their future house. He would build the furniture, the house, and make those kinds of preparations. Joseph became a carpenter by trade.

Also, during their engagement, the couple would become acquainted with each other, begin building their relationship, and start to fall in love.

Jewish law and custom took their engagement seriously. The Jewish law said that if Joseph died, Mary would be a widow. If she died, he would be a widower. If they separated, it was considered

a divorce.

In today's scripture from the Gospel of Luke, young teenage Mary was visited by an angel, Gabriel. Gabriel was a messenger from God. Gabriel said, *"Hail, favored one of Israel. The Lord is with you."* Mary didn't know what to think; she was puzzled, worried, and afraid. The angel continued, *"Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God."*

I could end the sermon right here, because those two statements are a summary of the entire Gospel. *"Do not be afraid, Mary. Do not be afraid of your future."* The very nature of fear is to be afraid of the future, for what might happen to us or our loved ones. Fear of disease, death, pain and suffering, lack of income. But God says, *"Don't be afraid of your future."* That is good news for you and me. We should not be afraid of our future.

Then we hear a second line, *"I, God will be with you. You have found favor with God, Mary."* Instead of Mary, substitute your own name here. **You** have found favor with God and God is with you. Elsewhere in the Bible, God says, *"Do not be afraid for I am with you wherever you go."* What good news that is for each of us, to know that God is with us.

The angel went on to say, *"You have found favor with God, Mary, because you are to give birth to the Messiah, the Anointed one."* And Mary questioned, *"Me? I am only engaged. I am not married yet. I don't have a husband yet. I am engaged, that's all."*

Then the angel said to her, *"The power of the Holy Spirit will come upon you. The Holy Spirit will be like a shadow over you."*

When Luke said the Holy Spirit will shadow over you; the exact same word was used in Genesis in the creation story. The Holy Spirit shadowed over the waters before the beginning of time, and God created life in those waters. In the same way, the Holy Spirit has shadowed over Mary and created life in her. What is the bigger miracle? The Spirit over the waters in Genesis and God created life? Or the Spirit over the womb of Mary, creating life. Both are miracles. Miraculously, the Spirit created life over the waters in creation and the Spirit created life in Mary.

Mary was overwhelmed, but the messenger was not done speaking, *"You know what? Your Aunt Elizabeth is pregnant. With God, nothing is impossible. God did the impossible in Creation. God did the impossible in Elizabeth. And God did the impossible in you, Mary. God does the impossible all the time."* With God, nothing is impossible. I could stop right here again for we again have heard the gospel. With your life and mine, nothing is impossible.

The messenger left and Mary said, *"Lord, I am your handmaiden, your servant. Let it be to me according to your word. Do with my life and my body what you want to do."* She believed the angel. Martin Luther once said that the only miracle greater than the virgin birth was the miracle that Mary believed.

What was Mary feeling after the angel left? Who knows? Fear? Excitement? Mary didn't really know what happened to her. She was wondering if all of this was true, and so she went to the land of Judah to look for her old Aunt Elizabeth. She found Elizabeth, and sure enough, Elizabeth was looking pregnant. Aunt Elizabeth looked at Mary and said, "*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child in your womb. You are most blessed, and you have believed God's Word to you.*" The baby in her womb kicked her as if to join the celebration. And Mary began singing a song of happiness, "*My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, who has looked with favor on me, a lowly servant.*" We recited the song, the **Canticle of Mary** earlier in this service.

So, that is the essential outline of the story of Mary, the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. But there is much more that could be said about her.

As we look at the Scriptures, we see that Mary was the only human being that was with Jesus throughout his whole earthly life. That is, she was the only person to love Jesus before he was born. You mothers are well aware of how much you love the child inside of you way before the child was ready to be delivered.

Mary loved Jesus at his birth. Women, more so than men, remember what it was like to actually deliver a baby. Her mind remembered clearly every detail of the birth experience. Mary loved Jesus as he grew up as a young child. She bathed him, fed him, changed his diapers, and sewed his clothes. His childhood was Mary's focus.

Mary loved Jesus in the temple at age twelve when Jesus amazed all of them with his profound wisdom. Mary pondered all of these things in her heart, wondering what this all meant. Mary loved Jesus when they were together at the wedding in Cana, the site of his first miracle. When you read the Biblical story, you sense that Mary was pushing Jesus to do the miracle and he wasn't even ready yet. A lot of mothers push their kids and it seems that Mary was no different.

Mary loved Jesus when he told the crowds that Mary and her other sons weren't Jesus' true family; those who did the will of God were his true family. Mary understood. Mary loved Jesus at the foot of the cross, when she had to suffer the unbearable pain of watching her son be executed and she could do nothing about it. And finally, we see Mary in the Book of Acts, where Jesus had been raised from the dead and now appeared as the Risen Christ.

As we look at the Bible, Mary is the only person who loved Jesus from the beginning to the end. Of course the Bible would declare that she was the most blessed of all women.

Three thoughts about Mary.

It can be said of Mary that God chose a humble person to use as his instrument to accomplish God's work in the world. God chose a humble instrument. One translation of the Bible says that she was a "handmaiden," and the word "handmaiden" really means that Mary was a servant. The

Greek word is "doulos," and this is a common word in the Bible for servant or slave. Mary was a servant girl, a slave girl; she was someone else's property. The Bible says that Jesus was born of a woman under the law, a woman of low estate.

Mary was not from a high, noble class of people. Nor was she from a family that had lots of money. The Bible says that her station in life was of a commoner and less than a commoner; she was a servant girl. God chose Mary, who was low and humble, to accomplish God's grand purpose. Mary was not the girl with the brains. No, God did not go after a young girl with beauty, money or brains. God chose a lowly person, of most common origins.

We find further examples of this principle in the Old Testament. If I had been God, I would have chosen the land of Egypt, the superpower of that era, with all their power, might, and chariots. If not Egypt, then I would have chosen Assyria or Babylon, for these were grand powers of human civilization. But God chose a tiny country like Israel and little town by the name of Bethlehem. God chose what was humble to accomplish God's purpose.

I like the following quotation: *"Just as Jesus was born in a humble stable, so Christ today is only born in humble hearts."* That quotation is potent. Just as Jesus was born in a humble stable, so Christ is born only in humble hearts. Proud people think they have no need of Christ; but those who humbly cry out to God need God's presence to heal, guide, and forgive. We don't need to have beauty, money and brains to be used by God.

A second point about Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Mary had the audacity to believe that God had chosen her. She said, *"Do with my life as you want to."* She had the audacity to believe that God had chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah.

Mary didn't say like Moses, *"Well, I am not good enough; God, get someone who can talk better."*

Nor was Mary like Zechariah, *"Lord, give me a sign. Prove it to me and then I will believe."*

Mary simply believed that God chose her. Because she believed, she was able to put into effect what God had chosen her to do.

I believe that as God chose Mary, a common and ordinary person, God has also chosen you and me, common and ordinary people. I believe that you are here in this church today because God has chosen you. God has chosen to use your life in God's mission for the world. I know that God has chosen me and God certainly didn't choose me because of my abilities. God chose me because God is gracious. He chose my life for a reason, and I don't have to ask God what the purpose of my life is, what the mission of my life is, or what I am supposed to do. And I know that God has a purpose for your life as well.

God has chosen you to carry Jesus Christ into the world. God has also chosen me as well to go

out into the world and be the loving presence of Jesus Christ. I am not carrying Jesus Christ physically inside of me. I am carrying Jesus Christ in my heart, but I am carrying Christ just as Mary did. I am to carry Christ out into the world. If you have the audacity to believe that God has chosen you, you know that God is doing God's work through you. You too are a carrier of Christ, just as Mary, his mother, was. Like Mary, you are an instrument of God's.

Third, when Mary finally realized the miracle that God has worked in her, she broke out in song. Her heart could no longer be contained, and so she started singing at the top of her voice, *"My soul praises God. For God has remembered what a lowly person I am and he has still chosen me. Praise God."*

Sometimes in life, there comes a moment when you just burst out with a song inside of you, and this is what happened to Mary. And when you realize the great things that God has done in you and your life; and these great things have nothing to do with beauty and money and brains, your heart begins to burst with praise. It is truly amazing what God did through Mary. It is truly amazing what God has done and is doing through you, and through us as a congregation.

Amen.