

ADVENT 4 YEAR B  
2 SAMUEL 7:1-11, 6  
ROMANS 16:25-27  
LUKE 1:26-38  
DECEMBER 24, 2017

We come to the last Sunday of Advent. Hopefully Christmas shopping and preparations are finished or in their final stages. Much of the month of December has been about everyone else. It has been about buying gifts for others. For some, our preparations for Christmas include making sure there will be food that everyone will enjoy. It usually means that some will spend endless hours in the kitchen baking cookies or other sweet things so that others will have what they like to eat. Our house is not different from many others. Denise and Paige spend time thinking about what each of our kids and grandkids will want to eat or drink. They make sure to bake things that will make others feel good and thought of. This is certainly part of family Christmas celebrations. Quite often, we forget one person that is also important. We might forget about our own needs and our own wellbeing. We want what will be appreciated by those on our list and we forget that we also have the desire to be cared about. We forget that we are also important.

**Luke 1:26-28** 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."

In the sixth month...Which sixth month are we talking about? It was the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. It was the sixth month after the angel visited Zechariah announcing that their prayers had been answered. It was the sixth month after discovering that God works in wonderful, mysterious and special ways. God works in ways we might see as being impossible. The story of Elizabeth being barren is not a new story by biblical standards. Sarah had been barren until Isaac was born. Rachel was barren until Joseph was born. Hannah was barren until Samuel was born.

Now, Elizabeth was barren until John was born. Each woman felt the eyes of others looking at them and judging them as being less of a woman or cursed for not having children. Each woman felt the scorn of others that were able to have children. It could be that each woman felt not important or even despised by God. Each woman finally found favor with God and her burdens were lifted. They experienced the blessing of God that comes with a child being born. They discovered that God had not forgotten them but that God was pleased with them and valued them as people important children of God.

And then there was another woman that found favor with God. Some might wonder about the favor of God that meant a teenaged girl would have a child out of wedlock. Mary probably did not pray that she would become pregnant at such an early age and bear a child. The angel appeared to Mary declaring that she had found favor. Mary would not have expected such a visitation or a greeting like this. She would hardly have felt like she was special or favored at all. Mary was a woman and women had little status. Women were considered to be property to be sold by their fathers and bought by their husbands. Yet God looked at women in a different way than men did. Mary was visited by God. God announced that Mary was favored.

In recent weeks and months we have learned what many have known all along. With each passing day we hear more allegations of women being abused by powerful men. We heard of men in prominent places abusing women that may not have been so prominent. With each revelation comes the thought that women are still seen as property to be sold and bought. In one report from this past week, a young woman told that she was asked to sign an agreement that she would not share information about the abuse or the abuser. They felt they were taken advantage of by men that held power over them. Most of the women that have come forward feel as though they are not worth much. They felt that they had little power to say "No" and even less power to come forward.

Part of the message of Advent and of Christmas is that God favors you. Whether you are a man, a woman or a child, God favors you that might have been told or treated like you were nothing special. God favors you who might be struggling with the things that life has thrown at you. God favors you that have been limited by physical ailments. God favors you that have been burdened with emotional or mental health issues. God favors you that are facing family divisions and other challenges in life. Advent is about looking forward to the Savior's return and Christmas is about Jesus coming into the world to save us from our sins and to walk with us. Jesus also came because of God's great love for us. That love says that we are favored and that God seeks to make all things new. The angel told Mary to not be afraid. Likewise we do not need to be afraid to believe we have found favor with God. We can trust that God is with us providing for us.

**Luke 1:34, 35** 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."

Mary was surprised that the angel would come to her. Her response and her question for the angel wonders how these things can happen. She is a virgin. She is lowly and humble and has no status. Yet she is called blessed. She is favored and she is God's special servant. Mary would bear the Son of God. What Mary, Elizabeth, Hannah, Rachel and Sarah thought would be impossible was possible with God. Each discovered that all things are possible with God.

As we come to this last Sunday of Advent and as we look forward to Christmas Eve and Day we have the assurance that God is with us and that God has already favored us. When things seem to be out of control or out of our reach we trust that God has favored us and that nothing shall be impossible with God. I invite you to trust in the words of Gabriel the angel. Trust that you are highly favored. Trust that the Savior of the World is coming and has come for you. Believe in the promises of God that are for all believers. AMEN