

Fourth Sunday in Advent
“Christmas gifts for Mary and for us!” Luke 1:38
December 22, 2024
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for the Fourth Sunday in Advent is from our Gospel reading, Luke 1:38.

“38 Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.”

So far the text...

When was Christmas for Mary? Well, we might be quick to say when Jesus was born and the shepherds came and worshipped Him. That’s true. Or when the wisemen came and gave her Christmas gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Also, true – the Gentile Christmas.

But, Mary celebrated Christmas early. With the angel Gabriel’s visit. She received many gifts from message that the angel gave her. Let’s look carefully at this message and also see how God gives us some early Christmas presents!

First, we have the greeting from the angel to Mary. **“Rejoice, highly favored one”** Favor – the unmerited mercy of God is bestowed on Mary. He shows His favor upon her and the angel repeats this in verse 30 to allay any fears she has from this heavenly visit.

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”

Again, as Pastor Goetz pointed out in his midweek Advent message, nowhere in the text do you find the phrase “full of grace” that is now commonly said in the Ave Maria. That was added by Pope Pius IX. Unfortunately, a false doctrine has then been accepted about Mary that she was born without sin, an Immaculate Conception.

Of course only Jesus the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit was born without sin. And only in Jesus does grace innately reside as we will hear again on Christmas Day from John 1:14.

“14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

To the disciple Stephen God gave fullness of faith and the Holy Spirit as we hear in Acts 6:5. And even later in the chapter, the phrase “full of grace” is used to describe how greatly the Holy Spirit was bestowing His gifts upon him that he was doing great wonders and signs among the people.

Yes, God highly favored Mary that she would have the honor of being the mother of the Son of God. What a Christmas gift! And to us we have been highly favored with God’s grace given to us through faith in Jesus. Listen to God’s Word as He gives to you these beautifully wrapped gifts of Christmas.

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2)

“6 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.” (John 1:16)

“9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)

A second gift: -**“the Lord is with you”**

For Mary, she would need great protection by God from slander, being pregnant and unwed, from murderous hands that wanted to kill her baby, and for her good health and all her physical needs. Indeed, God would send to her Wise men from the East with gold, frankincense and myrrh to help support her. Yes, what a Christmas gift to be assured of the Lord’s abiding presence with you.

And God promises us also the same as we know from the Great Commission to baptize all nations **“lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)** And as we will hear on New Years Eve from Romans 8.

“If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Let's open another gift...- **“shall call His name Jesus”**

Yes, the name of Mary's Savior is given to her, as it was also given to Joseph in a dream. And to Joseph, the meaning of the name “Jesus” was explained. **“for He will save His people from their sins.”**

Yes, in the Magnificat later in our Gospel from Luke 1:47, Mary says these words. **“And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.”**

She rejoiced that she was saved from her sins by the baby in her womb. What a Christmas gift! And this gift is for all people as Joseph was told. We rejoice that we are saved from our sins!

Indeed, our epistle reading from Hebrews 10 tells us so clearly that the ceremonial sacrifices of animals could not take away the sins of the world. And so, Jesus says in Psalm 40, quoted in our Epistle,

“Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:

“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me.

6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.

**7 Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—
To do Your will, O God.’ ”**

And the will of God resulted in this great Christmas gift as we read on in Hebrews 10.

“Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” 18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.”

This is the Gospel! This is what Christmas is all about. This is our greatest Christmas gift that we open again, and again. The forgiveness of our sins!

But how could this sacrifice of Jesus, His forgiveness be for all people and not just one other. Ah, we open up another Christmas gift with Mary. For the angel said that her son would be-**“Son of the Highest”**, that is, God Himself.

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”

Because Jesus is God, His sacrifice on the cross has no limit of forgiveness. And this forgiveness comes to us also as the next Christmas gift tells us.

-“He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end”

Jesus’ kingdom of grace reigns over the house of Jacob, over us, in His New Testament church. And when one is called from this world to Jesus, His kingdom of glory knows no end. What a Christmas gift for Mary and us to live eternally with God in heaven!

With man this is impossible. But not with God. And Mary receives another Christmas gift with this promise.

-“ Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing will be impossible.”

You noticed that the angel said the word “also”. The Holy Spirit had conceived in Mary already the baby Jesus even as the angel spoke to her. Yes, Elizabeth has also conceived a son also even in her old age. Whether it be a virgin birth or overcoming old age, nothing is impossible for God.

And that is the great joy for us to know that through faith in Jesus, our salvation has been made possible!

What was Mary left to do? Simply receive the gifts in faith. And serve the Lord in faith!

-“Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”

What is left for us to do? Mary’s answer is ours “Let it be to me according to God’s Word” and receive God’s many, many gifts every day.

Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)