

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
December 17, 2017

The Grace Given to Mary

Luke 1:26-38

1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

1:27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

1:28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

1:29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

1:30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

1:31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

1:32 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 father David,

1:33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

1:34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

1:35 And the angel answered 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 called holy--the Son of God.

1:36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

1:37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

1:38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

1. Grace to Mary

I know a sister in Christ of a church. She always have encouraged people saying, “Congratulations, a blessed woman!” When someone answered right answer to a question, the sister said, “Congratulations, a blessed woman!” If someone shared a thankful testimony, she said, “Congratulations, a blessed woman!” Someone asked a pastor to pray for herself, the sister said, “Congratulations, a blessed woman!” She said it from the bottom of heart for blessing others. No one heard her words with bad feelings. People was glad to hear it.

“Congratulations, a blessed woman!” This word came from the word of angel Gabriel who told Mary that she would conceive and bear the Son of God. It was known as “the Annunciation.” Many artists painted various kinds of the Annunciation pictures, but I like this picture. Mary was painted as a student girl because Mary was just a teen-ager when she herd the Annunciation.

It was a big surprise for us that the angel said, “You are blessed woman!” to a country girl of Nazareth. But it was also the most surprising thing for Mary herself. Mary was surprised, but she tried to understand the word. So, let us think about why the word was told to Mary, and in what way Mary answered the word.

The blessing given to Mary is the grace that she became the mother of the Son. This grace was only given to Mary. She was the only one. No other mother of the Son before or since. Then Elizabeth said, “Blessed are you among women.” (Luke 1:42) to Mary.

Catholic Christians chant “Ave Maria.” It says, “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.” The blessing was the most

glorious one given to the women. She was called “the mother of the Lord” by Elizabeth who was filled with the Holy Spirit.

2. Faith of Mary

However, we cannot give Mary divinity because of the grace. She can be called “Mother of the Lord,” but not “Mother Lord.” We know the first commandment of “The Ten Commandments,” says, “You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3) So we don’t worship Mary as a goddess. At the same time, however, fifth commandment mentions to “honor your father and your mother,” (Exodus 20:12) which implies we should respect and follow Mary’s faith.

In fact, Mary was faithful enough to be the model, as Elizabeth said in Luke 1:45, “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” God blessed Mary to be Jesus’ mother because of this faithfulness.

“Grace” is given to the people who does NOT deserve. No one could be great enough for being the mother of the Son, so it was only the marvelous grace that Mary became the mother of Jesus Christ. Mary was just a little girl. Still, however, Mary had something in God’s eyes. She had faith by which she was able to receive the grace from God. She could be immature and incomplete at the time, but God knows her faith was pure, loyal and proper.

“A little maiden with her fiancée gives birth to a baby from unknown father.” This was not the grace but a curse at the time. If she had no faith following God’s words, she could not accept it even if it was from God. Mary accepted to be the mother of Savior, on the other hand. Moreover, she didn’t talk to anybody. She never knew

how she, the virgin, have a baby, yet she believed as Luke 1:37, “For nothing will be impossible with God,” and answered in Luke 1:38, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” This loyalty let Elizabeth praise Mary, saying in Luke 1:45, “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Mothers of famous ones are often perceived as special or respected too much; so was Mary when Jesus became famous as a Rabi. Once Jesus spoke to people, a woman in Luke 11:27 suddenly shouted, saying, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” I guess she was a mother, too. As a mother, she respected Mary having such a great son like Jesus. However, Jesus answered in Luke 11:28, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” He taught them the importance of the fellowship in faith rather than family relationship. In fact, Jesus and Mary were a teacher and a disciple in addition to the relationship of a son and a mother. Mary was the one “hear the word of God and keep it.” We should follow Mary’s faith, believing God’s word and accepting to keep it through. This is the way to be “Blessed woman” and “Blessed one.”

“Greetings!” originally means “Rejoice!” God rejoices the people who believe and follow God’s words. We should be the ones God rejoices. We want to rejoice what God rejoices. We want to rejoice ourselves by the joy of God. This is the joy of Christmas.

3. Grace to Us

If that is the case, we understand that the blessing given to Mary is not

only hers but also ours. If we believe God's word and accept it as Mary did, then we can receive the blessing from God. Mary bore a child who was called "Word" in the Gospel of John, but can bore the Word in the Bible in our heart. As Mary gave life to the Child, we can bear the children of God through God's Word in our heart.

In 1 Corinthians 4:15, Paul said "For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel." Apostle Paul said he bore children of God by having spread the Gospel. Of course, we become children of God through the Holy Spirit, but we need the faith in Jesus Christ for being born as God's children. And for us to have faith, we need to hear the Gospel, and for the Gospel to be heard, there need people to teach it. In that sense, Paul bore children of God by teaching the Gospel.

Paul said in Galatians 4:19, "My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" He called himself "father" for the Christians in Corinth, but here he called himself "mother" for the Christians in Galatia. The children of God are born and grow by the Word of God. Therefore those who preach and teach the Word of God give birth to the children of God and raise them. This is the great grace almost equal to the grace unto Mary. As Mary received the grace to give birth and raise the Son of God, those who teach the Word of God to others can have the spiritual children, or the children of faith. If you do so, you will be told, "Congratulations, blessed one!"

The verse of the year is "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." How many of God's words have dwelt in your heart? Where is

God's word? Is it still between the ink and the paper or is it in your brain? Is it cherished in your spirit? Is God's word making you alive in you as the life? You can experience to bear the word, whether you are man or woman, but woman can understand it better. Through pregnancy, woman bears a life different from hers in her body, Likewise, to bear God's word means to bear God's life in you. Mother sends nutrients to her fetus and supports its life, but in case of God's word, the life in God's word supports us, the carrier of the word, and makes us alive.

The Son of God was born as a human. This miracle of the miracles happens now in a different form in those who bear God's word. The miracle that Christ will be born in us, and that those who believes the Word will be born as God's children. On this year's Christmas, Let's hope, believe and pray that this miracle will happen.

(Prayer)

Dear God the Father, we celebrate "big joy" that our Savior was born for us. At the same time, we want to celebrate "big joy" that shake the world that sinners repent and believe in Christ and will be reborn as God's children. Please make us bear God's word for that purpose. In Jesus name we pray.