

“God’s Gift Certificate!”—Luke 1:30-32

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “God’s Gift Certificate!”, is Luke 1:30-32 → *The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. 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.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

In the midst of your gift giving have you ever asked the question: “What do you get for the person who has everything?” In our highly materialistic culture we may find ourselves asking this question more frequently and come to the conclusion that a “gift certificate” or “gift card” would be perfect for that person. It actually “forces” a person to purchase something while allowing him to choose his gift. I remember my father once told me that he would rather get a gift certificate for Christmas instead of cash because so often cash simply gets deposited and used to pay bills, while a gift certificate demands that a person buy something for himself. Even if a gift card is used to buy “necessities” it still affords the person the freedom to choose and releases the giver from this responsibility to choose for him.

In one sense, a gift certificate represents hope and promise. With it you possess a promise of some blessing yet to come! On the basis of this certificate (or card) you go to the store in hopes of purchasing something which will benefit you in some way. Also, the promise connected with the certificate is specific—it will benefit you only at the store which will honor the certificate.

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary he presented her with the promise of a gift—a specific “gift certificate” of sorts. She received the promise of the gift of a child based upon Old Testament prophecy Who would be called Jesus, which means “the LORD saves.” It would be He Who would save all people from their sins. (cf. Matthew 1:21) As with God’s people in the Old Testament this promise to Mary demanded a response of faith, trusting Yahweh to fulfill His promise.

In this visit from Gabriel to reveal the giving of God’s Gift to a sinful world, it is interesting to note that Gabriel greeted her as one who has *found favor with God*. Contrary to the belief of many, the *favor* which Mary had *with God* was not because of something “special” in her. She did not deserve the honor of being our Lord’s mother. She *found favor with God* in that **God chose her** for this special task, not because she “earned” this privilege in some way.

The word “favor” comes from the Greek word for “grace”—God’s undeserved kindness and love—and is the most prominent theme throughout the Scriptures. God’s favor or grace is always found in **His** character, not ours. What makes Christianity so unique from all other religions is that God deals with people on the basis of His grace and His love, not our performance! **It is pure gift!**

When the LORD acts in His love and grace in our lives it will actually “catch us off guard” and even cause inner conflict for us. Luke 1:29 says that *Mary was greatly troubled at his words and tried to discern what kind of greeting this might be*. No doubt, the appearance of an angel with special revelation from God should cause fear in anyone! But to receive the announcement that you’ve been chosen to play a special role in the revealing of God’s grace to the world? This was far beyond even Mary’s comprehension!

When confronted with God’s grace, sinners become troubled because we are so performance based and know deep down inside that we are undeserving of God’s gifts. When you are confronted by God’s grace how many times do you respond with a troubled mind and wonder if God’s grace in your life could really be true? It is so easy to doubt God’s forgiveness, especially if you struggle with forgiving yourself. You may even doubt your salvation, wondering how God could love such a sinner. Grace—undeserved favor and love—goes against our sinful grain at every turn!

If you think you're exempt from this struggle just think of the last time someone gave you a gift and you felt obligated to give one in return. Many times the response is a "Thank you!" accompanied by something like: "You shouldn't have!" or "You didn't have to get me anything!" How about when a person does a favor for you and you say "Thanks!" without saying, "I owe you one!" While struggling so much with grace, how could you possibly bask in God's gracious forgiveness of sins, let alone understand it?

The angel places before you the same reality he placed before Mary when she wondered about the impossible. When it comes to God saving all mankind by taking on human flesh, in Matthew 19:26 Jesus reiterated the words of Gabriel: *With man this is impossible, **but with God all things are possible.*** Referring to Yahweh's acting in the lives of His people in the Old Testament numerous times the rhetorical question pops up: *Is anything too hard for the LORD?* (cf. Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:27) Absolutely not! Instead of thinking about what is impossible from your own perspective trust in the promise of God's Word that nothing is impossible with Him, accomplished in the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus!

As God sent the angel to tell Mary about the coming of His Christ, He stated that this "gift" would be given in fulfillment of the promise God gave to David when he was King of Israel. It is quite possible that Mary understood Gabriel's words that *the Lord God would give to her son the throne of His father David* in a nationalistic way. They harken back to God's promise to King David as recorded in 2 Samuel 7:16 → *Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before Me. Your throne shall be established forever.* Following the succession of David's kingship reveals that his earthly throne did not last forever as a result of idolatry and sin. Most people in Mary's day looked for an earthly kingdom of peace, prosperity and blessings beyond measure. However, Christ's kingdom can only *be established forever* as the Holy Spirit creates faith in your heart which trusts in Jesus to save you from your sins! It is the rule of God's grace in your heart as the Holy Spirit works faith in Christ through the Gospel!

Notice Mary had not yet receive the gift but only the **promise** of the gift, which is what a "gift certificate" provides. Thus, faith & hope are very important when it comes to God's "gift certificate" in Christ! Romans 4:16 says that God's promise of salvation *depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all . . . who share the faith of Abraham.* This "gift certificate"—the promise of a Savior from sin—was nothing new to Mary. She harkened back to those Old Testament promises with her song of praise, the "Magnificat," which we sing in our worship service whenever we use "Vespers." Turn to page 231 in your hymnal. Let's speak her words together:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior; for He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden. For behold, from this day all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things to me, and holy is His name; and His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent empty away. He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.

Notice as she praised God for all that's taking place in her life which will affect the life of all people, she said: "He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever." In Jesus the "gift certificate" is turned into the Gift, because *the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (cf. Romans 6:23)

In this announcement of Jesus as the fulfillment of the LORD's deliverance from sin, the Holy Spirit created faith in Mary's heart so that she responded with a humble obedience to His Will, as recorded in Luke 1:38 → *Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.* Even though

she did not completely understand how all this could be possible she simply trusted in the word of God given through the angel and obeyed.

A gift certificate is meant to make us respond and use it. It requires you to take the step of faith in the hope that when we go to the store it will deliver what it promises. You have been given the **promise** in the forgiveness of sins through faith in the gift of God—Jesus Christ! You have been given the **promise** of eternal life through faith in this Gift! God has **promised** to make you a new person on the basis of His Gift of grace! What is your response? In the words of 2 Corinthians 9:15 → *Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.* (NIV) Amen.