

LutheranRenewal

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Does God Have Favorites?

by Paul Anderson

God moves comfortably in the realm of the impossible. We, like the old priest Zechariah, might look for reasons why something can't happen. We struggle to wrap our brain around a miracle—God lives there. And He found a girl prepared to accept that without fighting. Her final input was, "Let it be." She had come to know a mighty God, as she proclaimed in her song of praise, and He was about to demonstrate His power in her body. She agreed. Spell it faith.

Luke sets her story right after Elizabeth's whose priestly husband's response contrasts Mary's. He chose to receive the shocking news of a coming birth with skepticism. His final word (and I do mean final) was, "How?" He looked at probabilities, arguing against the angel based on age. The same messenger months later received the opposite response from the young girl. He saw her heart opening to the supernatural, not closing in doubt. So after explaining how the birth was going to happen, he gave an example of another impossible birth about to take place four months hence, then added, *"For nothing is impossible with God."* God has favorites—people He favors because of their choice to favor Him. Jesus said that those who honor Him would be honored—and vice versa (Matt. 10:32,33).

Highly Favored

The back-to-back birth stories provide a rich contrast and complement. The senior couple prayed many years for a child, while Mary was still a virgin. The shame the elder couple felt in barrenness was lifted with the pregnancy, while shame came upon Mary when she began to show. Even geography figures into the drama. The priest and his wife came from Judea, while Mary lived in Nazareth, a place of questionable reputation. Both participated in a miracle, one

because of age, the other bypassing the normal route toward parenthood. A pregnant virgin is an oxymoron if there ever was one. Both received visits from Gabriel, with five months intervening. Both women marveled at the grace of God shown them. And by divine action, both women carrying children marked for greatness came together at the home of Elizabeth. The young mother-to-be needed the strength her older relative could provide, but she had no idea how that encouragement would come—through prophetic proclamation of pinpoint accuracy.

Favor with God trumps the blessing of man, and that is how Mary towers above others. Elizabeth spoke appropriately and with volume, *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear. But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord*

*"For nothing
is impossible
with God."*

Matthew 10:32

Lutheran Renewal

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should come to me?" (Luke 2:42,43). She then closed her astounding message with yet more strength-giving words: *"Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished."* This provided a stirring entrance into the song of Mary, words set to music ever since.

The Real Favorite

The spotlight now turned from the girl to the God who favored the girl, the God her Savior, the Mighty One, whose *"mercy extends to those who fear Him,"* as Mary certainly did, who *"has performed mighty deeds with His arm,"* who *"has helped His servant Israel"* through that mercy. It was being shown not just to a small nation but to the world, as the Mighty One sends His Child to be born of a virgin, whose birth will divide history, marshal armies, split up families and nations, and force a decision from every person who will ever live.


So how should we honor Mary? Do we worship her? Had the apostles wanted to assign her significance beyond what Elizabeth gave her, either as a co-redemptrice or with the title of *"theotokos"* (mother of God), they would have given her mention in the rest of the New Testament. Their silence is telling. We can say what Elizabeth said about her and what she said herself. She is to be honored greatly for her faith and humility and for raising the Son of Man, and yet according to her own words, she is dwarfed by the true favorite of God, the hero of heaven, the only begotten one. He, not she, stands at the center of Scripture. Mary's prayer tells us where the focus is, on the great One. We magnify the person Mary magnifies. When David DuPlessis was asked in a crowd of Protestants and Catholics how we should treat Mary, he responded wisely, *"We should listen to her words spoken at the marriage in Cana, 'Do whatever He tells you.'"*

Mary was chosen above thousands of other potential mothers. Why? God found her to be a vessel ready for use. We will never do what Mary did, but we can live as Mary lived. We can choose to obey, when obedience brings a sword. We can please God, inviting His favor—regardless. People will always pay a price to be heard on high. Influence in heaven brings a reaction in hell.

Would you rather be noticed by people or by God? For whom are you performing? The Pharisees' target audience was the people, and they received their reward. You could match them—or you could have an audience of One—and extend influence beyond your Nazareth. The One who hears and answers the most simple prayer is looking for participants in His story.

Where would God go today, two thousand years later, if He needed someone to cooperate with Him in a supernatural action? Would He find you prepared to sign up? Or would you give Him reasons why it could not happen? Would you encourage Him to go elsewhere because you are facing crises in your life, because you have endured a series of unanswered prayers or have just walked through some hardships that have discouraged you? Or would you receive the offer with a humble heart that says, *"Let it be,"* ready for the breakthrough of heaven into earth, ready to see a miracle masquerading behind misfortune?

And how God looks for such partners. *"The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him"* (2 Chron. 16:9). God would love to favor you. It does not depend upon gifting or personality or IQ but on your willingness to let God show His power—through you, just as He did through Mary.



"The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him"

2 Chronicles 16:9

A favorite is literally one who is favored. Favoritism is defined by Webster as “the showing of more kindness and indulgence to some person or persons than to others; being unfairly partial.” God does not show favoritism in this negative sense, and He forbids us from it as well, because He is a just God: *“My brothers... don’t show favoritism”* (James 2:1). But to have favorites (that is, to favor some over others) is both our right and obligation, and God definitely has favorites in this way. Gabriel’s opening words to Mary were, *“Greetings, you who are highly favored!”* (Luke 1:28). When she was troubled at the greeting, Gabriel said, *“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor (“charis—grace”) with God”* (v. 30). How did Gabriel know this? God must have told him. Mary’s way of life, of putting God at the center rather than at the edge, of being humble and pure, was pleasing to God. The psalmist writes, *“You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil”* (Psalm 5:4).

As a father, disobedience by one of my children gives me no joy. How much more so for a holy God. He is drawn to the obedient, compelled by His own righteousness to associate with them and pour blessing on them. Jesus said, *“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him”* (John 14:23). God enjoys spending time with people who show by their life that they want to be with Him. By contrast, the psalmist says, *“With you the wicked cannot dwell”* (Psalm 5:4b). If you disregard Him in your thoughts, words, and actions, He doesn’t want to be with you. He spoke through a prophet, *“Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained”* (1 Samuel 2:30). Grace does mean equal access and equal opportunity, but it does not mean an egalitarian status. God puts some down and raises others up.

“...He rewards those who earnestly seek Him”

Hebrews 11:6

It’s not that such action comes without an inner test. We don’t live in heaven. Both the elder priest and the young virgin responded initially to the heavenly visitor with fear. We are children of a fallen race. Skepticism comes easily for us. I’m not saying that a response of faith comes without effort. By nature we have more faith for bad news than good news. The advice that Elizabeth’s husband likely received from neighbors who learned to discount the God factor would likely have been, *“Quit praying, old man. Your wife has two problems: she is old, and she is barren.”*

Now an even more impossible story came to Mary, and yet she treated the news with faith. With poetry she blessed the God who chose to favor her above her contemporaries. Zechariah’s response did not please God, and we rehearse his doubt every Advent season. We identify with him, because we know our own struggles to believe. But it is the account in the next paragraph that we need to adopt as our own. And it is the final word of the angel that we are invited to declare: *“For nothing is impossible with God.”*

What impossibilities are staring you in the face today, challenging your circumstances, defying your peace, threatening your joy, mocking your future? Finances? Health? Children? Ministry? A spouse? How is God asking you to respond? What fight of faith is He calling you to? How can you please Him in the midst of your battle?

Remember that *“without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him”* (Heb. 11:6). He wants to reward your faith—even today. The bottom line message from Mary is that she believed God. May we do the same—and walk in God’s favor!

Paul Anderson is the former Director of Lutheran Renewal. He is currently the Director of Harvest Communities and may be reached at: paulanderson@harvestcommunities.org.



*“For God so loved
the world...”*

Those six words are the most powerful ever recorded. God loved the world—He loved you!—so much that He sent His son as the eternal gift that keeps on giving.

Knowing that we are loved and walking in the reality of knowing we are loved are two different things. Walking in the reality of knowing we are loved, cherished, and valued makes all of the difference in the world.

Those who walk in that reality are:

- Convinced that they will never be separated from God’s love
- Unafraid of the future
- Confident of His faithfulness
- Peaceful as they go through difficult times.

The list goes on and on.

We pray that this Christmas you will receive an increased revelation of the breadth, length, height and depth of His love for you (Eph. 3: 17-19). You are so loved!

As our gift to you, we are offering the choice of three impacting messages available for free download. We have selected messages from Diane Brask, Michael Frost, and Larry Randolph. Pick one, two, or all three. Go to LutheranRenewal.org and click on “Christmas Gift.”

This offer expires January 31, 2014.

With our love,

Nathan Hoff, Eric McIntyre, Ali and Denise Siemens, and Fred Thoni

The Lutheran Renewal Leadership Team and Staff

We hope you see the value of the ministry of Lutheran Renewal, a ministry that champions the work of the Holy Spirit. We need your immediate help to get us through this time.

Thank you for standing with us!



Growing Disciples

It Takes Time

Equipping Conference
February 7-8, 2014



Alan Hirsch is the founding director of Forge Mission Training Network and is currently the co-leader of Future Travelers. In addition, he has developed training systems for innovative missional leadership. TheForgottenWays.org



Steve Thompson is a popular international conference speaker, gifted teacher, and prophetic minister. After 20 years at MorningStar Ministries, overseeing their prophetic schools, he formed his own itinerant ministry and has founded The RainMaker Project. TheRainMakerProject.com



Location

North Heights Lutheran Church
1700 Hwy 96 West
Arden Hills, MN 55112

Early-bird price: \$45

Pre-registration closes on January 23.
On-site registration welcome.

Details and online registration: LutheranRenewal.org
Questions: 651-490-1517, ext. 20

Arise! Encounter Rooms

(for women only)

Date: Monday, January 13, 2014

Time: 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Place: Redeemer Lutheran
61 Mississippi Way NE; Fridley, MN 55432

Including:



- Individual prophetic and healing prayer appointments
- Worship all evening
- Pre-registration not available. On-site reservations only.



Arise! Women Conferences

“His joy, my Strength”

March 21-22, 2014
Sacramento, CA
with *Graham Cooke*
AriseWomen.org for details

“Destiny Revealed”

May 2-3, 2014
St. Paul, MN
with *Stacey Campbell & Cindy Jacobs*
Details in February

Arise!
Women