

Greetings highly favoured people! – Advent 4

2 Samuel 7:1–11,16; Psalm 89:1–4,19–27; Romans 16:25–27 Luke 1:26–38

Recently I went to Perth and joined in some leadership training, and gleaned ideas of how outreach was done in poorer areas, how services were run for those mentally handicapped or addicted, checked out a Bible School, met with someone who ran a Prayer Ministry and quite a number of other things.

While in Perth I was blessed to meet Margaret Court who is the well known tennis player, in fact world champion many times over and is now pastor of a large church. I had a couple of meetings with her and sat in on some of her staff planning times. Every day the church she leads begins with prayer led by different members of the church - which reminded me of our Morning Prayer services - and once a week there is all day prayer happening.

On the Sunday I went along to Pastor Margaret's church and to the early service with the person billeting me who was a pastor in the church and as she was on duty for the service I went and sat in the congregation. After a few minutes she came looking for me and asked me to sit with the other pastors – quite a privilege yet I felt somewhat embarrassed. So I moved up to the front seats. I had just put my things down when the second pastor of the church came up and invited me to come over and sit near Pastor Margaret. I was being treated with great honour and respect – these positions were usually for those with a big name or extremely well known. I felt troubled inside at such treatment – as I was not a visiting dignitary.

I was touched by the honour – or favour I was shown – and in fact being treated that way ushered in a deep healing from a time way back where I had been treated with dishonour. The healing was special and came from being blessed – just as simply as that. But also in pondering on what it felt like to be treated with undeserved favour I realised that it was only due to the attitude, character and Christ likeness of the giver of it that I was offered it.

- Two things then stood out to me – favour shows the goodness of the giver of it.

And

- It has to be received to have any impact, or effectiveness. It would have been no good to have stayed in the place of being troubled by it – I had to accept it. Which I did and therefore it blessed me greatly. A simple small act that showed favour.

How easy it is to do that to others!

This is a very, very, very small eg of how Mary may have felt when the angel appeared.

She was being shown favour – purely because of the goodness of God in choosing her.

And she had to receive before this favour had any impact.

And as we know, after being troubled at the greeting and after hearing the 'job description' offered to her she says: "*May your word to me be fulfilled*". Or as we know it better '*be it unto me according to thy word.....*' Luke 1:36

We too can all be troubled by the favourable words God says to us, by treatment that honours us and treats us in special ways. Many find it hard to believe that God's favour is on them. Many have trouble receiving all that God has already given us.

However, it reflects the giver – it reflects the goodness of God.

The truth is that God is always giving unconditional love to us all the time.

The truth is that God's love is flowing out of Him always and He is always showing favour to us.

We just have to receive.

So first point today:

- **Do we know we are highly favoured too?**
- **Are we receiving God's favour?**

Second point is to think about why Mary was such a highly favoured one.

Why was she favoured?

Well the rest of what Luke tells is in this chapter lays it out.

V 30 don't be afraid Mary – you have found favour with God.

V 31 you will conceive and give birth to a son – to be called Jesus.

V 32 He will be great .. - and just how great becomes obvious – He is to be the fulfilment of the promise given to King David that his throne would be established forever.

V 35 has the identity of the child fully spelt out – this little one is to be **the Son of God!**

So Mary is indeed highly favoured as she has been chosen to carry the Son of God. She is to be trusted to carry, nurture, protect, enjoy, teach, and parent the very Son of God. What a privilege!

Now we can see the favour bestowed on her... but do we see the favour bestowed on us when we realise that, since rising from the dead and sending His Holy Spirit, we too are carriers of the Son of God once we give our lives to Him. In John 3 Jesus calls this being Born Again. It really is what we affirmed in church last week when we all stood to confirm or reaffirm that Jesus is our Lord and Saviour. Hence we are Presence carriers – all of us.

Which is our third point – Mary was a Presence carrier and we too are Presence carriers of the most High God.

What does this mean in our daily lives?

- Do we remember who we carry within us from moment to moment?
- Do we realise Who other Christians are carrying within – especially when we are feeling annoyed with them? Or when they don't meet up to our expectations?

Mary would have had to get used to carrying Jesus, then after his birth getting to know Him. and the Gospels tell us this was not always what she thought it would be. We have an account in the Gospels where His mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to speak to Jesus and Jesus says pointing to His disciples: *"Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and my mother."* Mat 12:49-50

Jesus' concept of family was always bigger.

On our journey as Christians we learn to be increasingly in constant communion with Jesus. Sometimes He seems silent and sometimes has a lot to say. However, as the angel says to Mary: *"no word from God will ever fail"* – nothing is impossible for God – so being in communion, with the Christ that we carry within, is essential.

Our third point – we are presence carriers – every one of us. In some senses like Mary, was but in other ways very different as we are guided by the Holy Spirit of God since Pentecost – we are indeed blessed and favoured by God.

Last point – what is the similarity between David and Mary in the two readings we have and in what we know about them?

To me what stands out is **the attitude of their hearts.**

In the Samuel reading God is not looking at what David could do for Him – as in building Him a house or a Temple rather again it is clear that the favour comes from God and is because of the goodness of God. David has not earned it. But we are told that God enjoys David's attitude of heart – it is called "a heart after my own heart" by God. So too Mary's attitude stands out – *I am the Lord's servant ... May your word to me be fulfilled.*

- Both had obedient hearts – both desired to please God.
- Both believed God could do anything – both knew in their innermost being that nothing was impossible for God.

And

- Both trusted that God's will was best – even if it meant as in David's case giving up a long harboured plan to bless God.

So last point: God highly favours obedience.

1 Sam 15:22 *“To obey is better than sacrifice...”*

John 14:15 *“if you love me you will obey Me...”*

So in summary:

There is no doubt that Mary was indeed highly favoured for the role she was chosen for in world history and for the purposes of God’s salvation of the world.

But we must remember that we too are highly favoured for we too are presence carriers. We may be troubled by hearing this and only partially receive it – but don’t sell God short or ourselves – for it reflects the goodness of God – we don’t deserve it – but He has chosen us and He is the one that honours us with His gift of life – eternal life through His Son. And along with that gift comes an inheritance and the blessing of being presence carriers of the Son of God, Temples of the Holy Spirit – and as such we can honour the gift we carry too. As well as honour it in each other.

However, as we come up to the occasion of giving thanks for the birth of God’s Son in the world let us do a heart attitude check – for God favours an obedient heart.

Where is our heart on a scale of obedience? Even if it means abandoning plans we have for good, in order to obey?

Mary and David surrendered all to God – do we, day by day?

I began by telling about being treated as an ambassador when I was in a strange city with strangers.

- Let us honour the blessing we each carry by treating each other and all other Christians as ambassadors for Christ.
- Honour their gifting.
- Honour the One they carry within.
- Honour the gifting each has.
- Honour the heart attitudes of each – for Christ does.

And

- Most of all honour the gift we have truly been given in the gift of Jesus to each and to all the world.

Greetings highly favoured ones!

When we come to the peace I invite us to say that to each other as we pass the peace – Greetings ‘*Pam*’ highly favoured one! Let us pray: