



Luke Chapter 1:26-38

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Good morning, everybody! Grace and peace to you in the name of God, our father and our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a joy to be with you today and to share with you the word that the Lord has placed on my heart as we begin a brand-new message series that we're calling **Radical Hospitality**. I don't know about you, but every time I get close to the Christmas season, and I look at these wonderful passages about the Christmas story in the New Testament, I immediately go back in time, back to when I was a kid in church, and we would do pageants for Christmas. And there was always that person who played the innkeeper. Jesus is unborn, he's in his pregnant mom's womb and Mary and Joseph are looking for a place to stay in Bethlehem. And there's always that emotive actor or a kid who plays that role, who shouts "There's no room, there's no vacancy!" Well, that's not really in the story. All we know is that there was no room. That's the only statement. There was no statement about a mean, crotchety innkeeper. We've added all of that over the years. And I think about that in terms of *hospitality*.

I began this journey of looking into those wonderful passages with a different mindset, the mindset of coming out of Covid and the mindset of what would it look like if we retooled hospitality? So, I began looking at these passages with that in mind, and what I discovered was that there is more going on in these stories, more about hospitality, than anything that we may have thought about before. And I'm going to challenge us to take a look at *radical hospitality* through these passages, through these stories, in ways that I think ultimately will prepare us for this Christmas season.

As we prepare our hearts, would you join with me as we go before the Lord in prayer? Gracious Lord, open us up to your word and open your word up to us. Teach us, Father, what you would have us learn as you conform our lives into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this, Lord, I pray in Jesus' name. And all God's people said, Amen.

Well, my wife, Kristine and I are no strangers to hotels and bed and breakfasts. We've stayed at both, probably dozens of times over the years as we've taken vacations, and maybe you have to. Maybe that's part of your normal routine that you have for work. Well, going to hotels and going to bed and breakfasts taught me a lot over the years about hospitality. In fact, recently, as I've been going through the cancer treatments with my mom and my dad and going back home, I've spent some time in hotel rooms over the course of the last several months. And each time I'm just amazed at what different hotel chains consider hospitality. In fact, just a couple of weeks ago, when I was in a hotel room, I started making a note to myself

because I knew that this message was coming. And I wrote down a bunch of things that I saw in the room that they would classify as hospitality. For example, they had complimentary soaps and bath amenities. Complimentary soap, shampoo, and conditioner. It was complimentary, so I pocketed as many as I could. And they had an iron and an ironing board, not that I was doing any ironing, but they had that available. They had an in-room coffeemaker. There was a gift shop down in the lobby – not free. They had, in one place, a mini bar. That's a small, small, in-room source of alcohol for those who needed it. That was not free. They also had snack baskets; those were not free either. I learned that the hard way! And in the hotel I stayed at just a couple of weeks ago, they said they offered guests “free wi-fi.” And I thought, that's really cool because when I go to visit my parents, I'm working. So, I go into the hotel room, I open my computer and what I discovered at this particular hotel is that “free wi-fi” was actually just a quick checking of your email. Now, if you wanted to spend any amount of time on the internet, it cost an extra \$4.99 per day. I was not going to spend \$4.99, so I just used my phone as a mobile hotspot because I knew how to do that. If you have a smartphone, they allow you to do mobile check-in so you don't even have to go to the front desk. You could just go to their website or their app and check-in without even going to talk to anybody. In fact, there was one place that we went to that you can actually open your door by using your phone. You didn't even need a key anymore. This is great stuff! The one place that we went to over the years used to do turndown service. Now, because of Covid, people *turn down* the turndown service and many places provide continental breakfast, provided that you're there on time. Otherwise, some other continent gets your breakfast. The funny thing at my hotel that really struck a chord, because I look for humor everywhere I go, was a big sign that was on the nightstand that said something like because of Covid and because of wanting a contactless experience there will not be any changing of sheets, there will not be any cleaning and there will not be any changing of towels during your stay. And then there was another card, right underneath that one, that said your room will be serviced by Jackie. And I thought, shouldn't it say your room will *not* be serviced by Jackie?! Because that seemed like a contrast there. Everything that we would normally do that we're not going to do because we're now contactless. Hospitality sure looks different post-Covid than it did pre-Covid.

What about hospitality in our homes? A couple of months ago, Kristine and I had the opportunity and the joy of welcoming Kristine's cousin and her two kids to spend ten days with us. It was a great joy. Leading up to that time, one of the things that we did is a lot of prep work. In fact, we had not used our guest rooms for quite some time because of Covid. Nobody's been in our home except for me, our dog, and my wife. So, we had to clean our guestrooms. We thoroughly cleaned, we re-did things, we shifted furniture, and we had to unpack things and pack things. And then my wife said, you know, we want to give love away. This is important to us. And so, she went out and she got a nice sized basket and we filled that with things that other hotels provide for hospitality. So, we got complimentary bottles of shampoo, and we got complimentary soaps, and we got complimentary bags of chocolate, lots of chocolate. And we got other things, snacks for a family. I mean, there were two teenagers that are going to be in this house. We need to provide things for ten days. So, we packed out these baskets for the guestrooms, and it was a wonderful experience. When you saw their faces, when they saw their rooms, they lit up. It was radical for us, radical hospitality! We went above and beyond. But here's the thing, during the midst of their stay, I found out that I needed to transition and go to New Jersey to be with my family for a week. We weren't planning on that happening during this particular stay, so I had to shift things around. And the guests that were experiencing guest-like hospitality suddenly shifted from being guests to being family. And they shared the load of what it meant to live in this environment, where one of the hosts was no longer going to be there. And bless their hearts, they just jumped in. They did it because that's how they were wired. And what this did for us is it taught us that hospitality has a receiver, but also a giver. And what would happen in our hospitality if we never lost sight of the fact that hospitality benefits both? Hold on to that.

For the duration of this series, we're going to be looking at what does hospitality, what does radical hospitality really look like from the standpoint of those Christmas stories? And what would it look like for us in 21st century America? What would it look like for us as followers of Jesus, to retool how we define hospitality? And how do we give love away? So, this series is built around those Christmas stories, and I want to share one of them with you.

This is the first one, and it comes to us from the Gospel of Luke 1:26. This is a story that's telling the story of the angels message to Mary. And it's a miracle story that's embedded in a larger miracle story. The story begins earlier, in verse 11. But we're going to pick up in the midst of that larger story and connect the dots with what God is doing. So, starting with verse 26, if you want to open your Bible or your Bible app, and for those of you who are tracking with me online, you're going to see this up on the screens as well. So, what I'm going to do is I'm going to read some of these verses and I'll pause periodically, and I'm going to give commentary. Most of you who have been around me, you know that this is how I unpack the word of God. So, let's look at Luke 1:26. It says, "In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth." Let me pause there very briefly. This one verse is actually packed with information. For years, I would just gloss right over this, but this is important stuff. First of all, it says *in the sixth month* – and no, they're not referring to June. It's not a calendar year. This is actually a connecting reference to what has happened just before we pick up in this passage. And the connecting reference takes us back to another story where the angel Gabriel has another message. Starting in verse 11 of chapter one, we encounter a man named Zachariah and his wife, Elizabeth. They are up there in years, they're in the priestly home, and therefore they have priestly responsibilities. They are childless. God did not bless them with children and there is almost a bitterness that's connected with wanting a child, craving a child, praying for generations for a child, and never having a child. Back in the day, their faith kind of had this expectation that you needed a child in order to carry on your legacy, especially a male child. That was how Jewish men would pass on all of their legacy, their name, their heritage and often even their employment. And so, to be childless back in that culture brought about a sense of judgment that they must have done something that angered God. And they lived with that judgment each and every day. And for years, every day they prayed for that child until they crossed that age barrier where it didn't make sense to pray anymore. So, one day Zacharias is doing his priestly role in the temple, and it was there in the temple that the angel Gabriel told him that God had heard his prayer. Now I'm not going to get into the storyline, you're welcome to read it. It's a really powerful story. But in a nutshell, Zacharias and Elizabeth become pregnant in their old age. It's impossible on a human level, but God is not limited by our limitations. And so, she is now in her sixth month when we encounter Gabriel's story with Mary. So, when we read in verse 26, in the sixth month, what we're reading is that it's in the sixth month of *Elizabeth's pregnancy* that angel Gabriel now comes, by God, to Galilee to Nazareth. Why is this important? In my opinion, there's an intentionality to the timing of all of this. So, it's in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy that God sends angel Gabriel. The timing is perfect for Elizabeth, and the timing is now perfect for what God is doing. And what it tells us is that God is doing something so unique and so important that the timeline has been worked out in advance and God is now executing his plan - whether it makes sense to us on a human level or not. So, in the sixth month, God sends angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee called Nazareth. Now, back then, Nazareth was nothing. It was a village. It was not a cosmopolitan place. It was a place of humble, hardworking people, people who were often stuck in poverty. Why is that important? In addition to the intentionality of the timing, we have the intentionality of the place. God is very intentional. He's purposeful in how he is executing what he's about to download into Mary's life. And it continues. So, Gabriel, sent by God, to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin, engaged to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. Now I could spend probably at least an hour, maybe 2 hours just unpacking that word - *virgin*. Because in our culture today, that word means something totally different. And

dare I say this - in our culture today, in 21st century America, especially when people hear that you are a virgin, you're laughed at, you're not valued, you're mocked. You're not "with the times." Mary is a virgin, and from what we've read, that term, back in first century language is that she was pure and innocent. But underneath even that is the understanding and the anticipation that Mary is most likely only 12-14 years of age. Think about that. She would have been in what we know as middle school, and now God is inviting her into a life changing, into a world changing moment. Look what happens in verse 28. Gabriel came to her and said, "Greetings favored one, the Lord is with you." Mary was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this may be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." Now let me pause there again. Notice twice in these couple of verses God is saying through Gabriel, Mary, you are favored. You have found favor in the sight of God. When I look at those verses and I try to look at them from the perspective of a 21st century guy, and I'm reading into that from my perspective, how many young women in today's world get exposed to that kind of intrinsic value statement? How many young women are exposed to that sense that they are favored just because of who they are? In fact, in today's world, most young women, most older women, they're exposed to phrases like, you're too fat, you don't measure up, you're not worthy of being on the covers of these magazines. Unless you look like those models, you're not good enough. In the professional world, you're not worth being paid on equal terms with men. You are less than, etc. Those are the messages that most young women get in today's world. And here's the deal. Back in Mary's world, it wasn't that different. The phrases would be different, but the attitude was the same. Women were *less than*. And so, in addition to the intentionality of timing and in addition to the intentionality of place, God has an intentionality to the person who he's asking. A female, middle schooler. Think about that. And what this tells us is that God sees, identifies, affirms, and praises what He created in Mary. And He does the same thing for you. Regardless of your age, regardless of your gender, He sees, identifies, affirms and He praises what He created in you.

The story continues in verse 31, "And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and He will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His ancestor, David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there will be no end." Get this. God's favor comes before God's mission. And that mission is earth shattering. "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son." So, this mission that God has in store for Mary, Middle School Mary, who is going to get pregnant at 12 or 13 years of age, and the baby that she's going to give birth to is going to change history. Wow!

God asks this of a teenager. What do we ask of our teenagers? Think about that. What do we ask of our teenagers? Do we trust them to change the world? The reality is, as followers of Jesus, hospitality is our life's mission. It's our life's mission, right? But what do we do when that hospitality is not about a home, an inn or even a barn. But rather, it's about our womb, our heart, and our future. What do we do when that hospitality is more radical than anything that we have ever considered? Because Jesus isn't knocking on the door saying, Hey, do you have some extra shampoo? Do you have a basket that I could use? Do you have a mini bar? Because I've seen what you guys are doing, and I need some help. He comes and he says, metaphorically, Do you have a "womb" for me? Because what God is asking of Mary, is for her not only to open her womb for what God wants to give birth to, but to face into life as a middle school kid, her reputation forever tainted, her life forever changed and her future is no longer her own. Would we do that?

So appropriately, in verse 34, Mary says to the angel, "How can this be since I am a virgin?" Even back then, middle school aged Mary is very self-aware. She knows that people get pregnant when they're intimate. She knows she's not been intimate. She's engaged, but she's not married. So how can this be? So, in verse 35, the angel said to 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 holy. He will be called Son of God.” So, this is beautiful stuff right here. What we read in these words is that the active agent in this entire process is the Holy Spirit. God himself will make it happen, just like He did with Zacharias and Elizabeth in their old age. God is not limited by our limitations. God will make this happen. The Holy Spirit will make this happen. “The most high, God, will overshadow you.” And what that tells us is that the baby that is being born through Mary is going to be more important than Mary. God's mission for the world is more important than Mary, and more important than us. What God is asking of Mary and what God is asking of us, is that Mary become a God bearer. A God bearer. It's actually a theological word in Greek, *Theotokos*. Theotokos is the combination of two Greek words: Theo, which means *God* and Tokos, which is the root word, meaning carries the weight of or *bearing*, bearing something. It is so important that the Eastern Orthodox Christian faith identifies Mary as the Theotokos. That's the term that they used for her, *the God bearer*. But here's the deal. For us, speaking as a 21st century person here, whether we are virgins or not, according to the standards of the world, what God is looking for are people whose lives are so consecrated by the blood of Jesus Christ that when they say “yes” to Jesus they become “God bearers” in the world. God plants a mission within our metaphoric womb and sends us out into the world on a mission to deliver that hope to a hope-starved world. Verse 36, the angel continues “And now your relative, Elizabeth, in her old age, has also conceived a son. And this is the sixth month, for her who was said to be barren, for nothing will be impossible with God.” And then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me, according to your word.”

We'll talk more about those verses later in the series, but for now, hear this. When God downloads a mission on Mary's life, it is after he has already identified favor in and through her. He doesn't force her, He invites her. We can say yes or no to God's invitation. God waits for our “yes”. God is not a slave trader. He's an equipper. He's driven by a mission that is bigger than us. The moment we say yes, we become “God bearers”. So, look at the process. Mary's process is our process. God shows favor, He sees in us what He created himself and that favor then builds to an invitation. When we say yes to that invitation, God overshadows us and uses our lives to bear into the world things that are more important than even our own life. God sends us his favor, He invites. He overshadows and what He did for Mary, He's inviting us to do with Him today. It may not mean that a 12- or 13-year-old is supernaturally made pregnant, but what it does mean is that if you open your metaphoric life to be a womb for what God wants to birth, your life will partner with God in changing the world.

And that is the message of **radical hospitality**. Opening your life, your heart, and your future, and allowing the Almighty God to overshadow you. It will forever change you. Do you have a “womb” for God? Let's pray. God, thank you for what you did in that season with Mary and in the seasons of our lives. There are so many of us slaughtered in our culture that never hear the words of affirmation and hope that you spoke into Mary's life, and we crave that. Thank you for your favor, your grace that shines upon us in ways that we have not even seen because of the blood that Jesus shed on the cross. You invite us to be “God bearers” in this world. So, Lord, today, if there is anyone in this room who either for the first time or maybe not the first time is saying yes to you, let your spirit overshadow them and us as you send us into the world to bear Jesus, so that all who see us will see you. I pray this in your precious name. Amen.