

when the angel appears to her and says, and I'm quoting from the old King James Version, but the angel says in Luke 1:28:

Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

And that's where the phrase Hail Mary came from. Maybe you grew up Catholic like my wife Cheryl did and you went to your first confession and the priest said do 10 or 15 Hail Mary's as penance for your sins. Where did that come from? It came from this text. Hail Thou art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou amongst women.

Some of you are like *"Where is he going with all this, how does this all fit together..."*

It all seems to go together for me because what could be more of a Hail Mary pass than the one you need to throw as God when you want to bring forth the Savior of the world from a virgin womb. The Christmas story is one of God moving against all the odds in a miraculously way to save the creation that He so loves! So, let's look again with fresh eyes as we begin in Luke 1:26, this time from the NIV which doesn't give us the Hail Mary like the old King James does, but it's a little more readable. Allow yourself to be a little star struck at all that is taking place here beginning in verse 26:

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, [that would be the sixth month of Mary's cousin being pregnant with John the Baptist, in the sixth month] God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, [Gabriel had an earlier assignment to go to the temple with a message for Zechariah who was Elizabeth's husband. He had a hard time believing what Gabriel said so he made him mute until the birth of John. Note to self if an angel appears to me, believe what he has to say, right? So, now God sent Gabriel to Nazareth] to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, [There's the "hail"] you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called [b] the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." [Amen?] "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her. At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "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 should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Not a political statement, not a condemning statement, just a footnote in the context here on the sanctity of life. When Mary, who's barely pregnant, walks into the house of Elizabeth her relative who's six months pregnant, John the Baptist inside of Elizabeth leaps in the womb at the presence of Jesus in the womb coming into the house. Luke gives us the specific details of "baby" and "six months pregnant" because God wants us to see the sanctity of even little lives.

So, now Mary, who was in wonder as she didn't know how any of this could be, erupts in worship. She moves from wonder to worship and Mary's song follows beginning in verse 46:

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors." Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

What an amazing moment to have the announcement of Gabriel over your life. You are blessed and highly favored. I grew up in a tradition where I didn't hear that phrase a lot, but in some churches you hear that all the time. In some churches that is a very big announcement. I'm blessed and highly favored. Anybody grow up or been to a church like that? It's like, how are you doing today? "Blessed and highly favored?" How's life going? "I'm blessed and highly favored!"

AND that was true of Mary and it's true of you and it's true of me. BUT the interpretation of that, as I think we'll see at the end, isn't necessarily that "I got a brand-new car and everything's going fantastic today. All my prayers have been answered exactly the way I hoped they would be answered. God is good all the time and all the time God is good. I'm blessed and highly favored..." I don't think that's always the result because Mary's circumstance isn't exactly that circumstance.

When the angel came to Mary, she was somewhere between 12 and 16 years of age. As the daddy of a soon to be 12-year-old daughter next week, for my sake, I just need to her to be 16 in this moment. But culturally, somewhere between 12 and 16, she's pledged to be married to Joseph. And so, at 16 years of age, planning a wedding, planning a future, and planning a life comes the announcement, "You are gonna be pregnant and it's gonna be the work and the miracle of God." A divine conception is going to happen.

Now that is really great and really troubling news all at the same time. Can we all agree on that? But somehow in the grace of God, Mary rose up in faith to believe that God was doing something amazing in her and through her. And even though it sounded to the human mind like a stretch, she said, but all things are possible with God. Let it be with me as you have said.

In other words, I'm gonna choose the side of faith when everything in my human mind makes me want to tilt to the side of this is crazy and I don't believe any of this. That would be a good takeaway for someone today. When everything in your life leads you to conclude this is crazy and I don't believe any of this, choose the side of faith.

So, at 16 years of age, she's chosen to bear the son of God into the world. And at 28 years of age, she's at the temple to worship and her kid disappears. And once they finally find the kid, he says, "Well, where'd you expect me to be? I was at my father's house." And they're like, "Oh, okay, great. It's gonna be like this huh?" Right? In her thirties, she realizes there's a wonder kid in the house. When she's 46, she'd gone to a friend's wedding in Canaan, and when the wine ran out at the end of the reception, she kind of pulled the curtain back on Jesus, whether He was ready or not. Mom said, "Just do whatever He says..." "Jesus, get in there and do something and fix the wine." How'd she know He could do that? Because she'd been living in a house with the son of God for 30 years! And so now she's 46 and people are starting to go, "Oh wow, this guy can do stuff!" But at 49 she watches her Son suffer on a cross an excruciating death and knows that He's been put in a tomb and sealed in death.

But also at 49, she sees the miracle of the empty tomb and the resurrection. And also at 49, she has a goodbye conversation with Jesus where He says to her, "Mom, I'm gonna ascend back up into heaven. I know the whole thing's been crazy, but you've been awesome by the way. But I'm gonna ascend back to heaven. I'll see you later. Have a great life." And up into heaven goes her son at 49.

This is her life from 16 to 49... blessed and highly favored. Bumps in the road, crazy in the road. I'm sure it started with shock and awe. I'm sure other people tried to compound that with shame along the way. "Oh, great story, I've never heard that one, God did it, ha ha, that's amazing, creative way to approach that unplanned pregnancy. Then it was surreal, then there was suffering, then there was silence. And then there was the surprise. Blessed and highly favored.

She moved from wonder to worship, worried to worship, wounded to worship, waiting to worship, wow to worship, where'd He go to worship. But we see this pattern in the life of Mary who was blessed and highly favored.

Waiting > Divine Activity > Worship

There's waiting, there's divine activity, and then there's worship. To put it in a different way, there's faith. If we're never waiting for anything, we don't need faith.

I mean it would be great if God just did everything right when we needed Him to do it, when we wanted Him to do it, when we told Him to do it. But if God did everything exactly the way we want Him to do it, we would have zero need for faith in our life. So, come on, let's thank God today for our waiting because that stirs up in us the faith that we need to grow stronger! Amen! *But in our faith*, waiting is followed by God's faithfulness! Amen. Does anybody have a story of the faithfulness of God in the house today?

And once the faithfulness of God comes into our lives, worship is always the response, **BUT** what I love in Mary is she didn't wait until the resurrection to worship. Mary worshiped beforehand! Mary had a song at the very beginning when the baby was still in her womb! She believed in God's Word and worshiped God from the start!

BUT why did the wonder turn into worship? This is the most important part of the journey today. It was for two reasons:

Number one, what the Lord has done for ME. Mary said, "The Lord has been mindful of my humble state." Mary, this humble servant girl, now understands that she's on the radar of heaven, that her life matters to God, that she's in the story and in the plan of God.

But it wasn't just what God did for her that caused the worship. It was what God was doing for US that caused the worship. I want you to notice how this unfolds in Mary's song. Look back at verse 50 and then again in verse 54:

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. [And then in verse 54] He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”

She's talking about the Savior, the Promised One, the hope not just of Israel but of the whole world. And if you notice, she is talking about God's mercy, God is extending mercy, He is being merciful... **Mercy unfolds the grace of God, and the grace of God is the key that unlocks worship in our hearts.**

If you want to create an atmosphere of worship in your home this Christmas don't begin with worship. Begin with rediscovering the story of the radical grace of God. Worship is the byproduct of a heart that has been awakened from the dead by the mercy of God. When mercy is alive in our heart, worship will be alive in our mouths! When there is no mercy alive in the heart, then you're wasting your time trying to get people to be exuberant in their praise this Christmas. External pressure cannot cause the heart to do what the internal change of grace will do.

BUT if people can see, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that God who did not owe us anything extended to us everything, and erased our debt through the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ, then in that heart there is a song! Zachariah had one, Mary had one, and I have one. Thank you worship team for leading today but I came in here with my own song. I didn't come in here to worship, I came in worshipping! Amen?

Why? Well, He has been faithful! Am I still waiting on some things, absolutely! Has there been some wonder and waiting and wounding along the way, yup. But if God never did another thing in my life, I've already got enough to praise Him for! I'm in the house today with a bunch of people to celebrate a God of salvation, a God of mercy, a God of extravagant grace! I'm still moved by the gospel.

AND I guess that's the question today. Are you still moved by the Gospel, or do you need God to come through one more time for you to worship him? I want to be moved by the Gospel. I want what God has already done by sending His Son Jesus to this earth to live and die for my sins to be enough.

Because there are really only a few responses to God's mercy. The first response to God's mercy is to be ignorant of it. Meaning I don't even know that I need it. Like I'm not even that clued in to the holiness of God to know that I need mercy. OR I don't really know what mercy is all about so I'm just over here doing my best, trying to make it right with God.

And in either case, I don't have the full knowledge and understanding of the depth of the mercy of God. Of a love that's deeper than whatever I've done. That's wider than wherever I've run. That's higher than anything I can imagine. That's longer than any distance that would separate me from God. This love of God overwhelms everything I've done and everything I could ever do and brings me back to God. I didn't earn it. I didn't deserve it. I didn't merit it in any way, shape, or form. But God is a merciful God. And it's not just mercy, it's tender mercy. You're struggling, but I'm gonna help you. I'm gonna save you. I'm gonna do what you can't do. I'm gonna throw a Hail Mary and it's gonna be completed. And salvation is gonna come to all who receive this gift.

The second response to mercy is to receive it. And I think that's where the bulk of people in church are. I have definitely received the mercy of God. I remember where I was when I was saved. I remember where I was when I asked God to bring me to life. I know where I was when I prayed that prayer of faith in Jesus. And I have received the mercy of God.

But the third person in the story of mercy is the person who's the conduit of the mercy of God. Mary didn't just receive the miracle; she was the conduit for the miracle. And she knew it right away. And she said this is You being merciful to Abraham and to every generation. This is everything we've been waiting for, all the

