

Talofa, Brothers and Sisters! My name is Nari Molimau, one of the Young Adults at Kona United Methodist Church. Before sharing the message, I would like to thank our God the Father in heaven for blessing us and keeping us safe continuously here in this holy place. And I thank you to our Pastor Sunny for letting me share a message in my heart today.

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. Today's topic is LOVE—the LOVE that came to us on the first Christmas Day through Mother Mary. Many of us know the story we have today well. For that reason, I just want to zoom in and focus on two particular phrases from the Gospel Luke, chapter 1, verse 30—**“Do not be afraid”** and **“You have found favor with God.”**

“Do not be afraid” was a kind of catchphrase among angels in the Bible, a way of telling the person in front of them to calm down before they had a heart attack. In today's passage where the Angel Gabriel appears to Mary, I don't think that it was so much his appearance that was giving Mary reason to fear. I believe he spoke the words “Do not be afraid” to preempt the message he was about to deliver. It was a message fraught with danger. It was the news that she was pregnant.

Now, remember Mary is engaged (which is legally binding) but not yet married. And so, she is still living at home with her parents. The assumption is that she would be chaste until she and Joseph came together and formed their own household. But now, there's this angel in her room telling her that she is pregnant. And he tells her not to be afraid before he even gives her the news. He did this, I think, because he probably knew the chain of fears that might run through her mind.

That chain of fears could have gone something like this: Joseph, knowing the child wasn't his, would call off the marriage and leave her. For that reason, people would assume that her pregnancy was the result of sleeping around. Her parents would think the same thing and might disown her and throw her out. Friends would then forsake her. She would be shamed and either shunned or stoned because of the penalty for adultery in her culture. Even if she weren't stoned, she would be all alone during the trials and tribulations of pregnancy. Even if she made it to term,

she would be alone facing the daunting task of labor and the delivery, which included the very real possibility of dying in childbirth.

I think that it's because of that possible runaway train wreck of thoughts that Gabriel says to Mary, "do not fear." The reason not to fear was not that he says so. But it was because she had found favor with God.

The word "favor" means, I believe, to show kindness or to be gracious toward someone. God decided to give Mary something she didn't ask for, the incredible privilege of being the mother of Jesus! God didn't give her this privilege because Mary earned it. God gave her this privilege out of kindness and love for her.

God loves Mary so much and gave her this privilege to become the mother of God's Son, Jesus. Mary felt this amazing love of God for her. This love transformed her and feared nothing but embraced the call boldly by saying, "I AM THE SERVANT LORD, LET IT BE ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD" (Luke 1:38). That's the power of love.

As I read this story, I cannot help but wistfully think, "How wonderful it must have been to experience God's favor like that!" So, I searched to see if the verb "found favor" is used anywhere else in the Bible. I found it in one other place—the book of Ephesians, chapter 1, verses 5 through 6. It says, "God destined us for adoption as His children through Jesus Christ...to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us [**favor**ed us] in the beloved."

The word translated "blessed" is the same Greek word translated "favor"ed" in Luke, chapter 1. According to this Holy Scripture, God has favored you and me like He favored Mary! God has been kind to all who believe in Jesus and favored us by adopting us into His family as His children.

So, you and I do get to experience God's favor, after all, as God's children. That's actually pretty cool, isn't it? I experience God's favor here at Kona United Methodist Church. Like Mary, my journey of experiencing God's amazing love started with fear.

When auntie Gloria invited me to be a worship song leader, I was shocked. I said, "What? Are you sure you want to hear me singing?" I asked auntie Gloria, "How many people would be singing with me if I accepted the invitation?" I asked this because I never like singing by myself, especially in front of people. Auntie Gloria

said, “Oh, don’t worry. Just come, Nari.” Even though she did not answer my question, I accepted her invitation because I know she loves me, and whatever she asks of me to do is for my benefit. Also, I love to sing praises to the Lord. Singing is one of my ways to show my love to the Lord. Singing at church as a song leader scared me first, but it turned out to be joy for me. I feel that I have found favor with God to sing praises with many of God’s people, like YOU, on Sunday.

Another example is sharing a message with you, so-called “preaching.” I’ve never done this before. With the help of Pastor Sunny and God, I am here today, sharing a message of Love. If you don’t understand what I have been said so far, it is ok. But I want you to know at least one thing—You have found favor with God. You have no reason to fear about anything. You are blessed. I am blessed. We are blessed children of God because the LOVE came to us on the first Christmas day, which is Jesus Christ, our Lord. Let us know that we are loved by God. God loves you. So do I. Amen.