

**Knox Uniting Church**  
**Saturday December 20<sup>th</sup> 2025 Special Carols Service at BRUC**  
**Message by Russell Croxford**  
**Bible passages: Isaiah 43:1-7 and Luke 1:26-45**

***'You are a blessing'***

My wife Sophie remembers being a 'Teacher's Pet' at school - not that teachers should have favourites! She claims that she was a very good student, studied hard, was well behaved, and had a positive attitude. No wonder the teachers like her! I was trying to recall if I was ever a teacher's favourite. I reckon I was, once, in year 8. That was the one year I did all the things the teachers liked. Later on, I didn't do as many of the things the teacher's liked.

Being a teacher's pet is great, but there's a downside to watch out for. For starters, the other kids hate you. I guess you can live with that if you are getting good treatment from the teacher. The other problem is that you start to believe everyone else is below you. Aside from that it's great! The teachers think highly of you and they say nice things about you. Again - not that there should be favourites!

Seriously, when people say nice things about us it reinforces within us the idea that we are valued, respected and appreciated for who we are. It's good for our self-esteem. It buoys us up. Can you recall good words from anyone that buoyed you up and gave you confidence to go through the challenges of life? These are positive words that shaped you in a positive way.

In God's eyes we are all equally favourites (if that's even possible). We are all a blessing in his eyes. That's the radical good news of the gospel and this advent season.

The trouble is, we don't always get positive messages. Far too often we get messages about our failures and inadequacies. We get all sorts of false messages about how well we have to perform in certain ways in order to be accepted. And much of the time we are telling ourselves those bad messages. These are messages that make us think we are *not* a blessing. We *not* favoured at all.

Good messages and bad messages. They shape us don't they? So, how do you feel about yourself? How has your thinking about yourself been shaped by the messages you have heard and believed over the years? It's a deep and searching question but an important one.

Thinking about our Luke bible reading, how did Mary, the mother of Jesus, feel about herself the day the angel Gabriel came to visit? Did she feel she was a blessing to God and to others? Or did she feel small and insignificant? Probably the latter. Let's think about what happened. Let's look at her reactions to the angel's message.

Firstly, the message from Gabriel was *unexpected* by Mary. In fact, it would have been unexpected for the early readers of Luke's gospel. It would have been a shock to them that God sent his angel to someone from Nazareth. The Jews from Judea in the south looked down on their northern neighbours. They were lesser Jews up there. They intermarried with non-Jews over the border. They didn't worship in the real temple. Why would God choose someone from there?

Mary herself almost certainly would have shared the same view. Could she ever really be an important part of God's story? Mary may well have been someone overlooked by the world – but not by God.

Secondly, the message from Gabriel was *impossible*. 'How can this be?' was her first question (v34). Her reaction here is profoundly human. This was too farfetched for her. Don't we often feel the same. We often feel it's impossible to be what God wants us to be. Yet as Gabriel said to Mary, "For nothing will be impossible with God." (v37). God's love and grace, poured out to us makes anything possible. And he does that through his Son Jesus. The impossible made possible.

Thirdly, the message from Gabriel was *frightening*. Mary was afraid. Who wouldn't be? Becoming the mother of the Messiah would be scary for anyone, even more so under these circumstances. Fear was holding her back, just as fear holds us back too often. Knowing this, the angel tells Mary, "Do not be afraid, Mary" (v30).

These words echo what the Lord says to his people through the prophet Isaiah, "*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned.*" (Isaiah 43:1-2) Fears and anxieties are constant companions in life. I know, I feel it often. We need to know our Lord is with us in the fire. He's redeemed us, even before any trouble starts. And he calls us by name and claims us as his own.

The Lord called Mary by name and claimed her as his own. He wove her into his big story. In that way she was blessed. She may not have been wealthy, powerful, famous, or influential, but she is chosen to bear God's son. She was favoured by God. And so are we!