

# Favor with God

## What is Christianity all About?

This is a question we are going to be asking throughout the Advent season. Especially at Christmas time, we can see that many of the things we do to celebrate the season are not in alignment with the values of God's kingdom. Christmas has become more about spending our money to buy gifts for ourselves than about the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. This should cause us to raise a number of different questions finally asking, "Do we really know what Christianity is truly all about?"

Beginning in January, we will begin to explore the primary theme of all Jesus' teaching: the kingdom of God. The purpose for this focus will be to become fully equipped as the body of Christ to serve as God's representatives in the world. The season of Advent will be a time of preparation for this study.

## Kingdom Themes

The kingdom of God is the overarching theme of all Jesus' teaching. Beneath this overarching theme are many sub themes. In the Christmas story, we can find each theme very poignantly expressed. For example, the theme of "righteousness" is expressed throughout the teachings of Christ. It is also represented in the story of the annunciation to Mary.

## Mary

When the angel appeared to Mary, he began by saying, "Greetings, you who are highly favored!" Mary have found favor with God. This thought alone should give us great encouragement. As followers of Christ, we desire to live a life that is pleasing to God. Sometimes when we are weak, we succumb to the thought that finding favor with God is impossible. We falsely think that if we start improving our lives that this will bring about righteousness, and that obtaining righteousness will finally bring about God's favor. This is backward thinking. True righteousness does not begin in our actions, but in our faith.

## Righteousness through Faith

The righteousness of Mary is revealed in her response, "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said." Mary has faith in God, and this faith is the source of her righteousness. Righteousness therefore comes through faith. This idea is expressed more fully in Paul's letter to the Romans, where the entire book is devoted to explaining the righteousness does not come through obedience to God's law, but comes when we have faith in God and trust in God's leadership.

## Righteousness Revealed

Although righteousness comes through faith, it is made manifest in our actions. On a personal level, righteousness is revealed through personal holiness. When we are trusting in God, our faith transforms our personal behavior. This does not mean that we become perfect all at once, but it does mean that we grow more and more in the likeness of God. On a relational level, righteousness is revealed in our love for one another. On a social level, righteousness is revealed in principles of social justice.