**Charisma**

**FBC Albemarle**

**December 6, 2015**

The English word charisma is from the Greek root word χάρις (*charis*), which means grace. So in Greek, χάρισμα (*khárisma*) means “favor freely given” or “gift of grace.” In the English language, charisma has come to describe a personality trait filled with charm and kindness. A person with charisma is often someone people want to follow. But if we go back to the divinely conferred definition of charisma, it is less about the person and more about the Giver.

Luke 1:67 starts with the interesting phrase: “His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit…” Zechariah had charisma, meaning he had the gift of grace. Let’s remember back to who Zechariah was and why he is important to the season of Advent. Zechariah was a priest and was married to Elizabeth who was a descendant of Aaron. Bible says that they were both upright in the sight of God and observed the commands of the Lord. However, they had no children because Elizabeth was barren and they were both well along in years. The mention of Zechariah and Elizabeth’s childlessness and their being past childbearing age points to the human impossibility of what was to come and heightens the miraculous character of God’s intervention in the story.

The angel of the Lord, Gabriel, visited Zechariah and declared that he and Elizabeth were going to be parents and that the boy should be named John. Zechariah was told that the boy would be a joy and delight and many will rejoice because of his birth. John was going to be the forerunner of God, calling people to pay attention to the great work of the Lord that is to come. Zechariah wasn’t so sure of all he was being told, especially the part about Elizabeth being pregnant since both were beyond the childbearing years. Due to his hesitancy and disbelief, Zechariah was unable to speak for the duration of the pregnancy.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, Gabriel appears in Nazareth to share a similar message with a virgin named Mary. Mary was to be with child and give birth to a son who will be named Jesus. Gabriel said, “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 the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” (v. 32-33) When Mary questioned how this was even possible; Gabriel told Mary that Elizabeth was going to have a child even in her advanced age. That seemed to give Mary some assurance that she was not having a bad dream due to some indigestion but rather it was truly the work of God.

So when baby was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth, the neighbors and relatives asked what the baby should be named. Zechariah wrote on a tablet, “His name is John,” and miraculously, his voice came back and he began to praise God. Our text is his praise and affirmation of God’s goodness and his prophesy of John’s purpose in life. Zechariah praised God for his faithfulness and protection from the enemies. Time and time again, God had proven that he was righteous and holy and salvation was going to come to his people. Zechariah knew that his son was going to be the one to prepare the way for the One who was to bring salvation and forgiveness of sin. Just as Zechariah was filled with charisma, the gift of grace, we’re also invited to experience charisma!

First, Jesus is our charisma, the true gift of grace. As we wait on the birth of our Lord Jesus during this Advent season, we are reminded that without the birth of Christ, his death and resurrection would not be possible. His humble birth in a manger in Bethlehem is not an accident. He came into the world with humility and he lived a life exemplifying charisma, the gift of grace. He lived a life without sin but took on the sin of the world upon himself and sacrificed his life for ours. He took on the burden of sin, which is death, in order to give us life, life that is eternal. So we wait to celebrate the birth of our Savior in this Christmas season, the true reason we celebrate.

Second, God gives us charisma to share with the world. The birth of Jesus and John, the Mighty Savior and the prophet of the Most High remind us that God rarely works alone, but usually works through people like you and me. The births of these two baby boys were signs to Zechariah that God is alive and well and working to save his people from their enemies and from the hand of all who hate them (v. 71). And the result of this divine intervention will be that “the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (vv. 78-79). This eternal light is something that we are called to share with the world. This light is not something we hide under a bushel. This light is something we are to shine before all men and his message is something we are to shout from the mountaintops that Jesus Christ is Lord!

This is why we support the work of our Baptist missionaries around the world. God works through the divine gifts of his people to bring hope and peace into the world. God works through his apprentices to declare the presence of God’s kingdom and how we are called to participate in sharing it with the world. The money you give to the World Mission Offering goes directly to support the men and women who have answered the call to go to all nations to declare the birth of our Lord Jesus. They have experienced the charisma and now they are all over the world sharing the charisma with those who have not heard.

Ralph and Tammy Stocks have been called to share charisma (the gift of grace) with the Romany people as field personnels through Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF). As the Stocks minister among the Romany, they look for unique ways to share the gospel and encourage the Roma people to work among their own. Distinguished by their dark hair and complexion, Roma people are a minority in Hungary and often experience discrimination. Most live in poverty, and their opportunities for employment and education are limited. Project Ruth gives life-changing educational opportunities to children living in poverty in the Roma communities. Through programs developed and supported by Project Ruth, children are encouraged to reach their full potential, to integrate in communities and to develop an attitude of acceptance for others.

In addition to working with the children, Tammy Stocks has developed a sewing ministry with some of the women of the children who are part of Project Ruth. The mothers of the children gather together, talk about life issues while sewing aprons and bags for their micro-business. It has empowered the women to take ownership of their own lives and have given them confidence to build healthy relationships. On top of all that, the women now experience true community with one another, helping each other to succeed not only in their businesses but also in their personal lives in Christ. They support one another, pray for each other and encourage others to join their community. Ralph and Tammy are making a difference for generations to come in the Romany people.

This next couple is near and dear to my heart. Natalie Smith Goodwin was a student in my Student Ministry in Raleigh. Natalie loved to help others. Upon high school graduation, she studied nursing at UNC and began her nursing career at UNC Hospitals in the pediatric unit. Upon marrying Brian and listening to God’s voice, they found themselves being called to share God’s charisma with the young adults in Japan through SBC. Here is a story Brian and Natalie recently shared with me via email from Japan:

*Mayu is a biology student at a famous university in Tokyo. We met Mayu about 4 months ago when a friend of ours - a biology professor at her school and fellow believer - asked if we would help him start a Bible Study for some of his students. Mayu has been the only one to consistently attend. She is an agnostic at heart, but she is open-minded and she is seeking for the meaning of life. This desire led her to a conversation with our professor friend, Kose sensei, over two years ago. When visiting his office, Mayu noticed a book on his shelf written by the head of the human genome project, Francis Collins. Collins is a Christian, and his book was titled, “The Fingerprints of God”. As the two talked, Kose sensei explained to Mayu a little about his Christian faith, and Mayu grew more interested. The conversation tapered off in the months to come, but when Mayu left to study abroad at UC Irvine the following year, she got connected to a Campus Crusade Bible Study that she attended frequently. She noticed a selflessness and compassion in her Christian friends that she just did not understand. This summer, she returned home and she approached Kose sensei with this question, “Why do Christians show such love?” As a result, that was the topic of our first Bible Study together. Then, over the next few months, we have begun studying through the gospel of John, and Mayu has grown hungrier for the truth - and hungrier for that deeper meaning that seems to be growing ever closer to her. Three weeks ago, Mayu made a decision - the first huge step towards knowing God personally. She has decided not only that God, the God that the Bible teaches about, is real, but that He is worthy of her trust. He can guide her life. Mayu prayed with Kose sensei and shared her decision with our group. She is ready to learn about the God she now believes in. She wants to know more about Him. She wants to know how to relate to Him. As we continue to disciple her, we pray that the fullness of the Gospel will click with her heart and her head. There appears to be nothing standing between her and the decision to follow Jesus entirely, and we pray that the Holy Spirit would draw her to that conclusion quickly and boldly.*

Most of us have not been called to the outer most parts of the world to share God’s charisma with people who have not heard the Good News. However, we have all been called to participate in building of his Kingdom and being a part of the Great Commission. One significant way we can be a part is to generously give to the World Missions Offering so that our missionaries can focus on ministering to the people they have been called to rather than being concerned about how they are going to be able to pay the bills. The Lottie Moon Offering of SBC and the Global Mission Offering of CBF (which makes up our World Mission Offering) go directly to our missionaries in support of their work. In your gifts, you can direct your funds to one or the other mission organizations. If you do not designate, the funds will be divided evenly between our two partner mission agencies. Our goal for the World Missions Offering is $9,000. Let us share the charisma we have been given with the world by giving generously to our missionaries around the world.