

Notes on the Translation of Luke 1:28

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The angel Gabriel greets Mary with a usual greeting, in Greek *haine*, from the verb *hairō*, related to *harris* (“grace, favor”). “Grace” is the Latin *gratia*. This greeting can be translated “welcome, good day, hail (to you); in Latin this it is *ave* (“hail! farewell!”), like the Italian *salve* (“hello”), related to being safe, faring well. It is a good-wish form of *salutation* (again, related to *salus*, health and “salvation”). The Hebrew versions of the NT all translate it *shalōm*, The usual Hebrew greeting.

The next word is in Greek *keharitōménē*, literally “the-having-been-graced/favored-one.” The verb is *haritōō*.¹ Understanding *harris* here as “favor” would correspond to the use in 1:30, “don’t fear, Mary, for you have found favor with God (or in God’s eyes).” *Harris* thus here seems to correspond to the Hebrew *hēn*, “favor,” as in the names Hannah (Ann) or Yoḥanan (John), fuller version *y^ehohanan*, “Yahweh is gracious, or has shown favor.” It indicates “grace, charm, favor, popularity.” This means that God has “taken a liking to” Mary, and she need not fear the angelic visit, for it bodes well. A similar use is found in Eph 1:6, where it is said that God’s grace has made us “gracious” (acceptable, more vulgarly “popular, likeable”) in the Beloved (Son).

Gabriel’s greeting is noteworthy in that the actual greeting is not followed by a proper name, but by *keharitōménē*, which takes the place of a name.² It is thus like a special name for Mary. Jerome translated it *gratia plena*, “full of grace,” retained in the New Vulgate. More exact correspondences in Greek are found in John 1:14 (re Jesus) and Acts 6:8 (re Stephen). Cf. Luke 2:52.

Hebrew translations of *keharitōménē* in NT editions are:

1. *Ēshet-hēn*, “woman of favor/grace.” The Hebrew editions all have *hēn* for *harris* in v. 30.
2. *B^erukhat haḥesed*, “blessed with *ḥesed* [God’s unusual, unexpected “love” which characterizes him].

¹ A similar but different verb is *harizomai*, “give freely or graciously as a favor, forgive, remit;” it is used in Luke 7:21 (re sight given) and 7:42-43 (re forgiveness).

² *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament. Unabridged, 5th, revised edition* (M. Zerwick; ET M. Grosvenor; Rome 1996), 171.

3. *Habbat ruḥamah*, literally “the daughter of *ruḥamah*.” “Daughter of” is Hebrew for placing a woman in a category, or emphasizing a characteristic which defines her. *Ruḥamah* comes from the verb *raḥam*, meaning “to love” (in the basic Qal form); it is cognate to *reḥem*, the mother’s womb, full of the most tender love for her children. In the Piel form, the meaning is “doubled” (intensified), so that it means “to greet (meet) someone with love, take pity on someone.” In the Pual form, which is the one we have in this last Hebrew translation of the NT (the one on BibleWorks), it means “someone who has found ‘mercy,’” but we can and should understand this as basically meaning “love.” It is also the word used in Hos 1:6, 8; 2:23, in the sense that God has disavowed his people (*Lo-ruḥamah* is typically translated “Not-pitied”), but most importantly in 2:3, where *Ruḥamah* is apposite to (placed alongside) *‘Ammi*, “My-people,” in an “eschatological” reversal of the disavowal previously mentioned. This reversal takes the form of a *betrothal* between Yahweh and his people in 2:21-25, where God himself provides the six-fold dowry. Verse 22 refers to the sixth gift (the others are the nouns *tsedeq* [salvific righteousness] *mishpat* [“social” justice] *ḥesed* [see above, typically “loving mercy”] *rahamim* [mother’s compassion] *emunah* [truth, fidelity, firm adhesion to God in trusting faith]); this sixth gift is in verb form, “and you will *know* Yahweh,” the noun *da‘at* [knowledge] being crucially important in Hosea. It has strong marital overtones of intimate relationship, and is placed alongside *ḥesed* in 6:6. Could Mary be thus seen as the eschatologically-rehabilitated people of Israel, with “divine-marriage” overtones?

4. In the Peshitta, a Syriac translation of the NT —“Syriac” referring to Eastern Aramaic dialects; Jesus spoke Western Aramaic, which some think is quite different— the translation is *malyat taybuta*, translated into Hebrew in this edition of the Peshitta as “full of *ḥēn*,” which would be “full of favor or grace.”³ V. 30 of the Peshitta also has *taybuta* for *ḥaris*.

³ See discussion in <http://www.catholicapologetics.net/grace.htm>. An English translation of the Eastern Aramaic Peshitta is adduced here as supporting the meaning “full of grace” in the Peshitta, but without further discussion. In Jastrow’s dictionary of the Targumim etc., *taybuta* is translated as “goodness, good deed, pleasure,” but perhaps here Jewish Aramaic may differ from Eastern Aramaic. Note that the translation of the Greek as “one who has been highly favored [by God]” is proposed in the latest standard scholarly Greek-English lexicon, the *Bauer-Arendt-Gingrich-Danker*, with references to articles by S. Lyonnet, S.J. in *Biblica* 20 (1939) 131-141 and M. Cambe in *Revue Biblique* 70 (1963) 193-207, and J. Nolland, “Luke’s Use of [*ḥaris*],” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986) 614-620.