

Can You Believe?

Luke 1: 26-38

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In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

There are four Sundays in Advent. The first Sunday deals with the Second Coming, the next two Sundays deal with John the Baptist and now on this fourth Sunday, we turn our attention to Mary the mother of Jesus. All of this has been done in anticipation and preparation for the Christ event. We all need to remember that Christ came into the world to free us from our sin, not to celebrate a commercial holiday.

The countdown toward Christmas is well underway! A week from today we will be gathering to celebrate Christmas! Ready or not it is coming and it is going to happen! The bigger question is not whether we will be ready, the bigger question is can we believe that Christmas has arrived. If we just look at the gifts under the tree, we may be disappointed.

To gain a better understanding of what it means to believe, we need to think back to that first Christmas. We have allowed all the pageantry to overwhelm the simple message of belief. Let's look at the setting of that first Christmas.

Israel was an occupied nation. The Roman Empire was in control and exercised its authority in every area of life. Taxes were high and most people lived very meager lives. The people longed for freedom, a deliver to free them from their bondage.

At this moment in history, God decided to invade human history in human form. He picks Mary, a peasant girl to be the mother of the Christ Child. Some believe that Mary was only 13-14 years old. She had been engaged to Joseph in an arranged marriage. Mary had no social standing. She was a second class citizen at best, given by her parents to an older man. Joseph and Mary both faced to potential for public ridicule and scorn. This unwed pregnancy would easily destroy both lives. Mary was the most unlikely messenger of God! This was not a Romeo and Juliet kind of story!

Yet, God chose to come into her life and make her blessed! The gift of Christmas is not under the tree; it is in the belief that God loves us and wants to bless us. God wants us!

But, most of the time, we don't give God a chance. We believe that our lives are too messed up and that God could never love us. We look at our lives and say, "Impossible! No way! Won't happen!"? Or, we are just too busy to give it much thought. Many people join church like joining the country club.

Luke 1:26-38 is a story about the impossible. It is a story about how God comes into our desperate lives and brings healing and wholeness. It is the story of the angel's announcement to Mary.

This is a story of biblical impossibilities. But, what are the impossibilities in our world? What would you label "impossible" in your life? Peace in our world. Impossible! No way! Won't happen! Christian values returning to our nation, morality becoming the norm? Impossible!

The mission statement of the United Methodist Church is "is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." Impossible!

What about things closer to home. Restoring relationships, healing past hurts in our lives; a relative or friend entering a relationship with Christ; breaking an addiction and overcoming past hurts and disappointments? Impossible!

We find ourselves with the same troubled mind as Mary, wondering over the impossible (v. 29). We even ask the same question Mary asked, "How will this be?" (v. 34).

- How can the situation be resolved?
- How can the relationship be restored?
- How can I overcome my past?
- How can I break the bondage in my life?
- How can I find healing emotionally?
- How can I be healed physically?
- How can he/she ever come to the place of accepting Christ?

Impossible! No way! Won't happen! The question we're really asking is "How can the impossible become possible?"

The key is found in the language, in the word. God reminds us that our ways are not his ways. He infuses the situation with language of power and possibility. Perhaps the most important image is simply this: God is with us! It reminds all of us that we are not alone in this world.

God's power and presence can overshadow our lives and help us to see that our solutions are temporal and unsatisfactory. Our problems will not be solved by a strong economy but by a right relationship with God!

Mary asks a simple question, "how" and the angel says, "by God's power." Not by her power, not by Joseph's power, nor by the power of friends/family. It is not the power of nature or the power of luck, but by God's power!

But, there is one more component we can't afford to miss. Luke 1:38 says, "I am the Lord's servant May it be to me as you have said." I must be a willing and surrendered participant.

When God's power is met with a willing and surrendered heart, the impossible becomes possible! "I am the Lord's servant May it be to me as you have said." That is to say, "Let the power of God turn the impossible into the possible. I am surrendered and I am willing."

So I ask you this morning: What are the impossibilities in your world? What are the things that make you say: Impossible! No way! Won't happen!

Are you willing to respond to God's power with a willing and surrendered heart? Are you willing to participate with God as He intervenes in the world of the impossible?

Bring your impossibilities to God and let Him speak His name: Son of the Most High.

I like the story about a professor who sat at his desk one evening working on the next day's lectures. His housekeeper had laid that day's mail and papers at his desk and he began to shuffle through them discarding most to the wastebasket. He then noticed a magazine, which was not even addressed to him but delivered to his office by mistake. It fell open to an article titled "The Needs of the Congo Mission".

Casually he began to read when he was suddenly consumed by these words: "The need is great here. We have no one to work the northern province of Gabon in the central Congo. And it is my prayer as I write this article that God will lay His hand on one - one on whom, already, the Master's eyes have been cast - that he or she shall be called to this place to help us." Professor Albert Schweitzer closed the magazine and wrote in his diary: "My search is over." He gave himself to the Congo.

That little article, hidden in a periodical intended for someone else, was placed by accident in Schweitzer's mailbox. By chance he noticed the title. It leaped out at him. Chance? No. It was one of God's surprises.

It is my hope and prayer that all of us will experience the Spirit of Christmas this year. I recently came across this quote I want to share with you. “If you don’t have Christmas in your heart, you will not find Christmas under your tree.” -- Charlotte Carpenter

Resources:

The Text This Week - www.nph.com/nphweb/html/pmol/webdec02.htm

Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1, David Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor. West Minister John Knox Press. 2011.

Schwizer, Eduard. The Good News According to Mark, Westminster John Knox Press, 1970.

www.esermons.com

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