

Nothing Is Impossible **Luke 1:26-38**

When I read our scripture for today, I found myself wishing that I could have been the angel who was given the assignment to announce the Good News to Mary that she was going to be the mother of our Savior. The angel Gabriel was given the ultimate assignment. Just think, for a thousand years, the angels have been waiting for this day to arrive and it is Gabriel who was tapped on the shoulder to go and tell Mary. He alone is the one who announces amazing, joyful, good news.

There is nothing better than being the one who gets to announce news like that. Some news is so wonderful you feel like you are going to burst if you have to hold it in any longer.

- I remember the joy of a woman in one of my churches who burst into tears of joy when she announced to everyone at church fellowship that they were finally pregnant. She said, "I was about to burst to have to wait and be sure this time things were going to be ok."
- Or someone in the church tells all her friends who have prayed for her that "it's been five years and the doctor just told me that I am cancer-free."
- One of my all-time favorite television ads is one that came out many years ago. A high school senior has been sitting on pins and needles, running to the mailbox every day to see if she gets an acceptance letter from the college she is just dying to attend. One day it comes, she opens up the letter and joyfully shouts to her parents, "Mom, Dad, I made it, and I have a full scholarship." The next scene you see is a brand new yacht pulling out of the harbor with her parents at the helm, and printed on back the boat you see written the christened name of the boat: "Scholarship Fund."

As good as all of that is, there is nothing like the unimaginable good news that Gabriel got to share with Mary. He tells her that above all the women in the world, she is the one special woman who is going to be the mother of God's son, the one who will bear God's salvation. He says this to a woman who never imagined much beyond marrying a decent man, having children, and making enough to survive. To see the look on her face when he gives her the news would just be priceless.

Of course, God could not have given the job to just any angel. The job had to go to one who would be able to handle any complications that might come up.

- First, you have to make sure the poor young woman does not fall dead on the spot with utter fear of the appearance of an angel.
- Then there is that "small" matter of telling her that she is pregnant when she has never in her life slept with a man including the man she is engaged to marry.
- Then you cannot be sure, given the situation, that she will find a word you are saying as believable.
- And she might just say, "Thanks, but no thanks. The news is just too much for me to take. I'd rather take the safer route and just start my family the normal way rather than risk being stoned for infidelity."

But as we know, this assignment turned out rather well. Mary is honest about her doubts. And then she manages to believe Gabriel when he reminds her that all things are possible for God. She is willing to accept this honor, not knowing what will happen next. Apparently, God did the homework and knew the sort of woman she was. Perhaps God did not have to be so picky about whom to give the job. Maybe it was such a sure thing in God's mind that God just had the angels draw straws, knowing that any of them could handle this assignment.

But, good for Gabriel. He knew just what to say when Mary, still in shock, asked, "But how is this possible? I am still a virgin." Gabriel says, "Nothing is impossible with God." Mary believed Gabriel. She must have known her scriptures. All she needed was to be reminded, "With God, nothing is impossible." This was something that she would have been taught when she was just a little girl. It is the faith of Israel all wrapped up in one little phrase, "With God, nothing is impossible."

- That was true when old man Abraham and decrepit Sarah were told that they were about to have a son that God had long ago promised them. They laughed because in their wildest dreams they did not think that was possible. But as we know, it was. "With God, nothing is impossible."
- It was true when the Hebrew people had Pharaoh and his chariots charging them from behind and the Red Sea in front of them. God parted the sea, and the people walked between enormous walls of water to safety.
- It is true for every human being who has ever walked on this planet. What are the odds that any of us would be born when our coming into this world depended upon generations of events turning out the way they did for us to have the parents who got together and brought us into the world?
- It is true for us in our own lives when we have no idea how we made it through a time when it seemed impossible to find a way forward. But we did. Some mysterious miraculous things happened and here we are, on the other side. I never cease to be amazed when people tell me about their life's journey that somehow they made it to where they are.

I just read a short article in our local newspaper. There was a couple from Kalamazoo, Michigan who were visiting friends in DuPage County. Somehow their Labrador Retriever got away and for over a month they searched and never found him. It was their beloved pet who had been trained to help Debra, the wife, in case of a seizure. Just this past week, some three years later, the couple received a phone call from our animal shelter telling them that they have their dog safe and sound. Who would have dared to believe that is possible? Who would have thought that a dog could have survived being lost for that many years?

Is this life all happenstance or just good fortune? Has it all been predetermined and just now has to play itself out as written, like a classical music masterpiece that finally is performed? Or is this life one miracle after another miracle? For the Hebrew people, whatever has happened, God somehow has had a hand in it, providing a way even when it seemed impossible.

God acts in ways we least expect and in ways we never can fully appreciate. Mary nods yes to God and nine months later give birth to a Son and names him Jesus. Wherever Jesus goes, something unusual happens. People are lifted up.

- They become generous. People give up a week of their lives and spend their own hard-earned money to travel down to Biloxi to help some hurting people do what they could not have done on their own, build a house.
- People take time to go out and spend their money to fill that basket up with things that a poor older person at Marion Park needs and often cannot afford.
- There are even people who find a way to wish good upon the person who has hurt them most, and even found a way to forgive them and move on with their lives. Imagine that.
- Then there is the miracle of St. Matthew, starting with a few people in the warming house in North Side Park.
- All because a young woman dared to believe that nothing, nothing in this world is impossible for God.

As one of my preaching professors said at the close of a sermon on this very story: ⁱ

Now, folks, I hope we've all learned our lesson by now. It's been two thousand years. If God can give a child to an old couple in a tent in Saudi Arabia and change the world; if God can give a baby to a teenage girl in northern Israel and change the world, why should you ever, why should I ever, give up hope, doubt, wonder, despair, shrug my shoulders? I think, I think, I think I have learned my lesson: Nothing is impossible with God. Write that over the door at your house. Write that on your mind. Write that across your heart. It will come in handy before we meet again. Nothing, nothing is impossible with God. Amen.

ⁱ Craddock, Fred B.. The Collected Sermons of Fred B. Craddock (p. 146). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.