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December 3, 2018

Christmas According Angels

“Believe”

Luke 1:26-38 New Life Version (NLV)

Gabriel Speaks to Mary

²⁶ Six months after Elizabeth knew she was to become a mother, Gabriel was sent from God to Nazareth. Nazareth was a town in the country of Galilee. ²⁷ He went to a woman who had never had a man. Her name was Mary. She was promised in marriage to a man named Joseph. Joseph was of the family of David. ²⁸ The angel came to her and said, “You are honored very much. You are a favored woman. The Lord is with you. You are chosen from among many women.”

²⁹ When she saw the angel, she was troubled at his words. She thought about what had been said.

³⁰ The angel said to her, “Mary, do not be afraid. You have found favor with God. ³¹ See! You are to become a mother and have a Son. You are to give Him the name Jesus. ³² He will be great. He will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the place where His early father David sat. ³³ He will be King over the family of Jacob forever and His nation will have no end.”

³⁴ Mary said to the angel, “How will this happen? I have never had a man.” ³⁵ The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come on you. The power of the Most High will cover you. The holy Child you give birth to will be called the Son of God.

³⁶ “See, your cousin Elizabeth, as old as she is, is going to give birth to a child. She was not able to have children before, but now she is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For God can do all things.” ³⁸ Then Mary said, “I am willing to be used of the Lord. Let it happen to me as you have said.” Then the angel went away from her.

The Christmas season is a beautiful time and brings beautiful feelings. For many it is a sad and depressing time. It is an especially difficult time for those who have recently lost a loved one and this is the first Christmas alone. We have the trees and bells and the songs and the lights. We are told to celebrate and make merry but our hearts are not able. We know the terrible things going on in the world and ask, “Where is the peace of God?”

The truth is that only the Spirit of Christ can give us the joy, peace and hope we seek. As Christians we must continually ask ourselves, “What do I do differently during Advent, or any time of the year, from the world? Do my words and actions bring glory to God? Am I keeping Christ in Christmas?”

Today we continue our theme of "Christmas according to the Angels". Last Sunday the angel Gabriel told Zachariah, "Do not be afraid, your prayers have been heard". God hears your prayers and knows the longings of your heart. We are encouraged to keep listening with our whole heart because God is not silent, God speaks in many ways today to all who are ready to hear. Hopefully we are not silent, but rather we speak about what God has done and is doing in our lives. We hear and we speak.

I bet almost everyone in the US and many other countries have heard of Mary and of Jesus' birth. Knowing about this story does not make us believers. Knowing does not mean faith. Even demons knew Christ, but they did not believe in nor follow him. Zachariah was struck dumb because of his unbelief. Believing and willingness to live and trust our life to God is not the same. May we all hear today have renewed faith, renewed trust and new willingness to follow Christ.

If you open the hymnal to # 215 you will find our Scripture lesson in song. The first stanza is:

1. To a maid engaged to Joseph, the angel Gabriel came. "Fear not," the angel told her, "I come to bring good news, good news I come to tell you, good news, I say, good news."

According to tradition Mary was between age 14 and 16 years old. Some even speculate that she was even younger. Mary was engaged. Think of the time when you were planning your life with somebody you loved and dreamed to live the rest of your



life. Remember or just imagine what an excitement it is. You have plans. You have dreams, hopes and visions. There is not much information about Mary. We are only given a location and her engagement with Joseph and that she is a virgin. What kind of girl was she? Why was Mary chosen to carry and give birth to the Son of God?

“When the angel came to her, he said, “Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!”

God is with you. Emmanuel. In the midst of loneliness, despair and fear, God is with you.

The hymn continues:

2. *“For you are highly favored by God the Lord of all, who even now is with you. You are on earth most blest, you are most blest, most blessed, God chose you, you are blest!”*

Mary was chosen by God. Why? There is nothing recorded about what she had done. Jesus told the disciples "You did not choose me. I chose you." In his letters Paul reminds us that Christians, you and I, are chosen by God to carry the message of Christ and his love into all the world. You with all your faults and weaknesses are chosen by God.

What could a 14-year-old do to be favored? I believe she was favored because the Lord was with her. Could she have been favored for believing? What if she was favored because God truly was her Lord and she would be able to carry His will?

The text seems to indicate that she was not scared of Gabriel himself. She did not even question who he was. Somehow God's intervention in her life was not a surprise. She was troubled by his word. "Rejoice, favored one, chosen one, the Lord is with you! "

The angel said, you have found favor with God. Favor with God? What kind of favor is that? To be pregnant without a husband? To risk to be stoned? I am not sure that would be how I define favor. My mother in law says that I am her favorite daughter in law. Guess what. It is because she has no choice. I am the only one. I am certain it is not the same in this case. There were many Jewish girls. But what does it mean to you if I say you are the favored one? You think, it is good news? I get the best, I get more.

What does it mean to be favored by God?

I wonder if these words came back to her as she stood at the foot of the cross watching her son die. God's favor?

3. But Mary was most troubled to hear the angel's word. What was the angel saying? It troubled her to hear, to hear the angel's message, it troubled her to hear.

Many translations use the word "perplexed" instead of troubled.

I bet many things went through Mary's head. Gabriel is telling her mind blowing, impossible things. To be the mother of the Son of God! Be able to be pregnant and have a boy who is a Savior of the world! We love the news, but we want to have it without giving, without giving our lives. We want to have Jesus be for us, but we do not want to give ourselves for Him.

4. "Fear not, for God is with you, and you shall bear a child. His name shall be called Jesus, God's offspring from on high. And he shall reign forever, forever reign on high."

What is in it for Mary? Nothing is promised about her or to her. After I get pregnant, then what? How about my life, God? How about Joseph or my parents? Will she get a royal home? Will there be protection of an army of soldiers or angels? There is no promise of getting all that she wants. There is no assurance that she will avoid pain or sorrow.

5. *"How shall this be?" said Mary, "I am not yet a wife." The angel answered quickly, "The power of the Most High will come upon you shortly, your child will be God's child."*

You have to love Mary. "How will this happen?" I see her blushing and thinking I have not had a man. How will this happen? She believed it would happen, but did not know how.

Many refuse to believe in the Virgin Birth and consider it a fantasy. Let us ask ourselves more questions. What do we believe about God? God can do some things but cannot do other things because they seem unreal or impossible to you? Do you believe that you were made from dust? Do you believe God will raise you from the dead, even you have been dead for 100 or 1000 years? Will He raise you from ashes? How much are you willing to believe? How much do you know about the Holy Spirit? How can you believe then in a verse like this: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you" (Romans 8:11)?

Have you been born by the Holy Spirit? Have you experienced the power that is in us through the faith and presence of the Holy Spirit in us? If you think it is unreal, unbelievable and it cannot happen, then how do you believe half of the New Testament or even the Old Testament. It is filled with the work of the Holy Spirit that is totally impossible for human mind to grasp.

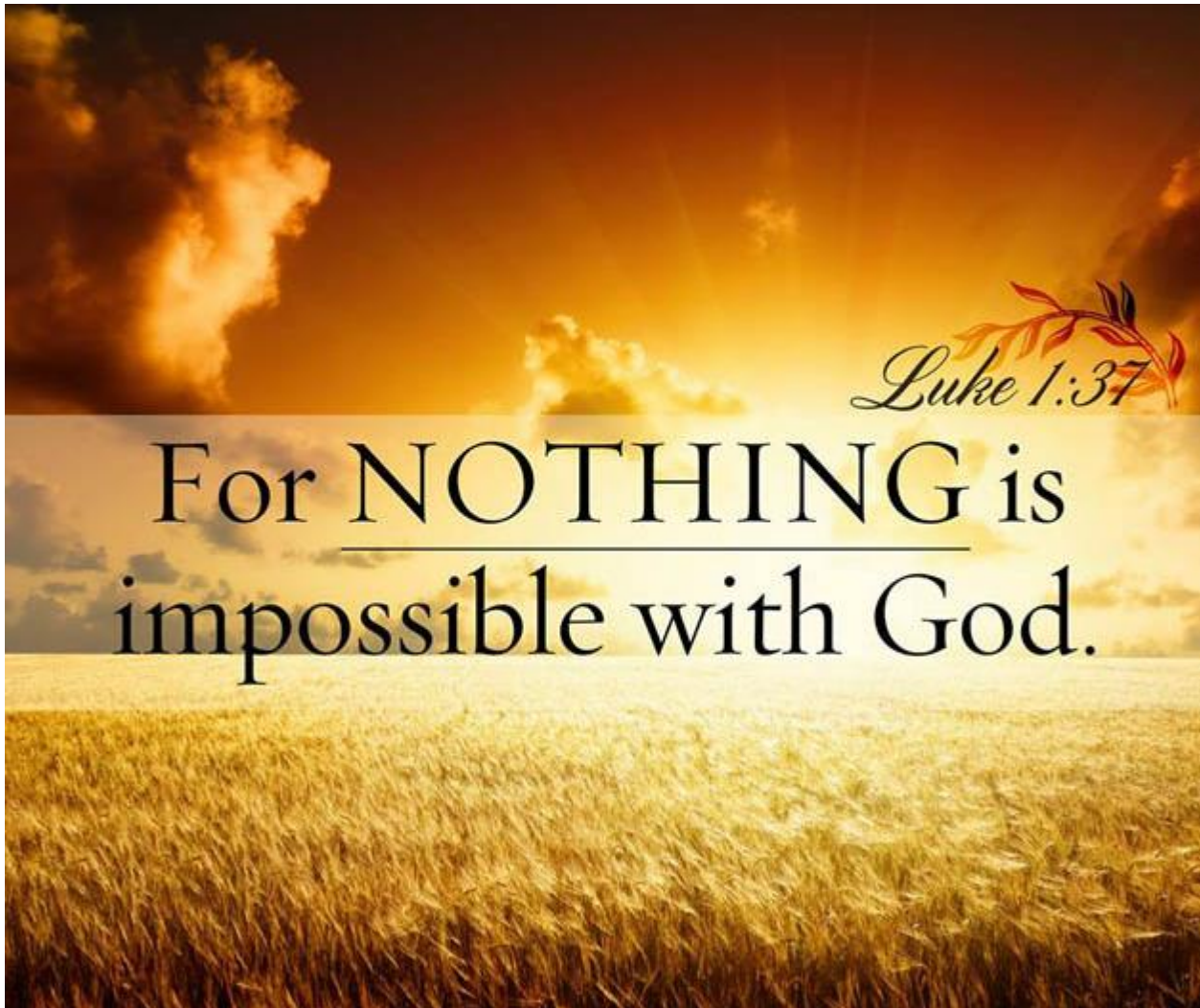
6. *As Mary heard the angel, she wondered at his words. "Behold, I am your handmaid," she said unto her God. "So be it; I am ready according to your word."*

Maybe this Sunday you can ask for the gift of faith. I realize that this is a gift. I cannot make you believe, nobody can. You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink.

You can receive a gift of faith from God, by the Holy Spirit but you have to be willing to believe.

Gabriel said to Mary, "God can do all things." Other translations say, "With God nothing is impossible" or "all things will be possible". That is so true. Nothing has been, is or will ever be impossible for God.

Mary had her life and her plans. Suddenly she heard God's plan for her. God will not be scheduled. Mary had to choose to trust in God and let her life and her dreams go. One thing that I am so amazed and encouraged by is that Mary accepted the unknown, scary, dangerous way instead of her safe way. Trusting God is not easy. Giving your life is so hard. To choose His way, instead of my way is a very brave and courageous act. It is so not true that weak people choose to believe God. No, only the courageous choose to follow God. Our way is always about comfort, safety, guaranteed future. God's way is always risky and always pushing us out of our comfort zones.



For God can do all things. If these are the words you need to hear today, what would you say? "For God can do all things". Would you say amen, or you say I believe, but...what and why you cannot believe? Because of the past? Because of the reality you see?

We cannot make God happen in our lives. We cannot bring new life. We can only receive it. Mary received God's way. She let all her dreams die, so God's dreams could come true.

After a Bible study entitled "Not a Fan", I, for the first time, surrounded all my dreams. I always wanted a house. Very specific and very different. I have realized that there is nothing better than to surrender all your dreams, all your hopes to God. He has my life in His hand. I am not saying to live as a fool or be a bad steward of your life and your resources. I am saying may it bring Glory to God, may serving God be a priority in all that we do. To be happy because we trust Him. Be happy not about where I am or

where I live, but because God is with me. I still would like to own a home, but it is no longer my goal or purpose of life.

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." I am a slave, a servant of the Lord. Maybe these are the key words for this Advent, for Christmas: to be able to say: "I am a servant of the Lord". Can you exchange your life for life in God? Can you trust Him with all that you are? If you let yourself be a servant and God be your Master, think of what you would stop worrying about? What would you stop wrestling with God over? What would you stop doing to secure your own place?

Mary agreed to be pregnant, agreed to get pregnant by the Holy Spirit. It never happened before and will not happen in the future again. She questioned, puzzled, wondered how, but in the end she said yes. Did she get all the answers? Did she get her way? Probably not, but she said yes.

Even in the future as we know, her life was very challenging, hard and heart breaking, but the presence of the Lord was with her. Now she is in the presence of the Lord. She is the saint who encourages us to say yes to God, to say yes to the impossible, yes to the unbelievable, to say yes to the challenges, to say yes to the Lord. Let us watch what God can do through us.

To receive God's gift of new life may very well mean for you and for me to accept from his hand, as a servant does, a task from his master, something that at first may seem unthinkable. The worst thing we could imagine may turn out to be the best thing that ever happened to us. Let's receive new Life through Holy Communion. Are you ready to receive Christ himself? Can you give your heart to believe that Jesus himself is present in the broken bread and a cup of juice? There is no way I can prove it to you, but you, by the grace of God, can receive it and start a new life in Him.