

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin pledged in marriage to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women."

²⁹But she was greatly troubled by the statement and was wondering what kind of greeting this could be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, because you have found favor with God. ³¹Listen, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus. ³²He 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. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."

³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶Listen, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age even though she was called barren, and this is her sixth month. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible for God."

³⁸Then Mary said, "See, I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Advent Faith

I.

Mary was deeply troubled. An angel had just appeared to her. A person might think *that* would be what was disturbing. Many times in Scripture people were troubled at the appearance of a holy angel. Often when an angel appeared to a person, the first words spoken were: "Do not be afraid."

Not this time, however. The angel's first words were: "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28, EHV). The words were surprising—perplexing. "She was greatly troubled by the statement and was wondering what kind of greeting this could be" (Luke 1:29, EHV).

"Listen, you will conceive and give birth to a son" (Luke 1:31, EHV). Soon, Mary would find herself pregnant. That news was even more perplexing to her than the angel's greeting.

Throughout Israel's history there had been surprising pregnancy announcements. Sarah, who was too old to have a child, Hannah who had given birth to the prophet Samuel. Most recently, her relative Elizabeth had conceived despite her age.

Those were all remarkable things, but not one of those women was in Mary's position. Mary knew the truth: she *could not* be pregnant. There was no possible way. She knew it.

Mary was a very young woman. Some might think she was just young and too naive to know about reproduction. Mary disproves this with an almost clinical coldness: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34, EHV). Virgins don't have babies. That's a fact. Mary knew it well.

Looking back thousands of years later we might forget something that is very, very important: while many people *came to believe* the truth about the virgin birth, only one person had absolute, physical, experiential knowledge. Mary knew as a biological fact that she *could not* be pregnant.

But somehow, maybe because she was in the middle of a conversation with an

angel—hardly an everyday occurrence—she did not respond with a rejection, but with a question. She asked: “How *will* this be?”

There *was* an explanation. Certainly a virgin birth is impossible in the normal order of things. It is impossible for human beings, but nothing is impossible for God.

“The angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God’” (Luke 1:35, EHV). A child would be created outside the normal means. This is how it would be. As remarkable as *that* miracle is, the truly amazing thing is not the conception but the identity and work of the child. The One who would be born was identified as a “holy one,” and as “the Son of God.”

The angel had announced to Mary the coming of the Messiah. Unlike other announcements from the past, this one was absolutely immediate. Mary’s God and Creator—Mary’s Savior—was growing within her. God had become flesh.

As amazing as the miracle was, it isn’t really about Mary. It’s all about Jesus.

By the same Spirit who caused her to conceive, Mary is able to respond in faith: “See, I am the Lord’s servant. May it happen to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38, EHV).

Mary would continue to need that faith. While a great miracle occurred within her, she would face many challenges. How would she tell Joseph? What would he think? What would she tell her family? Would anyone else believe this truth?

As her life unfolded, still more challenges would come. The scorn of ignorant but judgmental people never disappeared. Mary had to see what would happen to her Son as he bore the sin of the world and carried it all the way to the cross. She faced it all in faith. Mary’s Son was also Mary’s Savior. She believed. It happened to her just as the angel had said.

II.

This miracle was unique. Clearly there is no way any of us could ever experience all the things Mary experienced. In smaller ways, however, we may feel similar things. Mary was deeply troubled by the angel’s words. We may be deeply troubled by messages *we* hear.

Perhaps you are troubled by the world we live in. Society seems unstable; will that ever change? Friends and family may not act the way you would hope and pray they would; will things ever go back to what they once were? Will things ever improve?

Maybe you are troubled by your own situation. An honest self-evaluation makes you realize that there is sin in your heart. How can you understand your self—your actions, your failures? There might be things you would like to know: how certain things happened. The answer is not always given to us. Sometimes we are called to trust and believe—even when things are beyond our understanding. Maybe you have lots of “why me?” kinds of questions, or you wonder why God let certain things happen.

Many things can trouble our thoughts. It doesn’t just have to be an angel showing up with startling news that can make us feel unsettled.

III.

In whatever state of mind God finds us, he announces to us: “Greetings, you who are highly favored!” (Luke 1:28, EHV). “Highly favored” is in the passive voice. That means it is something done *to* a person, not something the person has produced. The word translated “highly favored” comes from the same root as “grace.” God gives his grace, not just to Mary in this special situation, but to all of us. We are given his favor.

Just as the Holy Spirit came to Mary and created life within her without her

participation, so also the Spirit comes to us. God's Spirit creates the new life of faith in us without our participation or help. He gives us the grace to believe. He sanctifies us and keeps us in that faith.

We might be tempted to think this is a small thing compared to the virgin birth, but is it, really? Faith is a miracle of God—a miracle we share with Mary, who was also given the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit.

IV.

Mary had the God-given faith to believe the truth that nothing is impossible for God. We have that same gift. Knowing that truth, we are not troubled by a virgin conception and birth. By faith we see the plan of God in action: God sent his Son to redeem all humanity. He has come to redeem us. Mary's Son and Savior is our Savior. *Nothing* is impossible for God.

Knowing that, we do not stumble over our need for forgiveness and salvation. We do not doubt that God can and will do what he says. We do not listen to Satan's temptation to doubt or deny the truth. *Nothing* is impossible for God—not even our salvation.

Nothing is impossible for God. Not even the new life he has promised to us. As we follow him in faith, we may find ourselves living a life we had not anticipated. We may begin to see fruits of faith in action as what seemed impossible becomes reality. God can do it.

V.

By that faith, and with God's guidance, we find the grace—the favor of God—to endure. Mary willingly accepted the task God gave her to bear the Savior. I wonder if she knew at the beginning what that would cost. She would bear many insults and much suffering because of her calling. But God filled her with grace and faith. She endured it all, trusting her Son and Savior. She was blessed.

We find many challenges and adversities in this life, too. Some may come as a direct result of our calling as God's children. In faith we, too, will endure. Trust in the Savior's promises. Believe that he will care for us. Wherever life takes you, find the grace to say: "May it be for me as God has said."

God grant you the faith to believe the truth that nothing is impossible for him. Amen.