

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Nothing is Impossible with God

Luke 1:26-38

Sunday, November 28, 2021

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I will always remember the surprise I experienced the Christmas of 1984. That Christmas I received one the best gifts an American boy could receive. In the months leading up to Christmas I had begged my parents for it, but they didn't seem too keen on giving it to me. So, I had resigned myself to the fact that I was not going to get it. When I came down the stairs on Christmas morning, my doubts were confirmed. There was no gift that matched the size and shape of the one I wanted. Toward the end of our chaotic unwrapping session, I noticed a box hidden under other gifts. It had my name on it. I opened it up and there was a note that read, "Go to the garage to see what this goes with!" In the box was a blue helmet! I ran to the garage door and opened it, and there it was in all of its glory - a bright blue shiny Go-Cart! Surprise! I almost heard angels singing!

Christmas is all about surprises. In fact, Christmas began with a big surprise. Mary got the biggest surprise of her life when the angel Gabriel appeared to her and told her that she would be pregnant with the Son of God! What could be more astonishing than that! Maybe "shocked" is a better word. After all, she was a virgin. She asked, "How can this be?" Surprise!

How could Mary know what was happening to her when the angel Gabriel came to her so long ago? She couldn't. It was a complete surprise. Her cousin Elizabeth was just as surprised when she found out that Gabriel told her husband Zechariah that she was going to have a baby, despite her old age! Surprise! Later, Mary visited Elizabeth and the baby in Elizabeth's womb jumped when they met. Imagine that meeting - a virgin carrying the Son of God and an older woman unable to conceive carrying John the Baptist! Oh, the surprises of God!

Christmas is about the joyous surprises of God. So, in the spirit of the surprise of Christmas I want to open up a few Christmas surprises from Mary's story that God wants to give each of us.

Did You Know that God Desires to Birth Something New Through You?

If there is one thing Mary's surprise teaches us it is that God loves to do extraordinary things through ordinary people. Mary was just a poor, Jewish, teenage girl. Based on life expectancy at the time Mary was probably between the ages of 13 and 16. Mary didn't have much experience in life. She was not sophisticated. Yet, God chose her to birth the Son of God.

I love the statements we find in this story when Gabriel visited Mary. Verse 29 says that Mary was "**perplexed and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.**" Well, that is the greatest understatement in the world. If an angel appeared to you, would "perplexed" be the best word to describe your reaction? After Gabriel explained to Mary that God had chosen her to birth the Son of God she asked in verse 34, "How can this be?" In our vernacular, Mary asked, "Are you kidding me? Are you smoking funny grass?"

Many of us have the same reaction when God desires to birth something great through us. We are perplexed. We can't bring ourselves to believe it. We are afraid. We have doubts. We have excuses. Matthew Hartsfield says that too often we get stuck in a Luke 1:34 mindset - "How can this be?"

Maybe for a long time God has been tugging on your heart to do an extraordinary thing and you have been stuck in a Luke 1:34 lifestyle. God wants you and all you can give God is your doubts and excuses. "I'm too old. I'm too young. I'm not smart enough. I'm not good enough. I'm not educated enough. I'm not experienced enough. How can this be?"

If that is where you are today, this is what I have to say to you: It is time to start "doubting your doubts and having faith in your faith!" It is time to believe in yourself and the God who made you! It is time to get the word "can't" out of your vocabulary. It is time to move from a Luke 1:34 lifestyle to a Luke 1:38 lifestyle! It is time to move from "How can this be?" to "Here am I, a servant of the Lord, let it be according to God's Word!"

This is what Mary did. She moved beyond her doubts and excuses and said “YES” to God! And aren’t we glad she did? She didn’t know much but she knew God loved her and wanted to use her.

So if you think your imperfections and insecurities disqualify you from being used by God, think again! What we learn from Mary. is that God will bring all the power, all the people, all the plans together to accomplish what God puts on your heart! Don’t worry about how, when, or how much. That’s God job. Your job is to follow what God has put on your heart and to be available to God. Your job is to say yes. God will take care of the rest.

So don’t for a minute think that because you have a disease, or dyslexia, or you are divorced or you are not eloquent, or fill in the blank you that God cannot use you. Because he can and he will. The Bible proves it. And why is that? Because when we have a weakness we have to rely on God and that’s what God wants. He wants people who must rely on him! Most of all, **when God works through our weakness, his power is on display!**

You see, the truth is God is a show off. When the world thinks people are too weak, unskilled, inexperienced or are just plain weird, God says, “You just wait and see what I can do through them! You just watch!”

Now I am going to tell you something which may surprise you, but it is the truth. I was a very shy kid. I couldn’t even look adults in the eye I was so shy. In fact, I really didn’t start to come out of my shell until I was well into my teens and even then I was still a bit shy. The truth is some of that shyness never really left me. I love to preach but I am scared to death up here. My heart is racing a mile a minute right now!

When God called me at 19 to serve my first church as a licensed local pastor, I was clueless. And the thought of speaking in public terrified me. But God was calling me and I couldn’t run away from God. So I did it. And I know my first sermon was the worst sermon in the history of preaching. But those people in that small country church were so patient, loving and kind. They loved me into being a preacher. And I will tell you this: In every church since then, in every decision, in every sermon, in every meeting, God has been with me every step of the way. God has never failed me. And God will never fail you.

God didn’t fail Mary either. Mary believed in herself and believed in her God, and she was used by God in a powerful way. But what turned the key for Mary? What caused her to move from Luke 1:34 thinking to Luke 1:38 thinking? I believe it was what the angel Gabriel said to Mary in verse 37, “For nothing is impossible with God!”

Did You Know that Nothing is Impossible with God?

Mary knew this. Mary believed this. Otherwise, she could not have done what she did. Imagine the fears and doubts she had to overcome. We sit here comfortably, knowing the rest of the story. But Mary had no idea what was going to happen.

All Mary knew were the risks. For example, can you imagine how Joseph reacted when Mary told him that she was pregnant with Son of God? “Sure, Mary. Pregnant by the Holy Spirit?” In fact, Joseph was making plans to get the heck out of Dodge until God got a hold of him. What’s more is that Mary knew that she risked being ostracized by her family and community. She risked rejection. She risked being humiliated.

Yet, knowing all that, risking all that, Mary said yes to God because she believed that nothing was impossible with God! She believed God would do what he said He would do! And she was blessed.

You want to know how to get blessed by God? You want to know how to be used by God for a great purpose? It is revealed in verse 45 of Luke 1. Elizabeth said to Mary, “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Matthew Hartsfield tells us to notice what Elizabeth did not say. She did not say, “Mary, you are blessed because you come from the right family. Mary, you are blessed because you are beautiful. Mary, you are blessed because you are intelligent. Mary, you are blessed because you are sophisticated.” No! Mary was blessed because she believed God would do what He said he would do. You see, Mary did not know what her future held, but she knew who held her future.

God does not bless us because of our ability; God blesses us because of our availability. We see this confirmed throughout the Bible. “Abraham was old, Jacob was insecure, Joseph was abused, Moses stuttered, Gideon was poor, Samson was codependent, Rahab was immoral, David had family problems and

personal sins, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah was reluctant, Naomi was a widow, John the Baptist was eccentric to say the least, Peter was impulsive and hot-tempered, Martha worried a lot, Zacchaeus was unpopular, Paul had poor health, and Timothy was timid. And yet God used each of them in his service. He didn't call them because they were super capable. He called them and blessed the world through them because they were willing and available" (quote by Rev. David Miller). Let me ask you this morning - are you willing? Are you available?

God blesses and uses us to the full when we say, "Lord, I make myself available to you. Use me however you want to use me. Do your will in my life. I will do the possible. You do the impossible, Lord!"

You see, Mary got this. Mary got that it wasn't about her. It was about what God could do through her. This is revealed in the greatest Christmas carol ever written. Now, think for a moment. What do you think is the greatest Christmas carol ever written? "Silent Night?" "Joy to the World?" "White Christmas?" "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer?" John Ortberg reminds us that the greatest Christmas carol was written by a Jewish peasant girl named Mary over 2,000 years ago. It is called "The Magnificat." It is the beautiful words she pours forth to God beginning in verse 46. Be sure you read it. In "The Magnificat" all Mary can do is talk about what God has done.

When we stop thinking about our limitations and begin believing in what God can do through us life begins to open up for us. When we stop trying to control our lives and say, "God, you take it from here," real life begins.

Every time an angel appears in the Christmas story they say, "Do not be afraid." Guess how many times the Bible tells us to "Fear not" or "Do not be afraid" 365 times. That's a message for each day of the year.

Did You Know that God Takes Notice of You?

There is a touching verse in "The Magnificat." It is verse 48. Mary said, "For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant." Other translations say, "he has been mindful." The one I like the best, which I believe best describes Mary's experience, is "he has taken notice." Can't you feel Mary's emotion? "God, you have taken notice of me - a poor teenage girl. You have taken notice of me."

If there is one consistent theme throughout the Bible it is that God loves us and takes notice of each of us. Now, that sounds simple enough, but you would not believe how difficult it is to convince people that it is true. As preacher, I hear so many myths about God. When I am on the golf course and people find out I am a preacher they will give me a four foot putt and say things like, "Be sure to say a good word about me to the man upstairs. I'd like to get into heaven. I have been a bad boy." Or they will say, "You seem nice, but I could never go to church. Lightning would strike."

What does John 3:16 say? Does it say, "God so loved the perfect people?" Does it say, "God so loved the religious people?" No! It says, "For God so loved the WORLD!" Receive God's love today. God takes notice of you.

I love something that author Max Lucado wrote in one of his books. "If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. God... But It is unfortunate that most of us see ourselves as a composite of all our failures," writes Lucado. "When we look in the mirror we may only see our failures. Even though many of us can't see beyond the failures, this is not the way God views us. As a loving God, he looks past our failures. Can you imagine a loving parent introducing their children by saying, 'This is my daughter Meagan, who stained the carpet with grape juice when she was two,' or 'This is my son Myles, who broke a valuable vase last week.' If loving parents don't have a need to memorize their children's failures, you can rest assured our loving heavenly Father has no use for such memories either."

God takes notice of you and cares for you. What do we think Christmas is all about? Love came down at Christmas to show each of us that God takes notice of us and wants to be in our lives. God wants to redeem us with his grace, encourage us with his love, guide us with his wisdom, and use us with his power. For nothing is impossible with God!

My wife and I were in our early forties. We had resigned ourselves to the fact that we could not have children. All the doctors told us it was impossible. 18 years into our marriage and we were settling in to being the crazy aunt and uncle. One Sunday afternoon I came home from church and my wife said, "I'm pregnant!" "Impossible" I said. Evidently, not for God.

There was once a pastor who was appointed to a church that was known for chewing up pastors and spitting them out. His first year at the church was a difficult one. The second one was even worse because his wife was diagnosed with cancer. The congregation rallied around the pastor, his wife, and family. A year later she went into remission and there was a loving bond between the pastor and this “difficult” congregation that lasted until he retired from that church 20 years later. “Nothing is impossible for God.”

She didn’t think she could ever give up alcohol. Truthfully, she believed it would eventually kill her. One day she rear-ended a woman in traffic. They exchanged information so the insurance companies could work it out. Surprisingly, the whole ordeal led them to become good friends. Her new friend asked her to come with her to an AA meeting. That was 10 years ago. She is still sober.

“Nothing is impossible with God.” Do you believe that? Mary did and look what happened.



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