

FOCUS: The Good News is that with God nothing is impossible

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

And Gabriel said to Mary, “For nothing will be impossible with God.”¹

This is the Good News, dear sisters and brothers. If I were wise, I would simply say, “Thanks be to God!” and take a seat. However, I am not wise, and the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit that came to the young woman named Mary and the old woman named Elizabeth, has filled me as well with the words and thoughts I share with you this morning. May God be praised for this wonderful gift.

“For nothing is impossible with God.”

As we heard two week’s ago, the barren, elderly Elizabeth became pregnant with a son who would be named John. Even with the lack of scientific understanding and development in the first century, *everyone* knew that there was a point after which a woman could no longer conceive a child. It was impossible. Zechariah knew that time had come and gone long ago, which is why he questioned the angel of the Lord, Gabriel, as to how it would come to pass. Zechariah’s human nature overcame his faith. He was thinking in human terms, and not in God’s terms. For humans, things can be, and often are impossible. However, for God, *nothing* is impossible.

“For nothing is impossible with God.”

The words of Gabriel to Mary are simply amazing. They astound me every time I hear them read or sung. I can only imagine what it must have felt like for Mary to hear them the first time. She was all alone, yet she was in the presence of a holy one—an angel of the Lord. The appearance of the angel surprised her—even scared her, I am sure. “What would this creature,” Mary must have thought, “want with me? I’m just a poor young woman. What have I done?”

¹ Luke 1:37 (NRSV)

Can any of us imagine thinking anything else? How often do we, when our boss, spouse, or even a friend comes to us and says, “Can we talk?” do we wonder, “What did I do *this* time?” It can be a bit scary, to be sure. And the angel knew this would be Mary’s response, too, and tells her not to be afraid, because God is not angry with her, but she has “found favor with God.”² This had to be at least a little reassuring for her.

Then, the angel lets the other shoe drop. Mary, engaged, but not yet married, will become pregnant and bear a son. Not only that, she doesn’t even get a say in what the child will be named, either. To make matters even more startling, the angel then tells her that her son will not be just anyone, but the Son of the Lord Most High and will ascend to the throne of David—the ruler of the house of Jacob forever.

And Mary, if she were a good Norwegian Lutheran, responds, “Yah, sure. How’s that to happen, yah know?”

Now, even in the first century, folks knew how pregnancy happened. They knew it so well that women who became pregnant outside of marriage were stoned to death. It just wasn’t something that folks did back then. So, Mary’s question is not “How will I get pregnant?” but rather, “How can I get pregnant since I have never ‘known’ my betrothed, Joseph? Besides, if it happens, how will I live? The Law is quite clear the penalty for this would be death.”

“For nothing is impossible with God.”

And the angel Gabriel goes on to tell Mary how she will become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit, and how the power of God will be over her to protect her. As further proof that things that seem impossible are possible, Gabriel tells Mary that her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, is also pregnant.

“For nothing is impossible with God.”

² Luke 1:30 (NRSV)

Mary, scared and comforted all at once, puts herself and her needs and fears aside. She doesn't say to the angel, "Not me, buster! Tell God thanks but no thanks. I have no interest in being pregnant right now." No, Mary does what a lot of us probably wouldn't do. She simply says, "Here am I, a servant of the Lord." She sets aside what *she* wants at that time to do what God has called her to do. From the testimony of the angel, she sees that there is truly nothing that God can't do.

"For nothing is impossible with God."

So what does all of this mean for us two thousand years later? Or, what other than the obvious—the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, does all this mean for us? Is there something we can learn from the witness—the testimony—of the angel and of Mary?

Yah sure, you betcha! Of course, you knew that would be the answer, didn't you?

Indeed there is a great deal which we can learn from this. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is impossible with God. Note that the angel doesn't say "Nothing is impossible *for* God," although that is absolutely true, too. When we are with God, nothing is impossible for us.

How then can we be "with God?" Obviously, God is with us at all times and in all places, but how are *we* with God? One way in which we are with God is through prayer. When we pray and seek God's direct involvement in our lives, miracles happen. This is not to say that every single prayer will be answered exactly as we expect and immediately when we ask for it. My shortness in stature and visibility of scalp stands as visible proof of *that*. But know that God our Father *does* hear our prayers and *does* know what we need, even before we ask for it. If we want to be with God, we can be with him through prayer.

When should we pray? Well, Paul told the Thessalonians, as we heard as well last week, to "pray without ceasing." We should pray constantly, not

just when we are in church or before we sit down to enjoy a festive dinner or as the teacher puts a pop quiz on our desks.

For what should we pray? We should pray in thanksgiving for all that God has given to us and done for us. We should pray in confession of our sins—known and unknown—against God and against our sisters and brothers. We should pray for others and their needs—for healing, reconciliation, peace, comfort. We should also pray for our congregation and our ministry here.

“For nothing is impossible with God.”