

December 14, 2014

## **“Nothing is Impossible with God”**

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris



*Luke 1:26-38*

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

We've arrived at the Third Sunday of Advent already and time to light the one pink candle in our Advent wreath. Why pink? A lot of churches don't do pink any more. They've gone all blue. On this one, I'm truly an old-fashioned conservative traditionalist. Pink on the third Sunday of Advent. Why? Two reasons. It reminds us of pink for joy and pink for Mary, often symbolized as a rose.

By this third Sunday, we're half-way through this Advent season. In the early church, Advent was observed like a little Lent. It was truly a time of fasting and long hours of prayer, with an emphasis on repentance. By Week Three, everyone was ready for a hearty dose of joy.

So we light the pink candle of rejoicing and start Week Three of this season with joyful anticipation and expectation. And in so doing, we remember the joy of Mary. When the angel Gabriel told her that a special child would be born to her, she sang a song that begins with the words: "My soul magnifies, praises, the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

As we read in Galatians, Mary rejoiced in God and God rejoiced in Mary, for the "fullness of time had come" in the willingness of this young woman of faith to enable God to become one of us through the birth of Jesus.

Mary's response to God reveals that somehow she already grasps the crazy excitement of what God is doing in this birth. In fact, Madeline L'Engle in her book, *The Winter of the Heart*, said of her: "[Advent] is the irrational season when love blooms bright and wild. Had Mary been filled with reason, there'd have been no room for the Child."

In the announcement of this birth we learn, along with Mary, that God is doing something so astonishing that it would seem impossible to a "reasonable" human mind. God—the great God of all creation, the God of all time and all space, the God in whom there is no beginning and no ending, the God beyond human imagining and telling---this great God, for our sake and for our salvation, chooses to become flesh, to become one of us, in the form of a child to be born. Unto us a son is born. Unto us a child is given. Love blooms bright and wild.

For love, God becomes incarnate in a baby. The great all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving God, wanting to be seen, wanting to be known, comes to us as a baby laid in manger. God gives Godself to the world in this astonishing *unreasonable* way--in a baby, the most vulnerable being imaginable.

It doesn't really make "sense" to us any more than it did at first to Mary. It took her a little while to get from astonishment to joy. At first, she was skeptical, incredulous, amazed. After all, she knew herself to be a very ordinary person, one of us. We don't know her lineage, her real parents. We don't know her credentials, her qualifications, or even her readiness to be a mom. Perhaps another kind of God would have done things differently, would have had the savior be born in a royal household or in the capital city or at least to a mother known and admired and respected. Instead, the long-awaited Messiah comes as a baby born to a peasant family in an unlikely corner of the world, far from earthly palaces and courts of honor.

But, you know, perhaps precisely because she wasn't rich and famous, perhaps because of her humble clear-sightedness, Mary could put her trust in God. And so she was able to hear and receive the promise of the angel Gabriel, to believe that God had chosen her to be the channel through whom the Messiah will come to earth. Mary, lowly handmaiden, the servant of her Lord, is visited by an angel and trusts that she is worthy and with God, will be able to do what God asks her to do. With God, nothing is impossible.

Mary's story shows us some very important things about our faith. Mary and this birth remind us that this faith of ours is deeply grounded in life, real life. Sometimes we think faith is about ideas that we need to believe in our minds, concepts, doctrines, propositions. Mary reminds us that faith is our response to God's love made visible in a human life that would know birth and growth and suffering and death and resurrection! Our faith is grounded in life.

Mary's story reminds us just how much God cares about human life. In choosing this poor, humble woman, God shows us a preference for all those who are nameless, who are marginalized, who are poor and afraid, vulnerable, often forgotten. Mary and Joseph were homeless travelers on the night of that holy birth.

And Mary embodies the compassion of God, the loving, tender heart of God, the infinite love of God. Across the centuries, around the world, Mary is revered by suffering people, sick and dying people, frightened people. Mary who, at the end, held the lifeless body of her son in her arms, is still to this day, a balm to mothers and fathers everywhere.

Maybe this is why God chose to come to earth in the form of a baby born to no-name parents. Maybe God chose something this ordinary and this familiar so that we would get that the point of it all has to do with light and love "bright and wild" coming to each and every one of us. Maybe God did it this way so that every time we celebrate a birth, every time we baptize a baby, we look upon that great miracle and remember that nothing is impossible with God.

Maybe the great God of the universe knew that it wasn't enough for the light to shine in the darkness in general, or even for the night sky to glow with millions of stars. Maybe God knew that the light of love had to shine so brightly in one little face so that the rest of us would remember just how very much God loves each of us and loves this whole world, for nothing is impossible with God.

Ah! The Good News is that our God turns inside out our assessment of who is important and what we are each capable of doing. If Mary can be that important, so can we. Our God can overcome any limitations we set to our taking our part with God and doing whatever it is our God has for us to do. "Perhaps Mary's words deliver God's Christmas wish: that followers of Christ will believe that nothing is impossible with God, and invite the Holy Spirit to work through [us] to attain miracles."

At that time of Jesus' birth, there was an expectation in the air that God would come to deliver the people Israel. No one knew just when, but they waited not in resignation, but in vibrant anticipation. Perhaps Mary was ready to believe that indeed the fullness of time had come and that God would keep the promise to send a Messiah, ready to believe that love would bloom "bright and wild" in her time.

And so it did! Love became incarnate—in order for hope to cast out fear, in order for good to triumph over evil, in order for that love to rule in our hearts and in our city streets.

This is our story. This is our faith. For love, God becomes incarnate as one of us, something so astonishing that it seems impossible to a "reasonable" human mind. God—this great God, for our sake and for our salvation, chooses to become flesh, to become one of us, in the form of a child to be born. Unto us a son is born. Unto us a child is given.

God chooses us—and now invites us now into that great story that together we can change the world. This Christmas, may love be born, bright and wild. For with God, nothing is impossible. Amen.

#### Notes:

Ashley Cook Cleere in Feasting on the Word Year B, Vol. 1. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.  
John M. Buchanan in Preaching God's Transforming Justice Year B. Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.