

"Gabriel and Mary"

Luke 1:26-38

December 21, 2008 – Advent 4B

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

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.

Prayer.

I would have considered taking a high
bridge.
Truly, I'm kidding.
I'm putting myself into Zechariah's
shoes.
I'm kidding about the high bridge
But the thought of me,
An old temple priest,
Being visited in the sanctuary,
(Perhaps here)
When I am all alone,
(with no one to witness my encounter)
By an angel named Gabriel
Who promises that my wife, Cynthia,

Is to become pregnant,
Bear a child who I am to name John ...
Would you blame me
for stuttering a word or two of
disbelief?
"It isn't possible, I've had a ..."
SHAZAM!
My voice is gone before I can make
my second point about menopause.
I'm speechless.
And Cynthia is pregnant.
People begin to talk
"O, girl, you should be on Oprah!"
Would you blame her
for going into seclusion for five months
Like Elizabeth?

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I can't even imagine
 That same angel Gabriel
 Now visiting a young cousin of Cynthia
 (if she had one),
 a girl named Mary,
 probably 14 or 15 years old,
 whose marriage had just been
 arranged by their families.
 Too young to question
 More child than woman
 With no experience
 And no reason to doubt
 With a naiveté
 That makes me want to jump into the
 story and shake her
 "Where is your father?
 Stop talking to this stranger
 And go find him RIGHT NOW!"
 It is so bazaar to me,
 I can't even imagine.
 I couldn't write this stuff,
 Because it just couldn't be possible.

Yet, this is where God is found
 At the intersection of life
 And the impossible.

Each of us have traveled by different
 pathways
 Different experiences
 Have been influenced by different
 people
 To get to where we are
 To be seated in these pews here
 today.
 We do have some shared experiences:
 Baptism is common among us,
 Families may be the same, or similar,
 Zion, certainly, is a denominator we all
 share.
 But, I want you to consider
 Those experiences that make you

Uniquely you;
 Those times when you've faced the
 impossible
 When you've thought to yourself
 "That's it. That's all there is.
 There is no other possible outcome."
 Then,
 Lo
 And behold,
 The impossible becomes possible
 And the fragrance of God is first
 perceived.

I was in a house fire in Canandaigua
 With my partner, Brian Mace,
 When the roof caved in on us.
 I remember thinking to myself
 "That's it.
 That's all there is.
 There is no more."
 Just then,
 Firemen from Hopewell showed up
 Grabbed each of us
 by the SCOTT packs we were wearing
 And dragged both Brian and I out
 To safety.
 Later,
 Soaking the soot away in a hot shower
 I realized that God was present
 At the intersection of life
 And the impossible.

The same youth
 And lack of life experience
 Caused Mary to be perplexed:
 "Who are you?
 What are you doing here?"
 We can imagine her saying.
 "Do not be afraid,"
 the angel assures her.
 Do not be afraid.
 I've been sent by God.

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God is not to be feared;
 Treated with respect, yes,
 But to be frightened of, no.
 Do not fear God.
 It is not like God is some sort
 Of supernatural zombie or monster
 Portrayed in modern day horror flicks.
 God does interrupt space and time
 To be present in our lives
 Where life and the impossible
 Come together
 To create the truly remarkable.
 God's presence
 Opens the endless possibilities of
 God's action,
 Only some of which
 Are known by us.
 The majority of what God can, and will
 do,
 Remains unknown to us
 For we cannot even imagine the
 greater plan.
 After God acts,
 It is as if it should have been obvious
 to us all along,
 - hindsight is 20/20 -
 but, prior to God's action,
 there is no way any of us can imagine
 the possible.
 The veil is dark,
 And limits us to see only
 the impossible
 In the world.

This is the impossible:
 "You will conceive," Gabriel tells Mary.
 This isn't possible without a means to
 fertilize her egg.
 This is the impossible:
 "You will conceive ... and bear a son."
 It is absolutely impossible
 To accurately predict the gender of an
 egg yet to be fertilized:

This is the impossible:
 "... and you will name him Jesus."
 Jesus equals savior
 And savior signifies the promise
 Of one who saves God's people.¹
 Have you taken a look around?
 Have you seen all the Roman soldiers?
 Caesar might have something to say
 about that!
 It is impossible
 That anyone could lead a successful
 revolt
 To liberate and save God's people
 From Roman power and occupation.
 Impossible!
 Impossible!
 Impossible!
 "How can this be?" Mary correctly
 asks,
 just as we would ask
 if we'd be in her position.
 "How can this be?
 I've never been with a man?"
 It is impossible.

This is where God is found
 At the intersection of life
 And the impossible.

Where ever God is
 God gives complete and undivided
 attention
 To the issue at hand.
 It isn't just the miracle of the Holy
 Spirit acting,
 "The Holy Spirit will come upon you,"
 Gabriel foretells,

¹ Paul S. Berge, Emeritus Professor of New
 Testament, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN., as
 found at:
http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=12/21/2008#

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but "... the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

The loving and omnipotent Father and creator God

Coupled with the invisible, transcendent Spirit of God

Conspire together to complete the Trinity

To give birth to a child

Born holy.²

Within this single verse, we have the basis

why the Christian faith is centered in the triune God:

All three persons are present in the God we confess

as "the Most High,"

in Jesus Christ "the Son of God,"

and the overshadowing presence of "the Holy Spirit."³

Impossible! We protest, God can't be three in one.

Yet, it is not only possible,

It is as real at the nose on my face.

Where is the impossible in your life?

Where does doubt overwhelm you?

That's where God is.

That's where God is working.

That is where God is transforming

The impossible into the possible.

That is where God is creating

Something out of nothing.

That is where God can be found.

The key to making sense of the nativity of Jesus

Of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John

Of Mary, Joseph and the visits of the angel Gabriel,

Can be found in Gabriel's message: "For nothing will be impossible with God."⁴

Nothing will be impossible.

Imagine that for a moment.

Imagine that:

A world where nothing is impossible.

Cure? Possible.

Miracle? Possible.

Immaculate conception? Doesn't even require God to break a sweat.

Repair and restoration of broken relationships? Done.

Forgiveness of past offences? Yep.

Every last one.

The strength to endure temptations? Yes.

That Jesus could be raised from the dead? Without a doubt!

Roll that stone away!

That God so loved the world

That God sent his Son to save us? Yep.

Into eternal life? Sure as shooting.

That God takes recruits? Yes.

If God will take me, he will take just about anyone.

That God expects us to bring justice where ever we go? Yes.

That God wants us to spread peace and love with whatever we do? Yep.

Nothing!

And Gabriel means NOTHING!

Nothing is impossible with God.

To which there is only one reply:

"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."⁵

Amen.

² Luke 1:35

³ Berge, P.S.

⁴ Luke 1:37

⁵ Luke 1:38

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