

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

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DAWN IS BREAKING – Living with Peace in the Face of the Impossible

Luke 1:26-38

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Emily, my girls, and I have found a new Christmas activity: we're trying to find the worst Hallmark Christmas movie ever made. It's been pretty difficult because it's hard to distinguish one Hallmark Christmas movie from the others. Most of them have the exact same plot. Someone from a big city comes to a small town where there's a struggling hotel or a struggling farm or a general store that's about to go under. The big city person somehow gets caught up in the struggle and finds out that they have until Christmas to save the farm or the hotel or the store.

If you've seen one of them, you know the story. The farm gets save. The hotel turns the corner. The general store beats Walmart. It's a Christmas miracle. I think the real miracle is that someone is getting paid to write this stuff. Maybe I'm just a little Grinchy this year.

The reality is that we have flooded this season with so many stories of cheap, so-called Christmas miracles that we have nearly forgotten that the real Christmas story is truly a miracle.

In the middle of the 20th century, C. S. Lewis was combatting a movement called modernism that was rooted in the philosophical ideas of people like David Hume and Friederich Nietzsche. Theologians were adopting their philosophical ideas and were attempting to rewrite a version of Christianity that effectively denied the miraculous claims of the Bible. They claimed to believe in Jesus so long as they could exclude anything miraculous or supernatural. Lewis rightly asserted that if you remove the miraculous claims about Jesus from Christianity, you no longer have anything left that is distinctly Christian. In his words, "The central miracle asserted by Christians is the incarnation" and "if the thing [incarnation] happened, it was the central event in the history of the Earth- the very thing the whole story has been about." He called the entire earthly life of Jesus the "One Grand Miracle" that encompasses everything from Christmas to the cross to the resurrection and ascension. If you throw out one part, you lose the whole thing.

And that view isn't unique to C. S. Lewis. The early Church Fathers, like Athanasius and Irenaeus, held the conviction that the incarnation is essential to every other truth claim of Christianity. The virgin birth is essential to the deity of Christ, and the deity of Christ is essential to Christ's atoning work on the cross and the claim of His resurrection. So, if you remove the miraculous from the life of Jesus, you no longer have anything distinctly Christian. To borrow the Apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians, at that point our faith is useless, and Christians are of all people the most to be pitied.

The thing that sets Christianity apart from every other religious movement in the history of this world is the truth that the God of this universe entered His creation as a real man. He was born to a human mother without the participation of an earthly father. God became a man. His name is Jesus. And our text for this morning is foundational to our understanding of the incarnation. It's a monumental text of Scripture. I pray the Spirit of God will overshadow all my inability to teach these truths.

Luke 1:26–38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the

virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 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 father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

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

35 And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Last week, we studied the verses before our text and saw the announcement of a miraculous pregnancy. Zechariah and Elizabeth were old and barren. It was impossible for them to have a child. But the angel Gabriel was sent to Zechariah to announce that God was going to do a miracle and give them a baby who would grow up to be John the Baptist. Elizabeth gets pregnant and in the sixth month of her pregnancy, the angel Gabriel is sent to a young girl named Mary with another announcement of another miraculous pregnancy.

But the miracle of this child is not just a miracle. It's the One Grand Miracle that is the central story in the history of planet earth. It's the miracle of Jesus. And in our text, there are at least 4 miraculous claims about Jesus.

Miraculous Claim #1 – Jesus was Born of a Virgin

Luke 1:26

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

Luke 1:30-31

And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son

Luke 1:34

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

Three times in this passage, Luke records the fact that Mary was a virgin. Luke was a physician, so he isn't going to throw that term around carelessly. As a matter of fact, in the opening paragraph of this chapter, Luke says the purpose of him writing this book is to establish the historical accuracy of the claims about Jesus that had been taught by those who were eyewitnesses to the actual events. Luke isn't using hyperbole or exaggerated language. He isn't presenting this as a metaphor or a myth. He's presenting this as a historically accurate account of what happened in the life of Jesus, including the events surrounding his conception.

And he includes the detail that Mary acknowledges the impossibility of it all. She brings up the fact that she isn't married and has never been with a man. She might not have had the medical knowledge of Dr. Luke and Dr. Luke may not have had the scientific knowledge of a modern student

of biology, but both of them knew enough to know that it is physically impossible for a woman to become pregnant without the involvement of a man. It would require a bona fide miracle.

Miraculous Claim #2 – Jesus is the Savior of the World

Luke 1:31

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

The name Jesus basically means “The LORD (Yahweh) saves.” When the angel appeared to Joseph in Matthew 1, he expounds on this a little more.

Matthew 1:21

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

The reason Jesus would be called Jesus is because He came to save people from their sins. Every problem that faces every person who has ever lived can be traced to a sin problem. From the beginning of humanity, the descendants of Adam have been held inescapably captive to sin and its devastating consequences.

Jesus came to miraculously save us in every way we need to be saved. And the Bible refers to our salvation in three phases.

- Jesus saves us from the *penalty* of sin. He removes the condemnation that we deserve. He spares us from having to pay for our sin by spending eternity in hell.
- Jesus saves us from the *power* of sin. Through the work of Jesus, we are able to break free from the patterns of sin that hold us captive and destroy our lives.
- Jesus saves us from the *presence* of sin. One day, we will be removed from the very presence of sin and will spend eternity in the presence of God in heaven. No more sickness or pain or disappointment or temptation. Jesus will make all things new – including a new heaven and earth and a brand new you.

Jesus is a miraculous Savior.

Miraculous Claim #3 – Jesus is the Son of God

Luke 1:32

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

Luke 1:35

And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God.

Jesus didn’t have an earthly father, but He does have a Father. He is the Son of the Most High God. And that might sound like it’s just a restatement of the virgin birth, but there’s an important distinction here. The virgin birth means that Jesus became a human without a human father. But, in some way two other people became humans without earthly fathers: Adam and Eve. But Jesus is a greater Adam. He didn’t just become a human. He is the eternal Son of God who became a human.

John 5:18

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

The Grand Miracle of the Incarnation is that Jesus is the One, True God who became one of us. He is the second person of the Trinity. He is God in the flesh.

Jesus came to usher in a whole new humanity – to unite mankind with the holy life of God.

Miraculous Claim #4 – Jesus is the Eternal King

Luke 1:32-33

And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Jesus came to fulfill God’s promise to King David that one of his descendants would be reign forever. Jesus is that King. Through Mary and his adopted earthly father, Joseph, Jesus was a direct descendant of David. He had a legal right to sit on the throne of his forefather, David. And, by virtue of Him being God, Jesus is able to rule with all power forever. He is able to merge the kingdom of God with the people of this world.

Let me cut to the chase on this one – right now, this very second, Jesus is ruling over Heaven and Earth. He is the Sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And, one day, He is coming again to set up the full and final kingdom of God upon the earth. He will banish every enemy. And His people will reign with Him upon the earth. He will wipe away every tear from every eye. There will be no more sickness or sorrow. No more disappointment or death. Jesus is the eternal King who reigns forever. Jesus is miraculous. He is born of a virgin. He is the Savior of the World. He is God in the flesh. He is the eternal King.

And when Mary hears these claims, she asks a very good question:

Luke 1:34

And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

If you were here last week, you might remember that Zechariah asked a similar question when the angel told him that his wife would become pregnant in her old age. But the text explicitly tells us that Zechariah asked that question from a place of unbelief. That’s not what is happening here. As a matter of fact, in the verses that follow our text, Mary goes to see her relative Elizabeth who is miraculously pregnant. Elizabeth knows that Mary has been chosen to be the mother of the Lord. She also knows what had gone on in Mary’s heart.

Luke 1:45

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

Mary believed. She just didn’t understand. She’s asking for clarification. She might even have been asking whether or not this would have to happen through her and Joseph finalizing their engagement and becoming a fully married couple. That’s how miraculous children were born to people like Abraham and Sarah and Zechariah and Elizabeth. Her question might be something like, “Is there something I’m supposed to do to make this happen?” And listen to the response of the angel. How will it happen?

Luke 1:35-37

And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God.

And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Mary asks, “How will this happen...is there anything I need to do?” The angel answers back, “Mary, God will do everything that needs to be done and nothing will be impossible.” That’s the explanation. The impossible becomes possible because the Holy Spirit of God would come upon Mary and the power of God would overshadow her inability to make it happen. She didn’t have to work to make it happen. In verse 28, the very first words the angel speaks to Mary are, “Greetings, O favored one...” The word “favored” is basically the word for “grace.” God’s showing grace to Mary. I mean no disrespect to Mary, but she wasn’t chosen to be the mother of the Lord because she had earned it. She was chosen by God’s grace.

The grand miracle of Jesus occurs because nothing is impossible with God. Mary didn’t have to work to make it happen. She didn’t have to earn anything. God made the impossible possible by His gracious power.

That’s the core truth at the heart of the Bible. That’s what modern theologians and philosophers like Hume and Nietzsche can’t swallow. That’s what drives humanity to want a version of so-called Christianity without the miraculous. We don’t want to humble ourselves to rely on God’s grace and we don’t want to acknowledge we are powerless apart from God. Sinful human hearts naturally say things like:

- Just give me Jesus the great teacher and I’ll do what He says.
- Give me Jesus the great example and I’ll live like Him.
- Give me Jesus the great humanitarian and I’ll follow in His steps.

But that isn’t Christianity. We need the gracious and miraculous power of God. We need the Christ of Christmas.

That’s what Mary believed and that’s how Mary was blessed. Christ was formed in her. His life was united to hers. Not by her work but by God’s grace and power. And that gives us our Big Idea for today.

BIG IDEA: GOD’S GRACIOUS POWER MAKES THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE IN THOSE WHO BELIEVE THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS.

We share more in common with Mary than we might think. The promise of the Bible is that Christ Himself will live in those who believe the truth about Him. His life will be formed in us. His gracious power will be at work in us through the Holy Spirit and He will make every impossible thing possible. Listen to the impossible promises of the gospel. If you place your faith and trust in the truth about Jesus...

- You are born into a new life by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 3:1-7)
- You are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- You are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
- You are united to the life of Jesus in you (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:1-4)
- You are forgiven all your sin (1 John 1:9)
- You are holy and blameless before God (Ephesians 1:4)
- You are destined to become just like Jesus (Romans 8:29)
- You are sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit until you inherit everything that belongs to God (Ephesians 1:13-14)

You hear those things and the first thing you might ask is Mary's question: How can this be? I'm sinful. I'm weak. I'm small. I'm broken. It's impossible. How can these things be?

It's not up to you. The gracious power of God will overshadow you. Nothing will be impossible for God. How do we respond? Look at verse 38.

Luke 1:38

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

Mary's response can be boiled down to two basic conditions of her heart.

1. Total Submission to the Lord. She says, "I belong to the Lord. All of who I am belongs to Him."
 - a. Howard Mumma, a pastor in the 1950s who is best known for his friendship and possible conversion of a renowned atheist philosopher named Albert Camus, said, "The whole trouble with our world is the lack of an apostrophe." What he meant was that we either live like we are gods or God's.
 - b. I belong to you. I am not my own. Total submission.
2. Confident Faith in the Lord. "Let it be."
 - a. The phrase "let it be" is essentially Mary saying – "Do what you've said. Lord, I'm not depending on my work for you, I'm depending on your work in me. Do it."

And that's how we experience the miracle that is Christmas. You can have peace with God today through the miraculous work of Jesus – your sins can be forgiven. You can be restored to God as your heavenly Father. You can be made holy and blameless.

You can have peace of mind today through the miraculous work of Jesus. You can know that heaven is your eternal reward. You can know that you will inherit everything that belongs to God. You can be confident that all things will work together for the good of making you like Christ.

How can this be? Total Submission - Bow before Jesus and say, "My whole life belongs to you, Lord."
Confident Faith - Do what you said you will do. I believe you. I trust you. Do what you said you will do."