

INI - SDG

4th Sunday of Advent

December 21, 2008

Hecla

Text: Luke 1:26-38 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin, betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then 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 bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Theme: FAITH BELIEVES THE IMPOSSIBLE

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

When you hear the word "impossible" what is the first thing that comes to mind? Maybe you think of all that memory work you had for your Christmas Eve program and how you thought it was impossible that you'd be able to memorize all of that. Maybe when you hear the word "impossible" you think back to President Kennedy's challenge to put a man on the moon. At the time that seemed impossible. Or maybe you think of the old TV show that has recently been made into movies called, "Mission: Impossible." Maybe a better name would have been "Mission: Improbable." Impossible means it cannot be done. Improbable means it likely couldn't be done. However improbable the mission seemed, they were completed - thus it wasn't impossible.

Impossible means that there is no human way for something to be accomplished. When the Angel of the LORD appeared to 100 year old Abraham and told him that he and 90 year old wife Sarah would have their first child, Abraham thought that was impossible - it couldn't be done for they were too old. Yet Sarah gave birth to her firstborn son, Isaac, in her old age.

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias in the temple and told Zacharias that he and his wife would have their first son in their old age, Zacharias too thought it was impossible - even though Zacharias should have known quite well that it had happened before to his forefather Abraham. Even though an angel sent from God was telling Zacharias this, he doubted that the angels words were truth. For doubting the angel Zacharias was struck mute until after his son John was born.

Sixth months after Zacharias' wife Elizabeth became pregnant with John, the angel

Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary. ***“Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!”*** Gabriel saw his visitation to Mary as a reason to rejoice. The promise that God had made in the Garden of Eden was now being fulfilled in Mary. From her womb would come the Promised Serpent Crusher. What every believing woman since Eve had hoped for since the fall into sin would now be accomplished in Mary’s womb. She was blessed among women!

Mary’s reaction is hardly surprising. How would you react if an angel of God appeared in your bedroom and greeted you like this? Mary was confused and wondered what was going on. Gabriel explained why he was there. ***“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”***

Just as Gabriel told Zacharias of the son he would have, he now told Mary of the Son she would have. As Gabriel told Zacharias he was to name his son John, Mary was to name her son Jesus - which means Jehovah saves. But as great as John the Baptist would be, he was merely the forerunner of the Son of the Highest. Jesus is the greatest. At His name every knee shall bow. His name is the only name by which we must be saved. The Son to come from the womb of Mary would be the Son of the Most High God. The Son of Mary would be the fulfillment of the promise God made to David in our Old Testament reading (2 Samuel 7) and in our Psalm for the Day (Psalm 89). The Son of this lowly peasant girl would be an everlasting King of an everlasting kingdom.

When God promised Abraham and Zacharias that they would have a son in their old age, it seemed impossible because they and their wives were so old - well beyond their childbearing years. However they still were husband and wife and so the ability to conceive children was still there. When it comes to Mary, however, it seemed impossible to bear a child because of one essential ingredient - a father of the child. Mary explains why in verse 34, ***“How can this be, since I do not know a man?”*** While Mary was betrothed to Joseph, that is they were engaged and were legally considered to be married but were not yet to live together as husband and wife, Mary knew that she had kept herself pure and not yet slept with a man - Joseph or otherwise. She was a virgin. To now hear that she was to become pregnant was impossible.

Unlike Zacharias, the wording in the Greek makes clear that Mary did not doubt the word of the angel, she simply wondered how this would take place. Gabriel explains, ***“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”*** We summarize this amazing miracle every time we confess our faith when we say that we believe that Jesus was *“conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.”* The Son of Mary would have no human father only a human mother. By the Holy Spirit the Son of God would enter the womb of Mary and life would begin. There the embryo of Jesus would live and grow and would be born 9 months later in Bethlehem.

Impossible? Gabriel tells Mary how her elder relative Elizabeth was now 6 months pregnant with her child. At that Gabriel reminds Mary of this truth, ***“For with God nothing will be impossible.”*** NOTHING! Sarah and Elizabeth can bear children in their old age because God overcame the natural affects of aging. While it is impossible for a true virgin to get pregnant, not so when God is involved. He who created man and the laws of nature can most certainly

overcome them. He who parted the Red Sea and raised the dead to life can Himself take on flesh in the womb of a Virgin and become True Man. Nothing is impossible with God.

So how would you react to this news? Would it be with a “yeah, right” like Abraham, Sarah, and Zacharias? How would you explain to your parents that you were pregnant but not by a man? How would you explain to your fiancée that you were with child, but you had not cheated on him? Likewise as a parent, how would you react if your 17 year old daughter told you this? If you were Joseph would you believe such a story? Even if you were Mary, wouldn't this be hard to believe? Certainly Mary didn't need faith for God to cause this to take place. God could have accomplished it in the womb of an unbelieving woman.

But notice how Mary reacts to the words of Gabriel, God's messenger from heaven. ***“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”*** Maybe Mary didn't fully understand how this would all take place - the Holy Spirit will conceive life in my womb? How could a child of hers, a poor peasant girl, could become a King? And a King who would rule an eternal kingdom! How could a child that came from her be the Son of God? How could this all be? Yet in humble, childlike faith Mary believes the word of the angel as the word of God. This is faith in the Triune God which believes He can accomplish the impossible.

Is our faith any different from that of Mary? What impossible promises has God made to you? Is it impossible for an enemy and persecutor of the Christian church to be brought to faith and a leader of the Christian church? We have the Apostle Paul to prove to us that God can do the impossible in bringing a Christ-hater to faith. What about what He says in Isaiah 1:18? ***“Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”*** Is it impossible for a soul stained with sin to be cleansed? Nothing is impossible with God. Through the blood of Jesus Christ His Son, He has cleansed us of all our sins!

The Reformed Churches claim that we believe many impossible things. They state that since Jesus is true Man as well as being true God, He has a body and His body is in heaven. Since Jesus is physically in heaven, He cannot be present in the Lord's Supper - that is impossible. Yet what do you communicant members believe you are receiving in Lord's Supper? Just a remembrance or representation of Jesus' body and blood? The Holy Spirit has convinced us by His Word that we are truly receiving the very body and blood of Jesus in, with, and under the bread and wine.

What about an infant having saving faith in Jesus Christ? Here again we are told this is impossible. We are told that a child cannot comprehend right and wrong, nor comprehend God and the need of salvation. Such would be impossible. Couldn't the same be said about each one of us? Which one of us is able to comprehend God and the need of salvation?! Faith is not something which the mind comprehends and accepts, but something which God works in our hearts and causes us to believe - even a little child. Jesus says, ***“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”*** With God nothing is impossible - “Baptize all nations” is simply the command He gives us.

Is it impossible for man to walk on water? Is it impossible for someone who has been lame their whole life to walk? Is it impossible for the dead to rise? For us? Yes. For God - no way. The Lord God has made countless promises to us His children in His Word. Promises that impact us on a daily basis. The promise that all things will work together for good to those who

love Him, who are called according to His purpose. To the child of God it may seem impossible to see the good at the time, but God has promised it and with Him nothing will be impossible. Rather than doubting let us in childlike faith echo Mary, "***Let it be to me according to your word.***" God has promised it, He will accomplish it.

How can the eternal, almighty Son of God be born of a woman? While it may seem impossible to us, we believe God has done it in sending His own Son Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such is our faith that God has accomplished the impossible that we base our salvation on it. That Baby that was born of the Virgin Mary went on to suffer and die for our sins. Through His death and resurrection we are redeemed, bought back to God. We are saved! Praise be to our Triune God for whom NOTHING will be impossible. Amen.