

“Christmas Carols III: Mary’s Song”
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Luke 1:26-55

“Mary, did you know?” Oh my, there was so much that Mary didn’t know on that fateful day when an angel came to visit. She was just a young woman, barely a woman at that. She was in a wonderful, sweet place in her life - engaged to be married to a good and decent man, a carpenter. She was, no doubt, caught up in the excitement of what was to come, what was yet to be. Probably, like every other woman in her situation, if she closed her eyes she could picture herself walking down that aisle on the arm of her father, dressed in beauty. Maybe she laid awake at night pondering what was to come - how she and Joseph would settle into their home and their new life together, and then, one day, when the time was right, they would begin a family. Everything was planned out, everything would work out in its time.

You know how you feel when you have everything laid out, everything planned the way you want it to go, and in your mind’s eye, you can see it? There’s a feeling of peace and calm and a sense that everything’s right with the world, things are as they should be.

Well, I think that’s what Mary was feeling too. Things were good, they were right, they were progressing as they should. Until that angel showed up, and basically told her that there was to be a massive change of her plans. The baby wouldn’t be coming along down the road, no, the baby would be coming much, much sooner. And Joseph would not be the father, the baby would be of the Holy Spirit.

I don’t know about you, but when shocking news hits me, it takes a little while for it to sink in. First, it takes a minute to see if it’s really for real. Could I have possibly heard what I heard? Could it be true?

Then it has to sink in - and the longer time goes on, the more it does, and then the questions start running through your mind. What do you mean? How can this be? What will happen? When? I don’t understand.

All of those things must have been running through dear, young Mary’s mind when she says back to the angel “How can this be?” “How can this be, Gabriel? How can it be that I will have a child when I am not married? How can it be that I will have a child when I have never been with a man? What are you saying?”

All she really said was “How can this be?” but you know all those things were swimming around in her overwhelmed mind. And when she had another minute, surely other questions surfaced, like, “What about all our plans? What about Joseph? What will he think? He’ll be heartbroken, he’ll think I cheated on him. What will my parents think? My friends? The people down the street? How will I be able to hold up my head? People will stare at me, and talk about me, and call me names. They might even call for me to be stoned. Oh, dear, how can this be?”

“Mary, did you know?” No, she didn’t. She didn’t have any idea. She needed help and she needed it fast, or she would sink.

If you’ve lived anytime at all, at one time or another in your life, you’ve felt something like Mary. You’ve had something happen to you, that, in the blink of an eye, changed everything in your life, laid aside your best laid plans, and made your head swim. And, if you’re like me, you don’t quite know what to do at that moment. I’ve had a couple of moments in my life like that. One was when a pastor friend of mine invited me to consider that God might be calling me into ordained ministry. It had never entered my mind - ever. Back then, about thirty years ago, I didn’t know any female pastors, so it was not something I had thought about. Back then, I didn’t like to speak in front of people, so it didn’t make a whole lot of sense to me, that God might be calling me to be in ministry, which meant speaking in front of a whole lot of people.

So when my friend said that, I was stunned for a while. It really threw me. “What does this mean? How can it be?”

The other time that it happened was in a far different way. It was the moment my sister told me that Dad was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease. I will never forget that moment, it seemed like the longest moment in my life. My head was swimming with questions about the future, but the biggest of all was, “how can it be?”

At moments like these, like the one Mary was experiencing, and others we have gone through, the situation we’re facing seems impossible - absolutely, positively impossible. There’s no way we think we can do what we have to do, face what we have to face. One pastor commented that, “this is where many people give up. They throw up their hands in defeat or crash in despair.” (On-line, “The Actions of Christmas”)

Actually, Mary did the best thing she could. She asked the question on her heart, she voiced her deepest concern to the angel, “How can it be?”

And she heard the words that would enable her to go on - “Nothing is

impossible with God.” Gabriel reminded her of that Good News, as she struggled to figure out if what he had just told her was bad news. “Nothing is impossible with God, Mary.” It’s as if he was saying “Mary, I know this doesn’t make sense to you, it doesn’t make sense in biological terms, in human terms, but it makes perfect sense in God’s terms, so trust me, it will be okay. Nothing is impossible with God.”

Thank God Mary listened, and heard, and believed. She took Gabriel’s words to heart and said “yes” to the task laid before her. Sister Joan Delaplane, a Catholic nun, writing about Mary said that she wasn’t naive. “We are not talking about pie-in-the-sky optimism that does not look reality in the eye. We are talking about hope that see with the eyes of faith and love.” (On-line, “And the Greatest of These is Hope,” Sr. Joan Delaplane)

Mary trusted in what she knew about God, and what Gabriel said to her about God. She trusted in the God she had known all her life, and she trusted that He could do the impossible, even when she didn’t know how.

In the end, isn’t that what it’s about with you and me too? Trusting in the God of the impossible. Trusting in the God who have been ever faithful in our lives. Trusting that if God has been faithful to us in the past, He will be faithful to us in the future.

When things are rough, and we’re facing impossible situations, those are the toughest times of all to get through, but those are the most important times of all to lean on our remembrance of God’s faithfulness in our lives, and throughout all of human history. When illness strikes, to remember the Lord who healed the sick, who caused the blind to see, and the lame to walk. When guilt and sin weigh us down, to remember the Lord who forgave and set people free. When fear plagues us, to remember the Lord who calmed the storm, and calmed storms in the souls of men and women. And most of all, when death draws near, to remember the Lord who conquered death and rose to life eternal.

I think Mary, in that moment of bewilderment, when the angel said “Nothing is impossible with God,” drew upon her faith and remembered, and having done that, then went forward and did what God called her to do - bear the Messiah. She trusted that God her Father would never fail her, and would never leave her alone.

I read a very moving story this week about something that happened in the aftermath of an earthquake in Armenia in 1998. It was a horrific earthquake, in which 25,000 Armenians lost their lives. One man, a father of a little boy named Armand, after the earthquake hit, ran frantically through the streets of his town toward the school where his little boy had been in class. When he got to the place where the school had stood, all he found was rubble, and he collapsed momentarily

in a pile of sobs. But just as quickly, he got up and began to dig in the rubble trying to find his child. People around him tried to stop him. "It's futile," they cried, "they're dead, they're all dead." But the man kept digging. Some others helped for awhile, but it was for naught, and they finally walked away in tears. Still he kept digging, even while others thought him foolish. He dug for 12 hours, 24 hours, 36 hours. He dug until he was filthy dirty and dog-tired. He just kept digging and digging, and then, after 36 long hours, he picked up one more piece of cement, and suddenly he heard a muffled groan. "Armand!" he cried hopefully, and from the darkness came a slight, shaking voice, "Papa?" Everybody began digging like mad, and when they were through, they found 14 of the 33 students still alive in the rubble. When Armand emerged he turned to his friends and said, "See, I told you my father wouldn't forget us." (On-line, "A Father Who Keeps His Promises," Dr. Scott Hahn)

Gabriel could very well have said the same thing to Mary, "God won't forget you, Mary. It will be okay." And the same could be said to us whenever we face what seems impossible, "God won't forget you, it will be okay."

Before I finish, I want to mention one more thing. You know, don't you, that God could have saved the world all on His own? God didn't have to use this precious girl to accomplish His saving work, but He did. As many commentators have pointed out, "there is not one word here about Mary's virtue, her worthiness, her suitability or predisposition to faithfulness, not one word that would explain to us why God should choose her - simply that God did." (On-line, "It's Not About Mary," Rev. Fred Anderson)

That's how God is - God chooses who God wills to do His work right alongside of Him. Which means that God may choose you to do something special at some point in your life. Something special that might seem impossible to you, as it did to Mary.

When that happens, do what Mary did, and remember the God for whom nothing is impossible, and trust that He will carry you through anything, absolutely anything in life.

If you have come here and are facing an impossible situation, know that it wasn't an accident that you were here today. Perhaps you were meant to hear Mary's story again. Perhaps you were meant to be reminded that, no matter how overwhelming things may seem, no matter how your plans have been turned upside down, no matter how entrenched the problems you face may seem, God is bigger than all that, and nothing is impossible with God. Like Mary, trust in the God who has been faithful in the past, to be faithful with your future too, and to make a way where you can't see it.

If God can save the world through a baby born by Mary, and conquer death through that same Son, how much more can He do with the impossible situation in your life? Thanks be to God, the God for whom nothing is impossible. I pray that all of us will join Mary and place our lives - all of our lives - into His hands, trusting in His goodness and mercy as shown to us so perfectly in Jesus our Savior. May it be so. Amen.