

# Believing the Impossible

---

Please open your Bible to the book of Luke and chapter 1, or turn to page \_\_\_\_\_ in the Bible under the chair in front of you.

Well, it is Christmastime. A time for family gatherings and gift exchanges and breaks from school and lots of good food. And I don't know if this is the case for you, but I think that many Christians are perhaps more aware of how much the world shapes and influences us at Christmastime more than any other season of the year. This is a time when we feel the push of our culture to make celebrating Christmas about all kinds of other things, rather than Jesus.

So how do we push back against the waves of culture that surround us? How can we allow ourselves to be shaped by the Word of God rather than the desires of the world, the flesh, and the devil?

And I think we have to start with prayerful self-examination. Where in my thinking or beliefs have I become conformed to this world rather than transformed by the renewing of my mind? How have I begun to treasure this world and its values more than Christ?

And then we turn to the Scriptures, and we seek to behold and understand what God has said and taught us to believe. And when confronted with how we fall short, then we need to turn again to God in repentance. We should confess to God, "Lord, I have not loved you as I should, I have put other things above you in my heart." And we seek to forsake those things and walk away from them. And then we resolve that we are going to think and live differently, by the grace of God and in the power of His Spirit.

I don't know where you find yourself today. But I want to suggest that we are all in this process somewhere. We all have things in our lives where we have lived for ourselves and the things of this world, rather than for God. And we need to be renewed in our thinking, so that even at Christmastime, we are seeking first God's kingdom.

And the passage before us this morning, though it is a familiar one to many of us, offers great help and encouragement to our souls. We will be reminded of God's great plan and the response that it should draw out in us. So let's read our text this morning...

Read **Luke 1:26-38**

## Intro

Do you believe impossible things? In the classic children's book, *Alice in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll presents an interaction between the young woman Alice and the evil red queen. Alice is struggling with the absurdity of the world she's in and she says to the queen...

Alice: "One can't believe impossible things."

But the Queen replies: "I daresay you haven't had much practice...When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."<sup>1</sup>



In the story, Alice is struggling to make sense of her world with its talking rabbits and eating mushrooms that make you change size and disappearing cats. And the mad queen just simply asserts that she needs to practice more. You need to believe impossible things every day.

Is that good advice? There are things in the Christian life that seem impossible to believe. There are times in the Christian life that we are confronted with things that don't make sense to us. And when we are faced with things that feel impossible or times when God's plan is hard to understand – what should we do?

I'm asking you to consider some questions as we think about this passage this morning: Do you sometimes struggle to trust that God is really in control? Or if He is in control that He will do what is best for you? Are you willing to trust that He's got this even if things seem impossible?

I believe our text helps us when we find ourselves asking these kinds of questions. I want us to see two lessons that Luke would have us learn from this passage. The first is this...

---

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, 103

## Behold the Plan of God

Luke wants us to see God's wonderful plan. Especially when we find ourselves struggling to make sense of what God is up to, we should step back and behold His plan.

And Luke wants us to see that in these verses God's plan involves some rather unexpected things. Notice first, we see that the angel Gabriel comes from God to this rather unexpected place. So look at verses 26 and 27...

### Luke 1:26-27

**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.

So who is Gabriel? He's kind of a big deal. He's one of two named angels in the Scriptures, the other being Michael. If you were reading along the storyline of the Bible, then you would have last seen the angel Gabriel back in Daniel 9, where he was helping the prophet Daniel understand God's plan for redemptive history while his people were in captivity in Babylon. And there, Gabriel told Daniel in answer to his prayers that God was going to not only bring his people back to the land after their time in captivity was completed, but that He was going to send a Messiah, a king who will reign over an everlasting kingdom. This was hundreds of years before Gabriel shows up here in Luke one. And he tells Daniel to seal up this revelation of God's plan because it's not time yet.

And this plan of God to save sinners goes back even further than hundreds of years, as Pastor Mike explained last week. It goes all the way back to the beginning, when God promised that a seed of the woman will be bruised but will crush the head of the serpent. And this plan that has been in the works since the beginning is now being revealed in this day. God's people have been waiting and anticipating and longing for the day when these promises will be fulfilled. They've been expecting that.

But then, God sends his mighty angel Gabriel to this little place called Nazareth in a remote region called Galilee. That is not expected. This is surprising. Because it's so small and remote, we don't know much about Nazareth. The disciple Nathaniel says in John's gospel, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" So this place has some sort of reputation as being a sort of backwoods, a nothing-there kind of place. You wouldn't expect big things to come from Nazareth.

It's winter-time in Indiana, and that means it's basketball season. And one of the greatest movies of all time is all about Indiana basketball. It's called *Hoosiers* (show picture) And the movie tells the story of a small school in a remote town named Hickory, and their journey to the state championship taking on all of these big schools from the cities. It's inspired by the true story of Milan High School (show picture) who won the 1954 state title in the day when all the schools played in the same tournament, regardless of their size. Even some of the actors are from local schools, like Lebanon and Western Boone.



You know, we love a good underdog story like that with heroes from unknown places like Luke Skywalker from Tatooine or Frodo from the Shire or Dorothy from Kansas.

And here, Nazareth is such a small place, that Luke has to tell us that it's in Galilee or we might not know where it is. Likewise, Mary is just an average girl. We don't know how old Mary was exactly – maybe 12 to 15 years old. She's a very young woman. We're not told who were parents are or her background. She's just a simple girl, living in a simple, out-of-the-way, little-known place.

And I know that we're so familiar with this story that it can be hard to imagine it being any other way. But God could have done this all kinds of ways. He could have had Gabriel go to one of the high priests of the day in the city of Jerusalem and say, "Your daughter, who is well-educated and brought up in comfort. She will be the one to carry the Messiah." But no, God chooses this young woman Mary in this little place called Nazareth in Galilee. Kent Hughes writes, "Mary was a nobody from a nothing town in the middle of nowhere."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, 32

This is rather unexpected, isn't it? That the God who created and upholds all things would choose these humble circumstances for the birth of His Son. Do you see how God has condescended, how He has stooped down low for us?

Maybe think about it this way. Parents, I know you want the best for your kids. You want them to be clothed in a way that they won't be embarrassed. You want them to have a warm coat in the winter, even if they won't wear it or lose it over and over again. You want your kids to be raised in a safe and secure environment. You want them to enjoy celebrating Christmas and things like that. You want the best you can give to your children.

Now think about the fact that your heavenly Father gave Jesus far less than any of you have given to your own children. He could have done it another way, but He chose to do it this way so that we might see and appreciate the humility of God and the Lord Jesus in fulfilling the plan of redemption.

Before the foundations of the world, it was appointed that Jesus would be born to this young woman from this nothing town in the middle of nowhere as a part of God's gracious plan to save sinners like you and me.

Doesn't that show us something of the humility and grace of God? And doesn't that challenge how we ought to live ourselves in a world that pushes us to be proud and self-interested and greedy for more? Should we live differently and follow the path of our Savior?

Just think about the area of giving and our finances. Over the past few years, I have read some statistics on the giving habits of Evangelicals.<sup>3</sup> And while Evangelicals – talking about those who hold to the truth of the Bible and exclusivity of the gospel for salvation and who go to church – they are among the most giving of people, the overall giving from Evangelicals continues to trend downwards. And what's even more striking is that giving tends to decrease for families even when income rises. And not just giving to churches, but to all kinds of charities.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://greymatterresearch.com/the-giving-gap/>

Did you know that? The more that wealth rises, the less people tend to give. It seems that the more money people have, the more their money has them. I would suggest that isn't the way of Jesus.

If we were following the path of Jesus, who gave up the glories of heaven to enter into history as a humble man, then we would use the resources that the Lord has entrusted to us for His glory rather than for ourselves. If we are regularly beholding the wonderful plan of God for us, then we wouldn't cling so tightly to the things of the world.

It's a wonder to me that every year, I come across things that I think I need right around November and December. I don't think much at all about these particular things the other ten months of the year, but for some reason (probably advertisers and my own greed...), when Christmas is closing in, it feels like I need this thing to be happy. And maybe that's just me. But I would suspect that most of us need this reminder to follow the path of Jesus who walked in generosity and humility.

God's plan for our salvation is unexpected and humble. It's also marked by incredible grace. Look again at verses 28-30...

**Luke 1:28-30**

**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.

Gabriel tells Mary that she is favored and that the Lord is with her. What an incredible thing to be told by an angel! The word for 'favored' here has to do with being given blessing and grace from God. Notice, Mary isn't the source of grace here, she's being blessed by the Lord.

Mary has been given the incredible privilege and responsibility to carry and raise the Messiah. This is a remarkable blessing. Of all the women who have ever lived, she alone has been given this grace.

And Gabriel continues...

### **Luke 1:31-33**

**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.”

Now we hear the plan of God revealed to Mary. Listen to all that she’s told here. She will bear a son. His name will be Jesus – or Yahweh saves, that’s what the name means. And He will be great and will be the Son of the Most High. In other words, your Son will be God’s Son. This baby who will be conceived in your womb will be both fully man and fully God.

And He will reign on David’s throne, in fulfillment of all the promises which were made and recorded for us in the Old Testament. All of those stories and prophecies which speak of and anticipate the coming Messiah will be realized in this Davidic King. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And kingdom will never end – it will outlast all others and continue on into eternity. Nothing will stop it or overcome it.

This is God’s wonderful, surprising, and unexpected plan to save sinners. This is the plan of God to redeem what was lost and heal what is broken. This is God’s plan to extend grace and mercy to rebels and enemies. It’s His plan to seek and save the lost.

There are so many in our world today who are seeking some other plan, some other way to heal what is broken inside them and in our world. A lot of people try to find it in trying to be a good person, being nice and kind and doing good for others. Or they try really hard to avoid doing bad things. Many people are desperately trying to do enough good that they’ll deserve God’s favor.

But what we see here in Gabriel’s message to Mary is that God’s plan to rescue sinners isn’t based on doing good things or somehow earning the love of God. It’s a gift that God freely gives – the Lord is with you! And just as Mary found favor with God and was given the incredible privilege of bearing the Son of God, there’s an even greater privilege available to all who trust in Jesus.



You see, when you put your faith in Jesus, you are welcomed into the family of God, such that you are now a brother or sister of Jesus, a joint heir with Him. We saw this last week from Galatians 4. And we see this even later on in Luke's gospel (something we saw in Matthew earlier this year...). You may remember the story. Mary and Jesus's brothers were looking for him and remember what Jesus says?

**Luke 8:21**

But he answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

The family of God is made up of all who trust in the gospel and obey its call. So there is a privilege, even greater than Mary's, available to all who would put their faith in Jesus to become a part of God's family.

So can I ask you this morning, have you obeyed the gospel call? Have you put your trust in Jesus to save you? And I'm talking to you, not the person beside you.

Friends, this is God's grace for you. So behold and see the gracious and wonderful and mysterious and surprising plan of God!

This should be an ongoing habit in the life of the believer. We should be regularly stepping back and looking at the bigger picture – what has God done? What is He doing? Maybe this Christmas season would be a good time for you and your family to remind each other of God's great plan to save sinners. One fun way to do that is by walking through an advent calendar. I know that we're already into December at this point, but it's not too late to do something like that. I can tell you that for our family, it's become one of my favorite traditions. We read from a devotional book and pray and then open the next day on our advent gift boxes. It's a helpful way to behold the amazing plan of God in sending Jesus for our sins.

Another good way to behold God's plan is through music. There's so much good music available today that is rich with truth for our souls. Music can speak to our hearts and give expression to our joys and celebration as well as our longings and grief. And music can help us fix our hearts on the wonderful plan of God through time. How can you use good Christian music to help you behold the plan of God?



A third way to behold God's gracious plan is by telling others. "Go tell it on the mountain! That Jesus Christ is born!" Talk about Jesus when you gather with family and friends and brothers and sisters in the church. Speak about what God has done in your life. Take the time to express gratitude to God and give testimony to His grace. Invite that friend or co-worker to come to church with you. Ask that person how you can pray for them. And as you talk about the power and grace of God, you will behold His good plan yourself. Let us behold the plan of God!

## **Believe the Power of God**

Secondly, this passage calls us not only to behold the plan of God but to believe in the power of God. Just after Gabriel explains this amazing plan of God to save sinners through Mary's conceiving of a child who will be the Son of the Most High, Mary asks in verse 34...

### **Luke 1:34**

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

She asks a pretty reasonable question. How is this going to happen? I'm not married. How can I become pregnant without being with a man? This sounds impossible.

Maybe you've felt this kind of question in your own life. God, how can I believe what you've said? How do I know that you've really got this? My situation seems impossible, God. I've been waiting too long. Or this thing in my life or my past is too big. Nothing's ever going to change. It's impossible!

Or maybe, like Mary, God's plan just seems too mysterious, too hard to comprehend. Why would you do it this way, God? This doesn't make sense to me. It's hard to believe what you say is true.

Can I just point something out? If you believe in an infinite God, then there are going to be mysteries in your faith. If you believe that God has no bounds and no limits, a God who is all-powerful and all-knowing, then there are going to be things beyond your comprehension in His plan. His power is beyond our ability to fully understand.

And by the way, that's not a problem for your faith, that's a product of it. It is because God is all-powerful and all-knowing and without any limitations or bounds that He is

worthy to be worshipped and obeyed. So the mystery of the virgin conception isn't a problem for our faith, it proves that God's thoughts are higher than our own.

Sometimes programmers will say that something is a 'feature and not a bug.' It's what happens when something that seems like it's a problem becomes seen as a good thing and not a bad thing. I've read that when you pull down on a web page, like on your phone, and it refreshes – you know what I'm talking about? Well, apparently that was originally the result of a bug in the programming. It wasn't supposed to work like that. But then as people interacted with websites and needed a quick way to refresh the page, it became a convenient feature. What was once seen as a problem is now something useful.

Friends, the challenges and questions of our faith, they're not bugs they're a feature of believing in a God who is bigger than you are and who will always be beyond our ability to fully figure out. That's a healthy part of faith.

Maybe you've wrestled with questions in your faith, or maybe you've got some questions right now. And things that the Bible claims – like a virgin giving birth or the miracle stories in the gospels – maybe you even have some doubts that you've just sort of kept to yourself? If that's you, can I challenge you even a little further?

Which is harder to believe – that God came in the flesh in Jesus and lived in perfect righteousness without any sin, or that the way that He was born was miraculous? You know, Christians worship a God who brought the world into existence by speaking. It doesn't surprise the Christian that God does miracles to display His power. It's not a surprise, and it's not a problem. It's what having faith means. It's just more proof that God really is infinite and all-powerful.

So if you're wrestling with doubts, or even struggling to believe the virgin conception or the miracles of the Bible, then I'd say get a ticket and stand in line. You're behind Mary. She didn't have any idea how this could happen either.

And yet, in this God is putting His power on display. So do not despise mysteries. Don't run away from your doubts and questions. They're a feature, not a bug. In a religion in which we worship an infinite, all-powerful God, there are going to be mysteries.

So Mary asks this question – how can this be? And look at Gabriel’s response...

**Luke 1:35-36**

**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.

Gabriel explains, this is what’s going to happen. The Spirit of God will come upon you and God’s power will overshadow you so that this son will be called holy. He will be God’s Son. And if you need a bit of encouragement, then consider this – your cousin Elizabeth is also pregnant. She who was unable to conceive will now also bear a son. And then there’s this final word Gabriel gives...

**Luke 1:37**

For nothing will be impossible with God.”

So Mary has asked – how can this be? And the answer is simple: there’s nothing God cannot do. God is all-powerful. He’s sovereign. He’s the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Nothing is impossible for God.

And that message is for us today as well. Our faith rests on the sovereignty of God. The Anglican bishop J.C. Ryle said it well,

*“Faith never rests so calmly and peacefully as when it lays its head on the pillow of God's omnipotence.”<sup>4</sup>*

God’s omnipotence means that He is all-powerful. That He can do anything. If you grew up in the church, maybe you know the song, “Our God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there’s nothing my God cannot do.”

And yes, God can do anything. But maybe you’ve wondered in the past – why did God do it *this* way? Why the virgin conception? I was talking with someone from our church this week, and he mentioned this same question. Why this way? Why a virgin?

---

<sup>4</sup> J.C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Luke 1:37. <https://www.preceptaustin.org/j-c-ryle-gospel-of-luke-commentary>

And I don't know all the reasons. Again, God's ways are higher than ours. But I do think that we learn some things in the miracle of the virgin conception. One of the things that it shows us is that salvation is all of God and all of grace. From beginning to end, it's God who does it, and it's His grace that makes it happen. From the fulfilling of prophecies to the virgin conception to the miracles Jesus performed to His crucifixion and resurrection on the third day, the whole story of salvation is one in which God accomplishes it and His grace that invites us in. And He does all of this so that He alone gets the glory.

Over and over in the Bible, God will strip away all of man's strength and faith in himself, so that we will see that He alone accomplishes our victory. He alone will get the glory. He alone can do the impossible.

I wonder if you sometimes struggle to believe this – that nothing is impossible with God. You know, it wouldn't have been any easier for them to believe it back then. They're just as smart and aware as we are today. Miracles like this would have felt just as impossible for them to believe as they are for us.

And yet, look at Mary's response...

**Luke 1:38**

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.

Mary says simply – I'm in. I'll do what my Lord calls me to do. It's a simple statement of faith. It's not a naïve statement; she's now aware this will be costly. She knows that Joseph might walk from her. Her family might disown her. The community may reject her. But she's willing to pay the price, even if her reputation is damaged and her body takes on the risk of pregnancy. She's willing to serve as the Lord calls her to.

And we see here in Mary's example, that she has learned to trust that nothing is impossible with God. She's not going to be conformed to the thinking of the world, putting her hope only in things that everyone else is pursuing like status and stuff. Her faith is in the God who can do the impossible.

Again, for the Christian, our faith rests on things that seem impossible. Jesus has done things that would be impossible if He wasn't really God. He had a miraculous conception

and was born of a virgin. He taught us how to live with a wisdom and authority like no one had heard before, never able to be tripped up or confounded. His life was perfect, fulfilling the law and its righteous demands, showing justice and mercy and love, despite being treated unjustly and being lied about and betrayed. Though He was totally innocent, He laid down His life for our sins, taking our place. And He rose again on the third day, defeating sin and death. And though it may seem impossible, His death and resurrection means that you can be saved. You can be forgiven and made new because nothing is impossible with God.

I wonder if Alice from Alice in Wonderland were to have a conversation with her and tell her, “One can’t believe impossible things!” Do you think Mary would say, “Why, I’ve believed in all kinds of things that seem impossible when God is involved.”

Can I ask you today – do you believe that God can do the impossible? Do you believe the gospel? Do you believe that God can save you and change you from the inside out? Do you believe that He can be trusted and that His plan is for your good?

If we’re going to be shaped by the Word this Christmastime and not by our culture, then let us start here.

Let's pray together...