

Advent 4B

December 20, 2020

Today's bible story is a staple of this season. God dispatches the angel Gabriel to deliver miraculous news to Mary. She is pregnant. The Messiah, the anointed one, the coming Redeemer that prophets predicted to many generations is growing inside of her womb.

Eight centuries prior it was the Hebrew prophet Isaiah who declared, "For unto us a child is born, unto us, a son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulders, and his name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

This is a miracle!

By the 2nd century, the developing Christian Church began to emphasize another remarkable feature of this story—the Virgin Birth. The Holy Spirit conceived this baby. Jesus, then, was both human and divine. This is a miracle!

I want to point out another miracle in the story. This is a miracle that many of us overlook as irrelevant. I'm referring to where the angel Gabriel delivered the message. God dispatched the angel to a city in Galilee known as Nazareth.

Nazareth. We identify it with the cultural power and popularity of Jesus. But Nazareth was far from a desirable postal code. Nazareth was an area of entrenched peasant poverty. Nazarenes were labourers on the bottom rung of a ladder. People who came from Nazareth would have been considered uncivilized by the elite in Jerusalem. We could even regard the label "Jesus of Nazareth" as politically loaded. It's like Jim the Redneck; James from the Ghetto, or Jane from the Backwoods. Despite the social connotations of Nazareth, God chose this place. God picked this peasant girl. This is a miracle!

When God decided to step from eternity into time, there were so many prestigious places that God could have selected in the ancient world. God could have selected Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel. Beautiful, with its abundant water supply and central location. But God selected a peasant village off the beaten path. God could have selected the city of Rome whose name meant power. But God selected an unwed teen mother from the backside of town to transform the planet. And God could have even chosen the great nation of Egypt, the cradle of all civilization in North Africa. But rather than floating down the mighty Nile river, God walked through the poor streets of Nazareth.

I can imagine the look of anxiety on Mary's young face. Can you hear her? *"What you're telling me is impossible. Who is going to believe I am pregnant by God? Joseph's family could press charges under law and have me stoned to death. And if that isn't enough, who is going to believe the Messiah comes from me? From this family? From this village? Impossible."* But the angel comforts her, "With God nothing will be impossible."

And this is good news for all of us today. Many of us, like Mary - we are pregnant with possibility. And we might just be ignoring it for all sorts of reasons. For you, it might be a false sense of insecurity. You think low of yourself. "I can never achieve that!" For others, it might be a false sense of security. They think too highly of themselves. "I will never do that."

And as a result, we may be settling with the status quo — all because of what we consider impossible. But with God, or more specifically with hope, faith, and love, the seemingly impossible is always a possibility.

Some of you are living testaments. What good was supposed to come out of your hometown? You might be the first in your family to experience events, travel, and meet people that your parents could never dream for themselves. This is why we thank God for loving communities that supported, nurtured, and cared for us. These are the people God used to help us reach goals that they could not even imagine for themselves. They made the impossible possible for us.

And it is for this reason, like Mary, we are given a charge, a challenge.

Let's celebrate the coming of Christ by striving toward the impossible. Let's attempt the unthinkable, imagine the inconceivable, and overcome what we thought was insurmountable. We serve a God that can show up in the most unlikely of places, will use the most unlikely of people, and transform the most improbable conditions.

Are you willing to believe that? And then, are you ready to make it so?

Amen.