

LUKE 1:26-38 12-20-15
MARY AND THE PROMISE OF GOD

(Luke 1) Now that I am a grandpa I find myself playing a lot of hide-and-seek, mostly on the hide end of things. Do you remember when you were a kid, and you played hide-and-seek? When it was your turn to seek you would cover your eyes, or pretend to. You would count to ten and then you would say..... "ready or not, here I come." Do you sometimes feel that line is appropriate for Christmas? You get past Thanksgiving and you can just hear Christmas saying, "Ready or not..." More than most years, this year, I'm ready. And I want to help you get ready, not by giving you some shopping hints, but by directing your thoughts to the central character of the Christmas story and to his leading lady, who is also His mother. Let's read from the gospel of Luke, a portion of Scripture about Mary, the mother of Jesus. "Oh no" some of you may think.

"There you go dragging religion into Christmas again." Yep, here I go. Hope you enjoy it. **26-38**

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. ³⁰ 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 name Him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; ³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

We will look today at the promise of a miracle child, the power of an omnipotent God, and the prayer of a godly woman. ®

Luke starts out this story of the great announcement by dating it for us. He says it happened in the sixth month, but that doesn't mean it was June. The sixth month here is the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elizabeth which was just announced in the previous verses. Now, for those of us in this church this type of dating should be no problem. We've gotten quite used to this kind of talk. For instance, we say that the Sanders household is in the fourth month or the McGlothlin house is in the eighth month. Now, in the sixth month, as happened in the announcing of John the

Baptist's birth, the angel Gabriel is sent from God. The term "angel" in the Greek means "messenger" but it seems that Gabriel especially is **the** chief messenger of the Lord. It is his great privilege to announce the entrance of God's Son into this world. So, the great announcement comes in the sixth month from God, thru Gabriel and it says "to a city in Galilee called Nazareth." It does not happen in the capitol city of Jerusalem, but in the insignificant city of Nazareth. And the promise comes to a virgin, a young woman named Mary, who was engaged or betrothed to Joseph. Now, betrothal was a more binding relationship than our engagement. It was a type of legal contract. And such a betrothal would last between a month and two years. So, scene one begins with Mary sitting in her house when Gabriel enters in and says **28**, "*Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.*" The Roman Catholic Bible says, "Hail Mary full of grace." Actually, the word "hail" is just "greetings" as the NIV has it. What is translated "favored" simply means that she received great grace from God. Now, I think we are all aware that the Roman church pays high honor to Mary. She is prayed to; she is offered a form of worship. She is placed on a level almost, if not equal to the level of her divine Son. Sure, not every Catholic does this, but many certainly do and the church has invented extraordinary doctrines about Mary. The immaculate conception dogma says Mary was conceived in her mother without the taint of original sin. Hers was a miraculous, immaculate conception. In recent years Roman Catholicism has introduced the doctrine of the bodily assumption of Mary, teaching that she did not die but was taken up into heaven. But for some time they have taught, over against Scripture, that Mary remained a virgin perpetually. Now, this is not affirmed at all in Scripture and is the kind of thing that most of us find quite alien to our faith. But in our reaction to the exaggerations of Mary's status let's be careful that we don't withhold from her appropriate honor and esteem. What woman, or man for that matter, could possibly have been more blessed than Mary? The angel calls her "the favored one of God." She was a sinner, yes, but one who was especially favored by God and blessed beyond description by being chosen as the mother of Christ. Mary's age is not given, but most likely she was in her late teens. It is then, in her period of betrothal before marriage, that the angel promises her a child who will be the son of God and the eternal king of Israel. Wow! That's a heavy promise. How would you react? Mary seem to have been blown away by the whole experience. No doubt she is confused. She is fearful. Is joy present? Maybe a touch, but she really needs more time to let it all sink in. However, she does have her wits about her enough to ask the obvious question **34** *Mary said to the angel, "How can*

this be, since I am a virgin?" Yea, how can it be? The skeptics have asked this for centuries, but Mary was the first. How can it be? That's a good question - and the angel is ready with a good answer.

His answer is our second point - it is the power of God. The promised miracle would come to be due to the power of a God who is not limited by nature 35 *The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.* There was no physical divine/human intercourse like you have in Greek mythology. This child is planted in the womb of Mary by God's power. I don't pretend to know just how God did this but I do know it was by His power the miracle occurred. It is fascinating to me that so many people refuse to believe in the virgin birth of Christ. If God can part the seas and rain manna and raise the dead, if God can create man from nothing once then why can't He do it again? Who is this God anyway? Is He not the Creator of heaven and earth? Is He not God the Almighty? Gabriel says 37 *For nothing will be impossible with God.*" Centuries earlier God promised a son to a 90 year old woman who laughed about it. But God asked then, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" No, no, a 1000 times no! He is El Shaddai, the All-Mighty God. Virgin births are no problem for Him. *For nothing will be impossible with God.* Gabriel is out to strengthen Mary's faith. He reminds her who God is. He also points her to what God has done 36 *behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.* Elizabeth was too old for kids and God did it for her. *Mary, remember who God is, Mary.* And I stand here to say to you Christian, *remember who God is.* Remember that your Lord and Savior finds nothing impossible, no obstacle too big, no task too difficult. Because of that great truth you can rest in Him and in His word. What God says, He will certainly do. Did He keep His word to Mary? Has He promised you anything He cannot do? He is able. He rules over every spirit. He can keep you from the evil one. He rules over death. He can raise you up and give you eternal life. When you read God's word and God makes a promise you don't worry about whether or not it will get done. In His time, He can do it. You can rest. *For nothing will be impossible with God.* JC Ryle said, *"Faith never rests so calmly and peacefully as when it lays its head on the pillow of God's omnipotence."* During his ministry in Philadelphia the late Donald Grey Barnhouse used to hold a question and answer class on Sunday afternoons. These attracted a lot of seminary students and one day a young man asked Dr. Barnhouse how in the

world the sea could have parted for Israel. That seemed impossible. Barnhouse replied in his booming voice with one word, "God." The students said, "Oh, I see." And his pastor said, "No, son, you don't see. None of us do. We can't wrap our finite minds around the miracles of God.

But, not only are we to rest in our Almighty God we are to also obey Him. One truly flows from the other. Why do we so often fail to obey? Is it not because we doubt God's ability to bless us if we do? People are afraid to give their \$100 to the church because they don't believe God can take care of them without it. We marry unbelievers because we don't think God can find us a truly Christian spouse or make us happy as a single. We don't extend ourselves to serve because we fear we will be taken advantage of. But you trust the God of the impossible and you will joyfully obey. God told Abraham to sacrifice his own son and Abraham went out to obey. How on earth could he do that? Hebrews tells us he could do it because he believed that God is able to raise the dead. *For nothing shall be impossible with God.* So, my fellow-struggler you too rest in Him. You too obey Him.

And also you hope in Him. If God has promised something it is sure. But if He hasn't, you still know it's a possibility, right? There is hope for anything because nothing shall be impossible for God. This means you can set your sights high. You're not limited by your own resources and God isn't limited at all. Great things are possible for you - in God. Listen now: our goals must be arranged by the will of God but never restricted by the power of God. His power is infinite. Our goals must be arranged by the will of God but never restricted by the power of God. Friends, you know, God can do amazing things. Who would have believed that little group of disciples in the upper room would be able to change the world like they did. *For nothing shall be impossible with God.* In Acts 5 Gamaliel, a Jewish leader, said of the early Christians, "Unless God is with them they won't last, but if he is nothing we can do will stop them." Was God with them? You better know it and those guys accomplished the impossible and drastically changed the world. Oh, friend, it's possible for you to have your dream. It's not too much for God. For "with God" and that's the key, Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing," but *with God* all things are possible.

Do you have a "with God" perspective? Are you willing to try things that without God are doomed to failure? In Numbers 13 there is the story of the 12 spies that went into Canaan, into the promised land to spy it out and report back to Israel. 10 men came back and said **31-33** "*We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us.*" ³² *So they gave out to the*

sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size.³³ There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight." What are they saying? "It's impossible." They are focusing on the obstacles. Did they have a "with-God" perspective? Uh-uh. But **30** Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it. Caleb saw the same big people, but Caleb saw a bigger God who had said to Israel, "this is your land, go and take it." Numbers 14:**6-9** Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes;⁷ and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land.⁸ If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey.⁹ Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." Here it is - Joshua and Caleb have a "with God" perspective and it radically changed their approach to life. They did not dwell on the obstacles. They rested on His promise and obeyed His command and hoped in His power. They knew that with God nothing is impossible. Did you hear that Christian? Did you hear that North Park Church? Did you hear that Dan Hendley? Lord knows that I need to hear this in my heart as much as any of you.

Back to Luke 1. We have looked at the promise of a miracle child and the power of God. Now let's examine the prayer of a godly woman. **38** And Mary said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." Do you see the pristine beauty of that? Every time I read it this week my eyes watered. What a gorgeous attitude this woman had! It is an attitude of complete surrender. It is the attitude of a bond-servant, and it is the attitude of someone who is full of grace. Absolute surrender to God's will. And you've got to remember, this announcement did not mean all cherries and cream for Mary. Here she is, supposedly a virgin, and she's going to be pregnant? Well, you just can't hide that. Her fiancée will have to know. And how do you explain to your fiancée that you are having a baby when he knows it is not by him? From the story in Mathew, we know that Joseph was so upset by this that he considered divorce. Knowing the problem she said, "Be it done unto me, according to Thy word. "

Then there is the problem of what people would think. Here is chaste little religious Mary, pregnant outside of marriage. What a scandal! What a disgrace to her family! And remember that in the Old Testament adultery is punishable by stoning. Mary was going to pay a heavy price for this but she accepted with open arms -- the good and the bad and said, *“Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.”* Mary calls herself a bondslave. This was a favorite self-designation of the Apostle Paul and it communicates so much. It reveals great humility. It shows one to be in a completely dependent, completely subservient relation to the Lord. And the neat thing here is that Mary doesn't just call herself God's bondslave after thinking thru how she could come across as being very humble. The term flowed from her mouth spontaneously. She said it again in **48a** *For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave.* This is really how Mary viewed herself and she didn't say it begrudgingly. To her, being God's servant girl is the greatest privilege in the world. And God, her master, honored that beautiful attitude. The attitude of the bondservant means you see yourself without any rights, only privileges, without any glory, just duty. The bondslave cares only to please her master. She is not a slave to the opinions of men - only to God's. She doesn't view herself as a noble volunteer but as a humble slave. Christian friend, is this your attitude! Do you see yourself as God's servant? Can we stop asking, "What do I want?" and start asking, "Lord, Master, what would you have me do?" When we serve God can we do it not with the arrogance of a noble volunteer but with the humility of a slave? The slave doesn't tell the master how he will serve him. The slave doesn't pick his own chores. He does what the master assigns him to do - no matter where it is or what it is. So often we come to God offering ourselves as specialist. "Well Lord, here I am, ready to do your will, as long as it's in Pennsylvania. Here I am, Lord, ready to do your will as long as it doesn't interfere with my career." Maybe we let God know that there are certain jobs we just don't do. I thank God Moses didn't say, "I don't do rivers." I thank God David didn't say, "I don't do giants." I thank God Mary Magdalene didn't say, "I don't do feet." I thank God Peter didn't say, "I don't do Gentiles." I thank God Jesus didn't say, "I don't do crosses." The bondservant does what the Master assigns him to do. The slave doesn't demand recognition and applause. He works out of duty but also out of love and loyalty for His master. Furthermore, that slave doesn't demand flowers and ease. He takes whatever the Master brings - no bitterness, no anger. *“Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.”* Can you say that to God? "Whatever you do with me Lord is okay by me. I'm yours for better or worse, richer

or poorer, health or sickness. I surrender to whatever you please to do with me.” One way you can tell whether you're a servant is by how you react when people treat you like one. Know what I mean? Those times folks just seem to expect that you exist to meet their needs. Those times you get no appreciation for what you do. Do you react like a noble volunteer or a humble servant? Humble servants of Jesus are just pleased to serve for the honor of a Master who has given Himself for our rescue and our joy. Knowing we are loved and cared for, we are able to love and care for others in Jesus’ name.

What the church can never get enough of is bondslaves - individuals who view themselves as unworthy and Christ as all-worthy. Individuals who put His interest ahead of self-interest. What would a church like that do? Well, for one thing she would cause a panic in hell, Satan is afraid of bondslaves because thru them God does mighty things. He brings His kingdom to earth. He did it thru Mary. Can He do it thru you, thru us? Count on the God of possibilities and commit yourself now to be his bonds slave this Christmas and in the coming year. Will you say it now to God: *Behold, the bonds slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.*