Nothing Is Impossible With God

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This morning, we dive into the part of the creed that has been fiercely debated for over 2,000 years. Last week, Pete talked about “…and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord” — namely, the truth that Jesus is both fully God and fully human. In the next line, the sparks fly: Jesus, “…who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.” What is THAT all about? “Conceived by the Holy Spirit” affirms the divinity of Jesus. “Born of the Virgin Mary” affirms His humanity. He’s got a heavenly Dad, but Jesus was carried in a humanly-mother’s womb.

Let us look at how this is described in Luke’s birth narrative, Luke 1:26-38: In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.’ But Mary was much perplexed by Gabriel’s words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 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 ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.

From a church history perspective, this Jesus-part of the Creed is a direct, calculated response to the Gnostic thinkers of the day. For Christian Gnostics in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, God could not have possibly become a real-live human being. Knowledge, which in the Greek is “gnosis”...
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(i.e., Gnosticism), was the only way to God, they argued. Spirit is good, physical matter is bad. The goal for the Gnostic was to become spiritually pure and somehow mystically united with Christ. Their goal in life was to arouse the spiritual self to a heightened state, where one could be free of one’s degrade-ed, earthly body. Gnostics simply could not fathom a God who would be born of a mother, or, subsequently, a God who would die a messy, earthly death! So the Church countered with what was already in the gospel; namely, that the Holy Spirit was with Jesus Christ at conception and was born of a woman through a birth canal with the same blood, water and mess that slides every other human baby out into the world (The Rev. Anne Robertson, February 2004).

This is the other flashpoint for us: Jesus, “Born of the Virgin Mary.” The adherence to the “virgin” birth was an issue for the Western Church in Rome, more than for the Eastern Orthodox Church in Constantinople (now Istanbul). The insistence that Mary was and remained a virgin all her life was/is a Roman Catholic insistence. But I remember it being a deal-breaker, also, for a small German-reformed church in central Ohio, where I interviewed in 1989 to become their part-time pastor. It was absolutely necessary for the church council that I stated my belief in the Virgin Birth. All the while, though, I remember thinking, “But what about Jesus’ brothers and sisters mentioned in scripture?” Some have explained that these were Jesus’ step-siblings from a prior marriage of Joseph’s, OR, that they were really just Jesus’ cousins. Maybe there is something else going on with Mother Mary’s virginity, don’t you think?

Frankly, I do believe that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. I believe because I believe in the very first statement of the Creed. It goes, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” If you agree that God made the heavens and the earth, a virgin birth is not going to be too difficult to pull off. If God is those things—if God is intimate and personal like a good parent, and if God is more powerful than anything we could ever think or imagine, then it would be hard to say that anything as crazy and wild as a virgin birth could not have actually happened! If God is capable of designing, then creating the first human prototype in Adam, then Eve, then God can certainly orchestrate a mysterious kind of cross-fertilization (or no cross-fertilization at all) in a teenage girl’s womb. Frankly, given the stats and stories in scripture, God is able to enter into our humanity any way God chooses! (Moses, a Hebrew Slave; David, a Shepherd Boy;
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Esther, another Jewish girl, who becomes a courageous Queen—God enters into humanity, into human life, any way God chooses.)

Here’s the deal. Christianity is **founded** upon a miracle. The heart and soul of being Jesus-followers is the **miracle** that God becomes flesh, and lives and dies among us. If that’s not miraculous enough, God becomes flesh because we are a mess; and yet, God loves us anyway and, more than anything else, wants to rescue us into a new life! It makes perfect sense that if God Himself is going to intersect our space-and-time, and live among us, die among us, and be raised again from the dead among us, that God would come into this world as an outrageous **miracle**. A skeptic might think this crazy and unbelievable but not for a believing Christian.

The miracle of our Holy Spirit-conceived and virgin-borned Son of God shows us something true about the nature of God. It’s the key verse in this morning’s reading, Luke 1:37: “For NOTHING will be impossible with God!” It shows us that God fulfills God’s promises. Nothing will be impossible with God.

Now, I’m not even talking about what to us seems really impossible. Like a football deflected off of Oakland Raiders’ safety Jack Tatum which miraculously falls into the open hands of Pittsburgh Steelers’ fullback Franco Harris, who miraculously dodges several Raiders, running 40 yards into the end zone with time running out in the 1972 AFC Division Playoff game!

No, Harris’s “Immaculate Reception” doesn’t even compare to what the “God of Impossibilities” can do. Or we could think of the seeming impossibility of ascending Mt. Everest. Junko Tabei, sickly and asthmatic as a child, not only climbed Mt. Everest as the first woman ever (in 1975), but then she climbed each of the highest mountains on each of the seven continents, all by 1992. Junko Tabei completed the “impossible”—conquering each and all of the “Seven Summits”! But this doesn’t even compare to what the God of Impossibilities can do. How about the 49-year-old, ultramarathoner Pat Farmer, from Sydney, Australia? Last year, Farmer ran the 13,000 miles from the North Pole to the South Pole in 10 months, 13 days.

Franco Harris, Junko Tabei, Pat Farmer…hard, grueling, agonizing accomplishments of the seemingly, humanly impossible. But what God is able to do and accomplish is so much more than these stories. More than anything, God is more than able to be with you in whatever might seem to you like a day-to-day “impossibility.” In fact, for those of us whose lives are scary, difficult, and troubled, we have a God for whom nothing is impossi-
The sweetness of God’s miracle—of God taking on flesh and bone—is that God knows all about the impossible moments of our lives. For those of us whose lives seem in a precariously “impossible” place know that nothing is impossible with God. God keeps God’s promises to be with you and for you.

The sweetness of God’s miracle—of God taking on flesh and bone—is that God knows all about the impossible moments of our lives. God knows about a life of facing giants, or of surviving threatening storms. God knows about a life of falling into or digging out of the Pit. The writer of Hebrews puts it simply: “Because Jesus himself was tested by what he suffered, Jesus is able to help those who are being tested” (Hebrews 2:18). When we are overwhelmed, when we are stressed, depressed, discouraged—we can know that Jesus knows what we are going through. In all his humanity, Jesus gets it. Jesus gets our full-out raw tears of sorrow and pain, because Jesus wept real tears. Jesus gets our moments of shaking our fists in frustration, because Jesus got angry. Jesus gets it when our neighbors are thirsty and hungry and homeless, because Jesus got thirsty and hungry and was abandoned. Jesus gets it when we suffer, because He suffered (John 11:33-35; Mark 11:15; John 19:28; Matthew 4:2; Luke 22:44).

"There was not one easy day in the whole journey," Pat Farmer, the ultra-marathoner, said of his 13,000 mile quest.

"Every day I felt terrible. I knew [that each] day was a day I never had to face again. There’s something about going the distance, something about fighting the elements; there’s something special about doing something for another person, about sacrificing yourself to be able to improve another person’s quality of life."

Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, is our sacrificing Savior. He sacrificed Himself to improve our “quality of life!” The God who replaces His crown of glory for a crown of thorns, the God of the Impossible, makes it possible for us to live new lives and to live forever.

There are only three people named in the Creed who represent our humanness. There is Jesus, fully God AND fully human, and then there is Mary and Pontius Pilate. Next week, we will find out that Pilate stands for the part in us and the world that rejects the God of Impossibilities. We will find out that Pilate stands for the part in us and the world that participates, directly and indirectly, in killing God’s Messenger. Then there is Mary, who stands for the part in us and the world that accepts the God of Impossibilities, the God Who makes it possible for us to live, and live with hope and joy. Like Mary, this week, will you make yourself available to God? Will you make yourself available to God’s people who are facing seemingly impossible moments in their lives? Like Mary, this week, will you be open and willing to serve the God, and to love the God, FOR WHOM NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE?