

SERMON: Impossible  
TEXT: Luke 1:26-38

12-20-20

I wonder if anyone remembers the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical version of Cinderella from the mid-1960's. This is the version I grew up with, and I especially liked the music. In fact, one of the songs came to mind not long ago, so I searched and found the film on a cable channel and began to watch. It was fun to hear and sing along with the songs I remembered, but I was disappointed at the overall production which was cheap and tacky. I turned it off before getting to the end.

Still, there are a couple of songs that I can't get out of my head when I think of them. One of them is called, *Impossible*. Cinderella sings this after meeting her fairy godmother who gives her the news that she's going to the ball. "Impossible! For a plain, yellow pumpkin to become a golden carriage." She goes on to list all the other things she will need, claiming that all are *impossible*. But as the fairy godmother begins to wave her wand and produce each thing, she joins the song, changing the word "impossible" to "it's possible."

Of course, we all know Cinderella is a fairy tale, and that there are many, many more wishes we all have that really are impossible.

Young Mary was a virgin when the angel Gabriel came and announced that she was going to have a child. “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.” IMPOSSIBLE, Mary thought, though she verbalized it with a humble question. “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The Holy Spirit was the answer. Before Gabriel left her, he concluded, “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

It makes for a beautiful story, doesn't it? Pure and clean and rated G. But from the perspective of the real world, it sure sounds like a fairy tale. If you're a little bit cynical - or a realist like me - you hear the statement, “nothing will be impossible with God,” and you immediately want to set the record straight. Even if I don't say it out loud, I'm probably starting a list in my mind of all the things I have found in my life to be truly IMPOSSIBLE.

I knew a woman in Springfield who was as faithful as they come. Betsey was what we would call a “pillar of the church.” Whenever the doors were open, she was there. She served at all levels of the church, she volunteered in the community, she was faithful in worship, and she knew her Bible well. However, she was always quick to say that she did not believe that in the virgin birth. She

also did not believe that Moses parted the Red Sea. She did not believe that Jonah was swallowed by a giant fish. She was certain that these were stories created by writers to explain the unexplainable. Even though as a young woman she survived a terrible car accident against all odds, she was skeptical of many Biblical events that defy logic and reason. And even though she fully accepted Jesus as the Son of God and her Lord and Savior, he was NOT born of a virgin. It's simply IMPOSSIBLE.

On the other hand, the discoveries and advancements made in science and medicine and technology throughout the centuries have made possible what was once impossible. Even virgin birth has been made possible by in vitro fertilization.

I know another woman in Iowa, who throughout her second pregnancy **never** tested positive on a pregnancy test. But her thirty-something year old daughter is living proof that what a scientific test called impossible was possible after all.

Furthermore, *Science Increasingly Makes the Case for God*. This is the title of a fascinating article printed in the New York Times about five years ago. The gist of the article is that, scientifically speaking, humanity should not exist. "There

are more than 200 known parameters necessary for a planet to support life - every single one of which must be perfectly met, or the whole thing falls apart....The odds against life in the universe are simply astonishing.... [And] there's more....The odds against the universe [itself] existing are so heart-stoppingly astronomical that the notion that it all *just happened* defies common sense. It would be like tossing a coin and having it come up heads 10 quintillion times in a row." (Eric Metaxas, *Science Increasingly Makes the Case for God*, The Wall Street Journal, circa 2015)

Miracles happen. Not always when we want them or need them. But I believe that there are miracles happening all around us all the time. Most of them we don't even recognize.

My favorite old, classic, holiday movie is, "Miracle on 34th Street," with Natalie Wood as little Susie Walker. Her mother is a professional woman and a single parent who has never let Susie believe in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny or fairy tales of any kind. But when a bearded old man named Kris Kringle is hired by Macy's to play Santa Claus, Susie and her mother get to know him. He claims he really is Santa, and his gentle and compassionate nature makes him believable. I applaud when he sends parents to other stores if Macy's doesn't have just what they're looking for. I am moved when he sings with a little Dutch girl in her native

language. And I cheer when his lawyer proves he's the real Santa Claus when thousands of letters to Santa are delivered to the courtroom by the U.S. Postal Service. But the fact that Susie gets her dream house for Christmas has always bothered me. Because, you know, IMPOSSIBLE. Unlikely, at least. Certainly stranger things have happened.

But this passage from Luke is not about Christmas magic. It's about real miracles. Whether Mary was a virgin or not doesn't really matter to me. But the most impossible thing about The Annunciation (as this story is known), is that Mary is... a nobody.

She was not born into a royal or wealthy or even scholarly family. She was a poor and simple, humble and faithful servant girl. She's not extraordinary; just ordinary. In her world, she's virtually invisible. Unnoticed and unimportant, she would be the last person chosen for any significant role in society. But God sees her and favors her and lifts up this lowly servant to bring "down the powerful from their thrones," as she later sings. God chooses this nobody of a young woman to participate in changing the world.

It is no small thing that Mary does in carrying and birthing the one who will

be called Savior. One Biblical scholar helps us imagine the “complexities of pregnancy in the ancient world. Imagine Mary’s pregnant body, continuing with the rhythms of a fishing community—cleaning, slicing, preparing. Imagine the strain on her back as she carried water from the well. Imagine the swelling of her feet as she planted and gathered the harvest during the late stages of pregnancy. Imagine the sweat dripping from her brow as she gathered grain and kneaded it for the evening meal.” (Courtney V. Buggs, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org), December 20, 2020

Mary’s strength of body and strength of faith reminds me that women have been confronted with the word IMPOSSIBLE since the beginning of time. But, time and time again - inspired by the Marys who have gone before us - we have heard and acted upon the message of an angel, “Nothing will be impossible with God.”

As we ponder the events surrounding the birth of our Lord, may we all listen for God’s message. Ordinary as we are, God may be calling us to do extraordinary things. And when the call comes to us, may we respond as Mary did, with faith and trust, and humility. “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” To the glory of God.

AMEN.