

Mary's Belief: For nothing will be impossible with

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[0 : 01] Well, good afternoon and welcome to you all to our Wednesday lunchtime talk. You're very welcome indeed. And particularly as we are in the midst of the Christmas season and working our way towards Christmas.

Can I just make one or two announcements just as we begin? The first would be, there'll be plenty of these, I hope, around the place, little flyers. Do be using these for next week in particular. We have our Wednesday lunchtime carol service next Wednesday.

So that'll be the usual time of quarter past one. But we'll go on a bit longer to squeeze in a few more carols and some readings. So next Wednesday, 1.15, do come, bring some folk along with you. That'll be a great time together. There'll be mince pies afterwards, I think. No lunch, but mince pies. So do come for that next week. You should also have on your seats these little yellow envelopes. So last week I explained that the offering we're doing this year is for the Barnabas Fund and the Operation Christmas Joy, which is to help Iranian refugees, particularly children who have had to flee from Iran and are now living in Turkey.

[1 : 10] You'll see the details on your little sheets here. And during our carol, which we'll sing in just a few moments, we'll remain seated for the first verse or two. And then that'll allow the offering basket to come around.

You can pop your offerings in these little yellow envelopes. Or you can also give online. There are details there about how you can go onto the website and give that way.

So we'll do the offering during the carol. But let's turn to God's word first of all. And we're back at the start of Luke's gospel. Luke chapter 1. And you'll find it on page 855.

Luke chapter 1. And we're reading from verse 26. So last week we had the first angelic visitation to Zechariah.

And today it's the second visitation from Gabriel, this time with Mary. So chapter 1, verse 26. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin, betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David.

[2 : 26] And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you.

But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son. And you shall call his name 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 father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end.

And Mary said to the angel, how will this be since I am a virgin? And the angel answered her, the Holy Spirit will come upon you.

[3 : 32] And the power of the Most High will ever shudder you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has conceived a son.

And this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.

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. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord. Well, please do have that chapter in Luke open. Chapter 1, page 855.

And we'll think again about these words from verse 26.

Now, there are some things that are too good to be true. We tend to spot them, don't we? At least most of the time. The phone call from the number you don't recognize.

[4 : 42] With the voice at the end of the phone promising you've been selected for a special prize. Hmm. Or the email that purports to be from the tax man.

Saying there's been a mistake in the systems. And you've overpaid your tax by many thousands of pounds. And you're due a refund. All you have to do is click this link. And hand over your bank details.

Hmm. If you believed all the adverts we see all over the place at Christmas time. Then we'd believe that delirious joy is just around the corner.

If only you bought your turkey from Iceland. Or got the latest gadget. Or the new TV. Whole new levels of happiness and joy. Not yet experienced will be unlocked for you.

Hmm. There are some things that are, in fact, too good to be true. But at the very heart of the Christmas message. At the heart of the biblical account of the birth of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 43] There is something that appears, at first glance, to be too good to be true. Astonishing things are said and promised. And for old Zachariah, as we saw last week.

For him, these things were too good to be true. He couldn't believe what he had heard and seen. And he was struck dumb for his unbelief.

And this week, in our passage, we have another angelic visitation. Another miraculous baby is promised. But this time, the response isn't unbelief.

But rather trusting faith. Yes, incredible things are promised here. Things that seem too good to be true. But the factor that makes all the difference is who is making these promises.

It isn't some guy on the other end of a phone trying to scam you out of money. It isn't a slick advertising firm seeking to sell you something that promises far more than it can really deliver.

[6 : 50] It is God who speaks here through the angel Gabriel. He is making these promises. And he is the one who brought the whole universe into being.

He is God. And with him, nothing is impossible. What we read here is not too good to be true.

What we read, it is good. It's very good. It's better than we can really grasp. And it is true. So let's look at the second angelic encounter here at the start of Luke's account.

And we'll first look at the angel's announcement. And then Mary's answer to that announcement. So first, Gabriel's announcement. A royal baby with an everlasting kingdom.

This is an extraordinary announcement. Not least because of where it takes place. The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.

[7 : 53] Now, Nazareth was a bit of a backwater. It's like saying he went to a city in Scotland named Edinburgh. I jest. But Nazareth was nothing special.

It was no royal palace. It was not an important place. Yet, the angel Gabriel is sent there. And he seeks out an obscure young woman.

A virgin. Named Mary. And God is about to use very ordinary people. In a very ordinary place. To bring about his extraordinary purposes.

And now the angel speaks. Greetings. O favoured one. The Lord is with you. Now, understandably, Mary is greatly troubled.

I think you and I would be too, don't you? If this had happened to us. And she tries to discern what sort of greeting this is. And the angel, clearly understanding her natural fear and astonishment of what's happening in front of her eyes.

[8 : 59] He reassures her. And then tells her of the astonishing purpose behind his visit. Look at what he says there. You will conceive in your womb.

And bear a son. You shall call his name Jesus. He will be great. He will be called the son of the most high. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.

He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end. That is a lot of information to take in at what go.

On its own, the news that she is to have a child, although she is a virgin, that news alone is enough to rock you. I'm still recovering from the news that my wife is expecting child number four.

And I was told three months ago. Still reeling from that one. But Mary is told that she is to have a son without the agency of a man.

[9 : 58] This is a divine conception, a miracle. And his name is to be Jesus, which means the Lord is salvation.

He'll be called the son of the most high. And that phrase, the most high, that is used in the scriptures to describe and speak about God the father. And that phrase, Mary's child will be the son

of the most high.

Last week we were thinking about John, who is to be the forerunner for the great savior. And later on in Luke chapter one, he's described as being the prophet of the most high.

And so Mary's child is said to be even greater than that of Elizabeth's. He was the prophet. Here's the son, the son of the most high.

But there's more. This is a royal baby. There are a few things that whip up our media more than a royal baby.

[11:01] And as we all know, I'm sure there is another one coming. Harry and Meghan are expecting their first child. It would be much anticipated. But here in Luke chapter one, we have the royal baby announcement to end all royal baby announcements.

Mary's son will be given the throne of his father, David. Jesus would be a king reigning over, we're told here, an eternal kingdom. Since the very beginning, go back to the early pages of the Bible. God's purposes was to establish his rule over this world we live in. That was the task he gave to Adam and Eve at first, to extend his kingdom of light over the whole earth.

But as the story unfolds, as you know, as you read through Genesis, there is another kingdom. A kingdom of darkness with Satan at its head.

And since that moment of temptation in the Garden of Eden, a battle has raged. A cosmic battle. A battle between God's kingdom of light and Satan's kingdom of darkness.

[12:10] It is a battle that's been fought in every age at all times through our world. But at Christmas, with the birth of Jesus Christ, we witness an invasion from on high on enemy-occupied territory.

The kingdom of light breaks in on a dark world. And the king of that kingdom is born a child, Mary's son.

His coming was a long-awaited one. God promised his forefather, David, the king of God's people who reigned a thousand years before the events recorded here.

God promised him, promised King David, that one of his offspring would be raised up who would reign over an everlasting kingdom. And this is the one.

These words of the angel to Mary. Look at what he says. He will reign over his house of Jacob forever. Of his kingdom there will be no end. This is the one. This is the one promised to David all those years ago.

[13:16] That promised offspring has now come. The long-awaited king is now about to come, says the angel Gabriel. And the king who will reign forever, he'll be your child, Mary.

Look down again at the angel's words in verse 32. The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David. He'll reign forever.

Of his kingdom there will be no end. This is no ordinary king. Jesus is going to reign forever. His kingdom will have no ending.

Unlike every other kingdom that has exercised rule over this world, his will last. Every superpower this world has ever known, in the end, crumbles.

The Roman Empire. The Persian Empire. The Babylonian Empire. The Soviet Union. The Third Reich. The British Empire. The European Union. All will crumble.

[14:19] All will, in the end, come to nothing. But the empire of Jesus. It will never end. What an extraordinary thing to say.

To promise. To this humble young woman in the backwater of Nazareth. With the birth of this child. The eternal promises of God are coming to fruition.

His reign over a kingdom that will endure forever. A world that will be free from injustice and pain and sadness. A world that all of us deep down long for.

With a king that will never fail us. Who will never disappoint us. And with the coming of this child. A royal child. That kingdom.

That promised kingdom has now come. And it will be fully seen. Fully experienced. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

[15:19] A royal baby. So there is Gabriel's announcement. A royal baby. With a kingdom that will never end. The magnitude of these words is astonishing, isn't it?

What will Mary make of it? What will her response be? Well, in response to Gabriel's announcement, we have Mary's answer. And in contrast to Zachariah's unbelief, which we saw last week, Mary responds with belief.

With faith. But it's not blind belief and acceptance, is it? She has her questions. Look at verse 34. And Mary said to the angel, how will this be?

Since I am a virgin. There isn't blasé acceptance from Mary, is there? She wrestles with what is happening in front of her eyes.

What she's hearing. Look back at verse 29. She was greatly troubled when the angel first appeared and started speaking. She tries to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

[16:26] Mary is not some supernatural superhuman who just takes all this in her stride. No, she feels the shock. The magnitude of this encounter.

She thinks about what she's hearing. She takes it in. And she asks a legitimate question. A question that is rooted in humble belief. How is this possible?

I'm a virgin. How can I be with child? She's not questioning that it will happen. Just how it will happen. She doesn't, like Zachariah, demand a sign.

She doesn't require proof. Just explanation. And the angel gives that explanation in verses 35 to 37. He says the Holy Spirit will be at work within you.

The power of God will overshadow you. But this won't be the only astonishing pregnancy. Your relative Elizabeth. Your elderly relative.

[17:30] Decades past childbearing age. She's pregnant. In fact, she's six months pregnant. Nothing will be impossible with God, says the angel.

And surely that's right. If God is God, as the Bible claims, if he really brought the world, the whole universe into existence, then nothing is impossible.

Nothing is beyond him. These miraculous babies are not beyond him. Nothing is impossible, says the angel. And so, when Mary heard God's word and the promises of the angel, she believes.

Mary submits herself to the Lord because she realizes that he is the Lord. Look at her words there in verse 38. Behold, I am the servant of the Lord.

Let it be to me according to your word. To submit herself as his servant. It is the right response, isn't it?

[18:38] This is the response of trusting faith. She doesn't invite the Lord to come and be her assistant or to have influence over a bit of her life that she decides to carve out for him.

That would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? Imagine the most powerful person you can think of. One who you admire greatly. And imagine they make a personal message to you.

They give it to you. And they give you a great task. And they promise great help. You wouldn't turn around and say, would you? I'll do this on these particular conditions.

And I can give you this little slot of time here on a Monday. And I can give you that bit of time on a Friday. You wouldn't do that, would you? If the most powerful person you know of came and sought your help, you'd say, okay.

I'm at your service. Whatever you need. How much more then, when the God who made you, the creator of the universe, speaks to you. When we hear his voice, we listen.

[19:40] We submit because of who he is. And Mary here, as she hears the words of the God who made her, she is in the way in which she believes the message of the angel.

She is an example to us of what real faith is. Zechariah was an example in the negative last week.

That is not the way to respond. But Mary, she takes God at his word. Extraordinary though it is, she is prepared to submit herself to his extraordinary plans and purposes.

And that is an example for us, even today. It's an example of real faith. And as we hear this message of the angel, as we hear about this royal baby who became a man, who died, who was buried and raised on the third day, who now reigns at the right hand of God forever.

When we hear again this Christmas time, his call to faith, we are to do what we're to do just as Mary does. And say, yes, Lord, I am your servant.

[20:50] I submit myself to your ways, to your plans. This announcement here from the angel Gabriel is not just a bit of personal news for Mary.

This is news for all mankind. This is an announcement telling of a reality that you and I and every person must in the end submit to.

The reality of the eternal kingship of this baby Jesus. It is a reality that all people will in the end have to come to terms with. So will you, will you submit now?

Will you side with the eternal king now? Or will you be forced to submit in the end when, as the Bible promises, there will be a day of reckoning?

And by which time it will be too late. Because all of us will have to come face to face with Jesus on that great day. We will have to recognize him for who he is, the great and eternal king and judge. [21 : 59] The question is, will you be there and welcomed by him as your savior? Or will you be sent away as he is your judge?

Dr. Luke writes these words. He writes this account so that we would respond with faith, as Mary does, to the announcement of the eternal king.

It's an announcement to be received with gladness and joy. For here at last is the son of the most high, a king who will reign forever with perfect justice.

This is good news. And so Luke urges you, each of us here this afternoon, to respond and to respond with faith.

So will you? Will you respond with faith? Will you? In the words of Isaac Watts, saying, joy to the world.

[23 : 02] The Lord has come. Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room. And Luke asks, will your heart, will you prepare him room?

Well, let's pray. Shall we close? Father, we thank you for these extraordinary words, this extraordinary encounter.

The one which we can have great confidence in, because it's here to give us certainty. Certainty about the Lord Jesus. Certainty about who he is.

Certainty about the implications for us. And so help us, Lord, to respond as Mary does. To respond with humble trust.

To respond in faith. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.