

For Nothing Will Be Impossible With God

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[0 : 00] Well now Alejandro is going to read for us from the beginning of Luke's Gospel and if you'd like to turn up and follow we're reading in Luke chapter 1 from 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.

And the virgin's name was Mary and he came to her and said greetings oh favored 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 favor 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.

[1 : 06] 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 and the power of the most high will overshadow 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 also conceived a son and this is the sixth month with her who is 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. And now Hazel is going to come and read from us picking up the story once again in Luke's gospel at verse 39 of Luke's gospel chapter 1.

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town in Judah and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry.

[2 : 21] Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

For behold when the sound of your greeting came to my ears the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

And Mary said my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant and behold from now on all generations will call me blessed.

For he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown his strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.

[3 : 38] He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

Well good morning folks. Please do turn up the readings from earlier and particularly the one that Alejandro read for us.

So we're looking particularly at Luke chapter 1 and verses 26 to 38 this morning. So please do have that open. It would be very helpful. Now some things in life are in fact too good to be true.

And we tend to spot them, I hope at least most of the time. The phone call from a number you don't recognize with the voice of the other end informing us that we've won a very special prize.

Hmm. Or the email that purports to be from the tax man saying there's been a mistake in their systems and you've overpaid your tax by thousands of pounds and you're due a refund.
[4 : 50] All you have to do is click this link and the money will be popped into your bank account.
Hmm. If you believed all the adverts that we see all over the place at Christmas time then we believe that delirious joy is just around the corner.

If only we bought our turkey from Iceland. If we got the latest gadgets or this new TV whole new levels of happiness would be ours in abundance. Joy yet to be experienced to be unlocked if you just buy this item.

Hmm. Now there are some things that are in fact too good to be true. But at the very heart of the Christmas message, the very heart of the biblical accounts of the birth of Jesus Christ, is something that appears at first glance to be too good to be true.

Astonishing things are said and promised in these opening chapters of Luke. And for old Zechariah, you can read about him at the start of Luke's gospel.

These things, they were initially too good to be true. They ought not to have been for him. He should have believed given who he was. Zechariah was a priest after all.

[6 : 01] Well acquainted with the scriptures and the promises of God. And yet he couldn't, he wouldn't believe. At least not at first. He was struck dumb for nine months because of his unbelief.

He comes around after a few months of silence and contemplation of the Old Testament scriptures. Just look on to the end of the chapter to see his turnaround with his great song.

And in this passage, there is another angelic visitation, very similar to the one that Zechariah experienced. Another miraculous baby is promised.

But at this time, with Mary, the response isn't unbelief, but rather it's trusting faith. 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. This isn't Iceland trying to sell you a turkey.

[7 : 01] This isn't some TV company trying to flog you their TV. No, who is speaking these words? And who is speaking these words is absolutely key. It's not some guy trying to scam you out of money.

No, it's God. Who through the angel Gabriel is making these promises. And he is the one who brought the whole universe into being.

He is God. And nothing is impossible with him. That's what we see in these verses this morning. Nothing is impossible with God.

What we read here is not too good to be true. And what we read here is good.

It's very good. It's better than we can really grasp, in fact. It's true. And so let's look at the second angelic encounter here at the start of Luke's Gospel. And we'll look first at the angel's announcement.

[8 : 01] And then we'll look at Mary's response to that announcement. So first, Gabriel's announcement here. And he announces a royal baby with an everlasting kingdom.

Now this is an extraordinary announcement. Not just because of what it says, but where it takes place. The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.

Now Nazareth was a total backwater. It's like saying he went to a city of Scotland named Edinburgh. Total backwater. I jest.

Any Edinburgh people here? I'm sorry. But Nazareth, it was nothing special. It was no royal palace. Not an important place.

Yet, the angel Gabriel is sent there and seeks out an obscure young woman. A virgin named Mary. You see, God is about to use very ordinary people to bring about his extraordinary purposes.

[9 : 10] And so Gabriel comes and he speaks to Mary. And he says, verse 28, Greetings, O favoured one.

The Lord is with you. And look at Mary's response. Verse 29, she was greatly troubled. I suppose she was.

Here is an angel. Now don't picture in your minds a nice robed, winged thing. Angels were terrifying. You and I would be greatly troubled too, I think.

And she tries to discern what sort of greeting this might be. The angel, clearly understanding her natural fear and bafflement at all that's happening, he reassures her and then tells her of the astonishing purpose of his visit.

Look at what he says. Do not be afraid, Mary, verse 30. For you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son.

[10:18] And you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord 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. Now that is a lot of information to take in in one go.

On its own, the news that she is going to have a child, although she's a virgin, that news alone is enough to rock you, isn't it? I'm still recovering from the news my wife gave me that she was expecting our fourth child.

That was three years ago. Still rocked me. But Mary is told that she is going to have a son without the agency of a man.

This is a divine conception, a miracle. And his name is to be Jesus, which means Saviour. He will be called Son of the Most High.

[11:23] And the Most High is one of the ways the Bible speaks about God the Father. Mary's child will be Son of the Most High. Now John, John the Baptist, whose birth was promised to Zechariah at the start of this book, he is later described as the prophet of the Most High.

You see, Mary's child is to be set even greater than Elizabeth's child. But there's more. This is a royal baby. There are a few things that whip up our media more than a royal baby.

Think of all the excitement there's been over recent years with royal babies. But here in Luke chapter 1, we have the royal baby announcement to end all other royal baby announcements. Mary's son will be given the throne of his father David. Jesus would be a king reigning over an eternal kingdom.

This isn't some kingdom in a small part of the Middle East. No, this is an eternal kingdom forever. And since the very beginning, God's purpose has always been to establish his rule over the whole world that we live in.

[12:41] That was the task he gave at the very beginning to Adam and Eve. To extend his kingdom of light over all the earth. But as that story unfolds, as you read on in those early chapters of Genesis, as the story unfolds, there is another kingdom, a kingdom of darkness, with Satan at its head.

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

It's a battle that's been fought all through time, all 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 at last into our dark world. And the king of that kingdom is born a child.

His coming was a long-awaited one. Many, many years have passed since those first promises in the Garden of Eden of a serpent crusher.

[13:57] One who would come and bring about God's eternal kingdom. At last, in this child, God's promised one to his forefather David, the king of God's people who had reigned a thousand years before this.

God promised David that one of his own offspring would be raised up who would reign over an everlasting kingdom. And that offspring has now come.

The one that's promised to Mary. The long-awaited king is about to come, says the angel Gabriel. The king who will reign forever is going to be your child, Mary.

Look down again at those words from the angel, verse 32. And the Lord 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. See, this is no ordinary king. Jesus is going to reign forever.

[15:07] His kingdom has no ending. That's unlike every other kingdom that's ever existed in this world. His will last forever. That every superpower this world has ever known, in the end, crumbles away.

The remnants end up in the British Museum. The Roman Empire. The Persian Empire. The Babylonian Empire. The Soviet Union. The Third Reich. The British Empire.

Every empire today. The United States. China. One day, they will crumble to nothing. But you see, the empire of Jesus.

That will never end. What an extraordinary thing to promise. To say to a humble young girl in the backwater town of Nazareth.

See, with the birth of this child, the eternal promises of God are at last coming to fruition. And he reigns over a kingdom that will endure forever.

[16:17] A world that will be free from injustice and pain and suffering. That is what is to come. A world that all of us deep down long for. With a king that will never fail us.

Who will never disappoint us. Extraordinary promises are made to this young girl.

A royal baby. The royal baby to end all royal babies. Because his kingdom is everlasting. That is the astonishing magnitude of these words to Mary.

What will she make of it? What will she make of this announcement from the angel Gabriel? Good. Well, let's turn back to Luke.

And we've looked at Mary's, the announcement that she receives from Gabriel. This astonishing announcement of this child who would be the king of an everlasting kingdom.

[17:21] It's quite an announcement to get your mind around. What will Mary make of it? How will she respond? Well, we see, secondly, Mary's answer, her response.

And it's a response of belief and submission. In contrast to Zachariah's response, which you can read in the first half of the chapter.

Zachariah's response was unbelief. But in contrast, Mary responds with belief, with faith. And Luke does that a lot.

If you read through his account, he's always setting things alongside each other, contrasting. And here, right at the start, there's a very clear one. Zachariah responds in unbelief to the angel's announcement.

And Mary responds in belief. But it's not blind belief. It's not just blind acceptance, is it? She has her questions.

[18:21] Look at verse 34. Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I'm a virgin? There isn't blasé acceptance from Mary, is there?

She wrestles with what is happening in front of her eyes, doesn't she? What she's hearing. Look back at verse 29. And she was greatly troubled when the angel first appeared and started speaking. She tried to discern what sort of greeting this was. Mary is not some sort of supernatural superhuman who just takes all this in her stride.

She feels the shock of this encounter. And she uses her mind to take it all in. She asks a legitimate question. A question that's rooted in humble belief.

How is this possible? I'm a virgin. How can I be with the child? She's not questioning that it will happen.

[19:24] She's questioning how. How will this be? She doesn't like Zachariah demand a sign. She doesn't require proof. She requires an explanation.

And the angel gives it. The angel gives an explanation. Look at verse 35. 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, decades past childbearing, she is also pregnant.

In fact, she's six months pregnant. You see, nothing will be impossible with God, says the angel. Do you see that verse 37?

For nothing, nothing will be impossible with God. Now, Mary found this hard to believe. And I suppose many of us do as well.

[20:26] A virgin conceiving. How can we believe this? Maybe that's a question you have this morning. Maybe it's a question that friends of yours have.

You really believe that the heart of Christmas is a virgin conception? You really believe that? Well, this is not the first astonishing claim the Bible makes.

You actually need to go no further than verse 1 of the very first book of the Bible to see a pretty extraordinary claim. The Bible opens with these words. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Rebecca McLaughlin, the author of our little white Christmas giveaway book. If you haven't got one, get hold of one. They're at the back. She says in her little book there, the Bible's first outlandish claim is that there is one God who created our entire universe.

If this is true, then believing that Jesus was born of a virgin is not irrational. In fact, believing that God could make the whole universe out of nothing, but not believing he could make one baby without a human father, that would be irrational.

[21 : 47] If you concede that God created the universe, if you take verse 1 of the Bible to be true, then this is not problematic. Of course he could do this.

Ben Scrivener, the Australian evangelist, put it this way. Christians believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. Atheists believe in the virgin birth of the universe.

Choose your miracle. Well, each of us has to make up our own mind, don't we? For Mary, when she 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. The one from whom this message comes from is the Lord of the universe.

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. You see, to submit herself as the Lord's servant, that is the right response, isn't it?

[22 : 59] That is the response of trusting faith. The Lord of the universe has come to her and spoken these words. And she responds in trust.

And her response is total. And her response is costly. She doesn't sort of invite the Lord to come and have influence over a little bit of her life that she decides to carve out.

That would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? Imagine the most powerful person you can think of. One who you admire greatly. Imagine that they make you a personal message and send it to you, giving you a great task and promising great help.

You wouldn't turn around, would you? You wouldn't turn around and say, okay, I'll do that, but on these conditions and on these limited slots of my available time, you wouldn't say that, would you? You would say, no, I'm at your service, whatever you need. Well, how much more then, when the God who made you, the creator of the universe, speaks to you, as he did to Mary.

[24 : 11] She heard his voice. And incredible as those words were, she believed, she trusted, she submitted. And when you and I hear God's word through his scriptures, speaking to us, when we hear his voice, we likewise are to listen.

We submit because of who he is. Because he is the God of the universe. And Mary, in the way in which she responds, the way in which she believes the message of the angel, she is, to us, an example of what real faith is.

Zachariah was an example in the negative in the first half of the chapter. That is not the way to respond. But Mary, she takes God at his word.

She is prepared to submit herself to his extraordinary plans and purposes. Then they are extraordinary. And it would have been very, very costly to her to submit in this way.

Remember that she's a young woman, betrothed to be married. What would Joseph make of this pregnancy? What would the wider family make of it?

[25 : 29] Think of the shame, the cost to Mary. You see, submission to Jesus, faith in Jesus was costly for her. And it remains costly today.

And so Mary is an example for us today, an example of faith, of taking God at his word. And as we hear the message of the angel, as we hear about this royal baby who became a man, who would later die, be buried, and rise from the dead on the third day, who now reigns at God's right hand forever.

When we hear again, this Christmas time, his call to faith, we are to do as Mary did. And say, yes. Yes, Lord, I am your servant. I submit myself to your ways, to your plans. Incredible as they are.

And remember that this announcement to Mary is not just a bit of personal news.

This is news for all mankind. This is an announcement telling of a reality that you and I and every person must submit to. It's the reality of the kingship of Jesus.

[26 : 48] It is a reality that all people will have to come to terms with one day. And so the question is, will you submit now? Will you side with the eternal king now?

Because this child, Jesus, that's promised here, he grew up and died on a cross and rose again and ascended to heaven and reigns and will return as judge of the living and the dead.

Will you side with his eternal kingdom 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?

Just read on through Luke's gospel. Read the words of Jesus in Luke 22 and what he promises is coming.

Keep reading Luke's gospel. See where this goes. See why you must submit even now. Because all of us, as Jesus says, will come to face him on that great day and we will have to recognize who he is, the great eternal king and judge.

[28 : 06] And the question is, will you be there and welcomed by him as your savior or sent away as your judge? And Dr. Luke is writing this account so that we would respond in faith as Mary does to the announcement of the eternal king.

It is an announcement to be received with gladness and joy for here at last is the great promised king, the most high, the one who will reign with perfect justice forever.

And so Luke urges us, urges you to respond and to respond with faith. And if you have responded in faith, if you've heard these things taught in the past, then Luke is urging you to have even greater certainty and confidence that these things are true.

They are incredible things, aren't they? The virgin birth is an incredible thing to get our minds around but Luke, he's writing to give us great certainty and confidence so that we would then go and share that with others.

if you've submitted to him, if you follow Jesus, then you are to take that message to others, to the ends of the earth. So will we, will you, in the words of Isaac Watts, as we respond in faith, can we sing these words, joy to the world, the Lord has come, let earth receive her king and let every heart, let every heart prepare him room.

[29 : 51] will you receive Jesus king this Christmas? Well let's pray shall we before we sing our final carol. Father God, we are so often a hard-hearted people, we are so slow to see and so slow to believe.

Lord help us in our unbelief and to know with certainty that you are the Lord and that truly nothing is impossible with you.

So help us, help all of us to respond to your words with believing faith and trust this Christmas. For we ask it in Jesus name.

Amen. Well let's close our time together by singing our final carol this morning from the squalor of a borrowed stable. Let's sing this now.

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