

How Advent Came to Mary: Part Two

Reflections on Luke 1:26-38

When Gabriel first announced the great miracle of incarnation to Mary, amidst all the promises and reassurances, this only he asked of her: “Do not be afraid!” Essentially that’s the one thing asked of us as well. Do not be afraid! Whatever you most fear today – what is it? Touch it. Name it. Give it up to God and let it go. There is a prayer I often pray, though not as often as I should. “Lord God, help me to act only in response to love and trust, and not to fear and anger.” Just this prayer, I’m certain, changes life.

Gabriel goes on to tell us, for this is our story too, why we can let go of the fear. “For nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). Nothing is impossible with God. It’s important that Luke says this at the beginning of his Gospel. Luke is a careful, thoughtful writer. He is inspired by the Spirit of God but he is a careful, thoughtful writer. And he is making decisions about what to say and when to say it. So he begins by telling of the virgin birth of Jesus, that it all began with a young teenage girl up in the hill country of Galilee who had never had sex giving birth, because nothing is impossible with God. And that is in fact the lesson of the virgin birth: a timeless reminder that nothing is impossible with God. If it needs to be done, it can be done. In your quiet moments, you know that. Hold on to that thought.

If there are inner-city children to be saved in the Bronx or in Bridgeport or in Stamford, it can be done. Nothing is impossible with God. If the church worldwide needs to be re-envisioned, thought about in new ways, biblical ways, spiritual ways, restructured, reformed, restored, renewed, revived, it can be done. Nothing is impossible with God. If good news of great joy for all the people – the news that God is not a capricious tyrant but one who comes to you in love and seeks to satisfy your soul’s deepest desire – if this good news needs to spread through the corporate headquarters and schools and hospitals of Stamford, and White Plains, and New York City, and from coffee shop to diner and deli and warehouse, it can be done. Nothing is impossible with God.

If you are trapped in some addictive nightmare and some part of your life is out of control, and you need recovery, release from what oppresses you, redemption, rebirth, it can be done. Nothing is impossible with God. If mountains need to move. If prejudice and discrimination need to end. If the world needs rescuing, salvation. If the earth needs to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. If the kingdom of God needs to fill the earth, if God’s reign of grace and love and forgiveness needs to fill the earth. All this can be done. Nothing is impossible with God.

So right out of the blocks Luke tells us this. If you’re going to grasp the story of Jesus and its consequences the first thing you need to know is this: Nothing is impossible with God. So don’t be afraid. If it needs to be done, it can be done. There is no challenge you can’t face. There is no darkness you can’t confront. There is no scandal or shame you can’t rise above. There is no human need – however large – you can’t meet. Nothing is impossible with God.

And so the Christian poet Ann Kiemel wrote some time ago (1971):

i love the word impossible ...

it's like joy after sorrow.
people being friends after being enemies.
rainbows after drenching rain.
a wound healed.
sunset on quiet evenings after
 hot, noisy days.

paralyzed, injured limbs learning to grow
 strong and useful again.
forgiveness after wrong.
new love-made babies.
birds learning to fly and own the sky.
bitterness turning to mellowness.
fresh, genuine hope ... once abandoned.
people finding each other at right moments,
 in unexpected, obscure places ...
 for God-ordained reasons.

i love that word impossible because my God
 believes in adventure
 and extraordinary mountains, and He dares
to be alive in a world crawling with terrible
 situations.

He promises to be bigger than any impossibility
 because He is love ...
 and love always finds a way through,
 in time.
love isn't scared.
it builds bridges instead of walls.
it never gives up.
it always hangs on.
it waits with stubborn, strong hope,
 sometimes even years.

...
IMPOSSIBLE means that i,
 an ordinary young woman,
can be something special and significant
 in an enormous, hurting world.
i can be love where i live,
 and that is Christ ...

and He really does make ALL
the difference!

But it all began with an ordinary young woman named Mary who became special and significant in an enormous, hurting world. She became love where she lived, and that is Christ and he really does make all the difference.

Likewise we are called to see this, to leave doubt behind, to let go of fear and believe, to see the possibilities, to catch the vision, and maybe to realize that it all begins with God coming again to you in this sacred season. Perhaps there is still something missing in your life, maybe in your heart, something that eludes your grasp. There is still an unnamed “restlessness” in your heart. There is still an emptiness that you keep trying to “feed” with food, with fantasy, with excitement, with busyness. There is still a conflict “eating at you.” There are still sinful, unloving, self-centered patterns for which you need forgiveness and healing.

You still stand in need of a peace the world cannot give. You still need the coming of our Savior. And acknowledging all this, you are ready this year to begin Advent. You are ready for Jesus to be reborn in you this holy, sacred Advent season.

– Dale Pauls