

**Sermon The Fourth Sunday of Advent December 20, 2020 Big News!**

***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 ... Luke 1:26-27***

The Bible is full of predictions of future events. Not the least among these is Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." This prophecy is extremely specific. It tells that the promised deliverer would be born of a virgin. How profound!

In our day, we honor those who have proven to be great leaders and have contributed greatly to society – William Shakespeare, Isaac Newton, Christopher Columbus, George Washington, Mother Theresa, etc. However, they all started life as ordinary people. We could explain their success on the basis of good upbringing, privilege, personality and the like. However, when it comes to Jesus, even his start in life was exceptional as he was not conceived and born in the natural way, but the supernatural. His job could not be accomplished by a mere mortal. It required someone extraordinary. Jesus was that man, whose start in life was exceptional as he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, just like the prophet Isaiah had said.

***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." Luke 1:32-33***

The sign Pontius Pilate displayed above Jesus' head on the cross read, "Jesus of Nazareth – King of the Jews." This is often shortened to INRI - The first letter of each word in the Latin - since there is not enough room on most wall crosses in our homes to fit all the words. If Pilate had only known how correct he really was!

Of the countless names for God in the Bible, one that aptly applies to this story is the name King. Jesus is the King of the universe. He created it, maintains it, and directs it toward his ends. Stop and think of the wonder! Again, the Lord made a promise and prediction long ago in the days of King David. God told David, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." 2 Samuel 7:14. We have the beginning of the complete fulfillment of that promise in Jesus, as Luke here connects the promise made to David with Jesus, who traced his ancestry according to both Mary and Joseph back to David. Luke says here that Jesus is the one who will indeed sit in the place David once sat as king over all Israel and that his reign will be forever.

We may have heard these lines from Luke so many times that they, like a school lesson to a bored student, go in one ear and out the other. It is good for us to stop for a moment and think about the importance of what the angel Gabriel is saying here. What he is saying to Mary is that *the entire Old Testament hope is about to be realized in her son!* It had indeed been a long time coming, from a human perspective, but nonetheless the time had come for the world to receive its Savior from death and hell. No wonder Jesus caused such a stir in the hearts of the people. It was he for whom they had been waiting for so long.

***And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. Luke 1:36***

It's interesting to note here that Gabriel had made a somewhat similar announcement to Zechariah the priest when he was in the temple offering incense during the office of daily prayer. Gabriel appeared to him and said that he and his wife Elizabeth – both advanced in years and her never able to have children – would have a baby who would play a vital role in God's plan. Zechariah did not have enough faith to believe what Gabriel told him was true. Because of his lack of faith, God struck Zechariah mute. He could not talk for quite some time. His was the example NOT to follow.

***And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." Luke 1:38***

Mary is the one for us to copy! Gabriel made far greater acclamations to Mary than he did to Zechariah. He and Elizabeth would have a child the natural way. Mary, however, would bear a son whilst remaining a virgin. That's quite a difference. Zechariah's son would have important work to accomplish, yet Mary's son would be the promised savior and deliver the world from death and hell. Again, a major difference in roles between John and Jesus. Despite Gabriel's out-of-this-world message to Mary, she believed every word. Her response was, as we might say today, "Bring it on!"

***For nothing will be impossible with God. Luke 1:37***

This was Gabriel's assurance to Mary amongst all the pondersome words he spoke to her. An angel appearing out of nowhere? It happens. Having a baby with no man involved? Not a problem. A boy born to an average family becoming the immortal king over all God's people? Why not! "Go big or go home," as people say. That is no more truly spoken than here. Mary was assured the Lord could and would do all these things and more.

God makes huge promises to us, too, doesn't he? In our baptism we undergo a supernatural birth by the power of the Holy Spirit. That person we see in the mirror every morning and in the pictures on our phones is saved from condemnation and is a holy, blessed child of God. As we grind through our troublesome lives, we are told we and all believers will reign over creation with Christ the eternal king, appointed as such before the ages began. Wow! That's a lot to take in. Even harder to take to heart and believe. Those same words given to Mary are there to encourage us; "For nothing will be impossible with God." We also, with Mary, respond to all these promises of God to us, "Let it be to us according to your word." Amen!

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