

ADVENT III MIDWEEK
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ADVENT FAITH

Intro. Mary was deeply troubled. An angel had just appeared to her. But that alone wasn't troubling her. She was troubled by the angels' words. Many times in the Scriptures, people are troubled by the appearance of an angel. And the first words of the angels message is usually, 'Do not be afraid'. But not this time. Mary is troubled not so much by the angel's presence, but by what he has to say, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you ... You will conceive and have a child and give birth to the Christ ... and all the promises of God's Word will be fulfilled in you'. Holy, smoly no wonder Mary was 'greatly troubled at his words'.

This certainly isn't the first annunciation of a surprising pregnancy in God's Word: Sarah, Hannah and most recently Mary's own relative Elizabeth had conceived a baby even in her old age. These certainly were all remarkable pregnancies, but not one of these women were in Mary's situation. They all had husbands. Mary knew the truth: she could not, no way, could Mary be pregnant. And Mary knew it. Some may think that such a young girl might just be naïve about where babies come from. It is guesstimated that Mary would have been around 13 – 16 years old. But obviously Mary's answer disproves her naivety with an almost cynical matter-a-fact question, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?' Virgins don't have babies. That's the fact. And Mary knew it. Mary knew as biological fact that she could not be pregnant.

But there is an explanation. Mary becoming pregnant would indeed be impossible in the normal human way of doing things. It is impossible for a virgin to have a baby, but nothing is impossible for God. The same life giving Holy Spirit who hovered over the waters in the creation of the whole cosmos will overshadow Mary and God will miraculously create once again. A child will be created beyond normal means. This is how it will be because God says it. And by the means of God's Word the impossible is accomplished according to God's will. And as remarkable as that miracle is, the truly amazing thing is not simply the conception but the identity and the work of this child born of Mary. Mary's baby is Mary's God, her Creator and her Savior is growing within her. God is becoming flesh. So you see, as amazing as the miracle is, it is not about Mary at all. It is all about Jesus, the baby conceived by God the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin by the power of God's Word. And then, just think, it's by the same Holy Spirit who caused Mary to say in faith 'I believe, let it be to me according to your word', that same

Holy Spirit has conceived in you the same faith to say 'I believe, let it be to me according to your word' = God's Word. And we know that Mary would need this God given faith because she would face a whole lot of challenges to her faith. How would she tell Joseph? What would he think of her? What would she tell her family? Would anyone else believe this truth conceived in her? Mary knew the scorn of ignorant and judgmental people would never fully disappear. And we know the rest of the story also, don't we? Mary would witness what would happen to her Son as He would die on a cross. But Mary faced it all in faith, because Mary's Son is also Mary's God and Savior as He is ours through the power of His Word.

FOR NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD!

And that is what I want to talk to you about a little bit this final Advent service.

I. None of us of course have experienced all the things that Mary faced. This miracle of God's immaculate conception was unique in all of human history. But in smaller ways, we may feel similar things as Mary. Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's words. We, too, may be troubled by messages we hear in our own lives, 'many claiming 'I am the Christ' ... wars and rumors of wars ... nations against nations ... famines ... earthquakes in various places ... many turning away from the faith ... the love of most growing cold' as we are told to expect in God's Word, Matt. 24, as the end of the world draws near at Jesus' 2nd Advent.

Are you troubled by those messages you hear through the media of the world we live in? Will we ever truly know peace on earth? Will our society ever become moral and decent? Will hostility, hatred, crime continue to increase? And the message of God's Word says, as the end draws nearer and nearer, the world will grow worse and worse and not evolve to the better as the philosophy of the world teaches. And that message is troubling. And even more troubling is when we turn our attention to ourselves. As bad as things are out there, compared to my sinful heart and mind I know their source, human sin and its consequences. Or maybe you're troubled by the things you don't understand. We want to know how things will work out, why certain things come about. Why? Why me? Why my loved one? Why did God allow this to happen? And the answer is most often not given to us. There are so many times in so many ways our trust and faith is tested, tried, aren't there? What is it that's troubling you tonight?

II. In whatever situation of life God finds us, our God still offers to us the same seemingly impossible miracle He performed for Mary. How can all this be, we ask? And God's messenger responds, 'Rejoice, favored one. The Lord is with you. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you'. Those promises are just as true for you as they were for Mary. Just as God the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and miraculously created life within her without her work or effort or participation but by His grace and favor. So God the Holy Spirit is coming upon you and God the Holy

Spirit miraculously creates life within us without our work or effort or participation but by His grace and favor. God is giving to us His gift of faith for us to believe His Word. He gives to us His gift of grace to believe His promises. We might be tempted to consider this a small thing compared to the virgin birth of God incarnate, but is it really? Your faith in God's promises is a miracle of God, one you share with Mary, who was also given the gift of faith by the same Holy Spirit of God which you have received.

III. You see, we have the same gift as Mary was given, the faith to believe the truth = that nothing is impossible for God. Knowing that truth, we can see God's plan in action in our lives even when we don't know the 'whys'. God incarnate, Jesus 'true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord' and nothing else matters. Truly nothing is impossible for our God, a virgin birth or the birth of our faith.

Knowing that truth, we need not doubt that God can and does do what He says. And God says: for Jesus sake you are all forgiven and redeemed people. Hearing that message, we know that nothing is impossible for God = not even our eternal salvation. Knowing nothing is impossible for God, we know that nothing can possibly stop God from loving us for Jesus sake. God does it all! We're pregnant with the promises of God!

IV. And it's with that God given faith and God strengthened faith, we find that even in our times of testing and questioning 'Why?' we endure. Even in a world that is coming apart at the seams moving faster and faster to its destruction and final judgment, we endure! Matt. 24 'He who stands firm to the end will be saved'. Mary willingly accepted the task that God gave her to bear the Savior of the whole world. I wonder if she really knew at the beginning what that would cost her. She would bear many insults and much suffering because of her calling from God. But God filled her with His grace and faith. Mary endured it all, right to the very foot of the cross of Calvary, as she stood to the end and witnessed her Son's crucifixion but then rejoiced in her Son's resurrection. Mary endured it all, trusting in her God and Savior, her Son, Jesus. And she was blessed through that gift faith in God's grace. As we are blessed with God's grace and favor, as we through faith endure it all right to the very foot of the cross where our Savior took our place and through His resurrection from the dead has promised us eternal life long after this world has come to its end.

Conclusion: We too may find many challenges and adversities in this life's journey. Some may come as a result of our own sinful condition. Some may come as a result of the sinful world we live in. Some may come as a result of our calling as God's children created by the Word of the Holy Spirit. But in faith

we endure. We trust in the promises of our Savior and believe that He will care for us. Where ever life takes us, whatever we face, we receive God's grace to say 'May it be for us as God has said' and know it will be. Because God's Word is the truth: nothing is impossible for our God! Amen.