

“How can this be?” Mary cries. *“This is impossible!”* might have been our response.

You have likely said that at one time or another in your life. Maybe you've said it a lot of times. It might have been, *“This is impossible,”* as in, *“I simply can't do this!”* Or perhaps it was, *“This is impossible,”* as in, *“This shouldn't be happening to me!”*

Not to worry. You are not alone when the impossibilities of life wring this cry from your lips, *“This is impossible!”* Abraham and Sarah said it when they were told they would become parents at an age that is well past retirement (he was 100; she was 90). I would suspect that not many of us would envy Abraham and Sarah at this “impossible” moment. Israel said *“This is impossible!”* collectively when they found themselves between the rock of Pharaoh's armies and the hard place of the Red Sea. King Saul of Israel said it when a giant named Goliath marched up and down in front of the armies of Israel demanding a fight to the death for the right to reign.

“Impossible!” “Never happen!” “Not in my lifetime!” You've been there. Too much money left at the end of your check. Too much left to do at work and you haven't seen the kids all this week. You know the Bible tells you to love your neighbor as yourself, but your neighbor burns his trash in the back yard and stinks up the whole neighborhood.

And those are the easy ones! There is the grief that will not go away, the love that was lost, or the bitterness that won't give way to forgiveness. The dozens of old wounds, old scars, old hurts that we nurture and feed from.

In spite of all the impossible situations you and I have ever faced, I'm thinking the greatest, “Impossible!” of all time has to be the one from our scripture today. Is there anyone who could not identify the person who

asked this question: ***“How can this be, since I am a virgin?”*** If the idea of a child born to Abraham and Sarah was impossible, the idea of a child born to the young woman named Mary in our scripture would require nothing short of a miracle.

The question Mary asks is so obvious isn't it? ***“How can this be,”*** she says, ***“since I am a virgin?”*** And if you think Mary had a hard time believing this angelic message, Joseph would certainly have none of it. Matthew tells us Joseph's, ***“Impossible!”*** led him right to his lawyer's office. ***“Obviously,”*** Joseph is thinking, ***“she's been unfaithful.”*** It was clear to him that divorce was the only option. Being a caring and righteous man, he sought to accomplish the divorce quietly so as not to bring public disgrace on Mary. Can any power on earth disperse such impossibilities? It would take a miracle.

Would you have had the same response as Mary? I'm not sure I would. First, I would need to get past the whole angel thing. Apparently angelic appearances were commonplace for Mary, and even though the angel tells her not to be afraid, Luke tells us that she was ***“much perplexed . . . pondered . . .”*** not startled. Once I had gotten past that it was an angel, my reaction may well have been, ***“What are you talking about?”*** followed pretty quickly by ***“Why me!?”*** There have been times in my life, as I am sure in your life, when I thought a miracle would be required to surmount my circumstances. But, the idea of Mary the virgin having a child takes us directly into authentic, supernatural miracle territory.

But we have not yet arrived at the central point in this story. The significance for you and me lies beyond the announcement of a miraculous intervention by God into Mary's life. When the impossible hits — and when the impossible thing has impacted our lives, broken our hearts, and shattered our dreams — the message comes to us, ***“. . . nothing shall be impossible with God.”***

Can you let these words fall gently on your spirit as the snow flakes fall gently and silently to the ground? And then let them cover your soul as a fresh dusting of snow seems to make the ground new once again.

Listen: (Say the words slowly) ***“Nothing . . . shall be impossible . . . with God!”*** Do you hear that? You surely hear the words in a technical sense, but I am wondering if you receive the message.

Please indulge me as I ask you to do something. This message is such an important tool in dealing with our impossible circumstances that I am anxious to really have it touch us deep within. Would you simply allow yourself to get still and quiet inside. Tell all those nagging little voices to stay quiet and that you will attend to them at another time. Simply take a deep breath and listen once again: (say the words even more slowly this time) ***“Nothing . . . shall be impossible . . . with God!”***

There is a process with three steps that occurs in the gospel story today — a process that can help us build our life of faith. We’ve encountered two of these steps so far.

First, the impossible situation comes. This is where most people give up. Here is where Joseph calls his lawyer, Saul surrenders the kingdom, and Israel appoints a “Return to Egypt Committee.” This is where we throw up our hands in defeat or crash in despair. This is a world without Christmas . . . a life without Christ.

The second step takes place when we hear — really hear — the good news. Which is...(Say it with me) ***“Nothing . . . shall be impossible . . . with God!”*** Are you with me here? First the impossible thing confronts us and like any normal human being we are frightened, angered, depressed, or any number of other emotions that can leave us crushed and in despair. However, if — and this is important — if we stop and listen for the still small voice within, we hear the good news that nothing shall be impossible with God.

Ah! But there is more to this process than simply hearing the news. There is one final step that smashes through the barriers of the impossible. One thing more has to happen. That one thing more is not something God does, but something we do. Something Abraham and Sarah did or there would have been no Nation of Israel. Something Moses did or there

would have been no liberation from Egypt. Something David did or there would have been no throne in Israel. Something Mary did or there would have been no birth of the Christ child. Something we need to do or there will be no birth of Christ within us. There is something we need to do or there is no authentic Christmas for us.

The third step in this process of moving from the impossible to the miraculous is contained in Mary's response to the news that nothing is impossible with God. Listen carefully once again, for her words ushered in the incredible miracle of incarnation: ***“Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”*** The key that unlocks the miraculous action of God in Mary's life is believing.

It takes a listening spirit to hear the good news of God. It takes a believing heart to actually receive the good news of God. Believing is the thing that makes God's heart glad above all other things. In believing the good news, we not only listen, but we come to trust the word of God's good news. ***“Let it be,”*** Mary says, ***“according to your word.”***

Believing is not the simple intellectual acceptance of a creed, but the joyous receiving of God's promises — God's Word — as though the thing were already accomplished. Mary did not say, *“Well this all sounds pretty far fetched to me — but we'll see what happens — seeing is believing.”* It was exactly the other way around with Mary, as it must be also for us: ***“Believing is seeing!”***

As we stand at the threshold of Christmas 2020 — a year that has brought us a lot of mixed reactions, from hope to fear, from anxiety to expectation, victories and defeats — the world of Mary and Joseph and angels singing to shepherds seems so very far removed from us in so many ways. Yet, the ancient truth that opened the door for the incarnation of the Son of God is the truth that continues to open the door for the entrance of Christ into our lives today: ***“Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”***

In a few days, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day will come. And then

they will go. My hope and prayer for all of us is that after all of the hustle and bustle of this season, when we get to these days of celebration we will take let Mary's words become ours.

I urge you to welcome the Christ Child into your heart: First, stop and say, "*Here I am . . .*" and truly be present in that moment. Second, surrender and say, "*. . . the servant of the Lord . . .*" and give yourself to the calling of your baptism. Third, submit and say, "*. . . let it be with me according to your word,*" and then listen for that word.

At the heart of Christmas is receiving. Not the receiving of the gifts we give to each other and to our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, friends and neighbors — although such gifts can have purpose and power. But the central Gift to be received is the Gift God has given to us in Christ. Though the season of Christmas will retire to the end of the calendar year once again, pray with me that the heart and the Gift of Christmas remains. Pray with me that, through believing, we will continue to receive the hope, the strength, and the courage that takes us through those times that others would call . . . "*Impossible!*"

Because we know — we believe — we trust — we live — (say it with me) "***Nothing shall be impossible with God!***

Amen.