

“MARY’S ANGEL.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

December 10, 2023, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Luke 1:26-38

Introduction.

1:26-28, “Angels We Have Heard on Earth.”

The first thing we notice in our text is something we addressed last week.

The Bible is unapologetically, unashamedly, openly supernatural. The Bible talks about things and assumes things modern, materialistic mankind finds quaint or foolish. This offends our American individualistic, independent way of thinking. This offends our intellectual, scientific, academic pride, this is not the sort of stuff we allow to be taught in our schools. People who believe this stuff are superstitious, gullible and naïve.

This is the stuff of myth, fantasy, sci-fi, make believe. This is Peter Pan and Never neverland. This is Alice and Wonderland. We are just drifting through space on a big rock only to die and become worm food.

The fundamental truth concerning Christmas and the incarnation and Christianity is we live in an open universe where there are encounters with the real, invisible realm of God and heaven. And we live on a planet visited by God where there is more going on around us than meets the eye.

Let there be absolutely no question in your mind, no hint of doubt, another world has broken into our world, and it dramatically changes everything. We cannot just go on with business as usual.

I am thinking of you young people remembering when I was your age. I remember being young, completely self-absorbed, thinking the world revolved around me, completely selfish in my decisions and choices, wanting what I want, doing what I want. Thinking I am not accountable to anyone for anything.

I believed in God, I believed in Jesus and in heaven and hell and angels. I believed all that but I lived like a practical atheist. In other words, I didn’t really think about what the impact of the supernatural had on my day to day life.

We are not our own, we are not alone, God is as real and present and active in your life as He was in that teenager living in Nazareth.

That's the *first* thing about the Christmas story it blows up our American ways of thinking. Then we are hit with a *second* reality that almost gives us whiplash in the opposite direction, from the miraculous to the mundane, from the extraordinary to the ordinary.

God obviously had a lot of choices in how to do this. He could have chosen Rome or Jerusalem. He could have chosen the daughter of countless rich, famous, powerful, influential families.

God choose Galilee of the Gentiles, a lowly despised region, and then Nazareth, a lowly, small obscure village, not even mentioned in the OT. Remember what people said about Nazareth back in the time of Jesus? Can anything good come from Nazareth? Nothing good had ever come from there before, so why would that change now.

The quickest way to give you a feel of what this region is like is to compare it to Mississippi or Alabama or Kentucky. Or a little closer to home, maybe Maple Falls or Acme. If you were going to dignify one woman out of the human race would you go to Mississippi or Maple Falls?

Enter into the humble origins of Christmas and the incarnation and Christianity. We wouldn't do it this way, so why did God?

Isn't this just like God. This is His MO, His mode of operating. Man looks on the outside, God looks on the heart. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, my ways are not your ways." God refuses to bend or bow down to human expectations or to political or social correctness.

God loves small places and small people. God loves to exalt the humble and humble the exalted. The bigger God wants to do something the more humble the beginning He looks for.

God will not have us proud. Don't be full of yourself, don't be puffed up, don't think too highly of yourself. And on the other side of the coin don't think you are too unworthy, too small, too ordinary to be of any use or purpose to God.

I Corinthians 1:26-29 Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is

weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

God does such things to test our humility and test our faith, and cut off all pride.

Pause and reflect on the staggering condescension of God and the humility and humiliation.

For the Son of God to come to earth is condescension and humiliation enough, He could have spared Himself a bit of disgrace by at least being born into a high position. It would have been condescension enough to be born a rich prince.

Mary was a common unknown girl between 14 and 17 years old, betrothed to a simple carpenter named Joseph from lowly Nazareth in lowly Galilee.

Gabriel addresses Mary in a remarkable way, “O favored one, the Lord is with you!” Mary was just living her life, planning a wedding, and God breaks in. The Lord is with you. You are not alone, you are not on your own, your life is not your own.

He calls her highly favored, one who is most blessed among women. What does this mean about Mary? Why is she so highly favored? Was Mary the first woman in history to meet the qualifications to be good enough to be the mother of the Son of God?

Was Mary better than all the other virgins in Nazareth? No, favored means freely bestowed, this is pure grace. And what is grace? It is the unmerited, undeserved favor of God, something you are given.

Mary was not sinless or perfect, she was the recipient of God’s supernatural, gracious favor. And remember grace doesn’t always look like grace. The grace of healing may have the face of much pain and suffering from a surgeon’s knife. The grace of humility may have the appearance of defeat. Will Mary see God’s grace as grace when it happens?

1:30-35, you will conceive and bear a son and call His name Jesus.

Gabriel’s words are nothing short of mind boggling. Humanly speaking they are unbelievable.

Luke 1:31-33 You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 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, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Mary seems to understand what the angel is saying to imply this is imminent, something that will happen soon, and so that raises a question of simple biology. She is not naïve, she knows the facts of life. Since she knows no man, how can this be?

She is ready and willing to believe but doesn't understand how this can be since she has no husband. And again, we are hit again with the supernatural. It will be accomplished by the powerful, presence of the Most High God.

1:36-37

As a further word of encouragement meant to strengthen her faith, Gabriel breaks a HIPAA law and tells Mary about her elderly relative, Elizabeth, who is already six months pregnant.

Gabriel tells Mary this as a present confirmation of a future promise. God knows our weaknesses, He knows our weak faith, He helps us. What Gabriel said to Mary is also meant to help you and me.

With God nothing is impossible. Do you believe that? Do you think it is just true for others? Do you live by this principle? What in your life is impossible? What do you believe not even God can do?

[There are a good many of us here who remember the Cold War and the Iron Curtain that divided Western Europe and Eastern Europe for decades. No one believed it would ever change and then the Berlin wall came down and the Iron Curtain across eastern Europe fell. That was one of the most impossible things anyone could imagine happening. No one saw the end of the Cold War.

God speaks to us of impossible things to reveal Himself to us to show us what He can do.

Isaiah 59:1 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear.

God puts seeming impossible things in our lives to show Himself to us.

In the spring of 2019 I was wrestling with something that was impossible for me. I couldn't see anyway on earth for me to do what I had been asked to do, I was stuck, and all I felt was stress, pressure, inadequacy, impotence. It was impossible.

Then early one morning in my devotion time God spoke to as clearly as anything I have ever heard. Robert, I want you to say yes and do it, and I will do it for you. It was so clear, and in that moment I knew I had to say yes, to get out of my fears and doubts and surrender to Him.

To this day that is a profound tangible experience of the supernatural power and presence of God. God was completely faithful, He accomplished it in me and through me. I am humbled, both by my lack of faith, and by His powerful presence and incredible grace.

Don't tell me there is no God, don't tell me there is a God but He stays in His heaven and doesn't meet us individually and specifically.

We are all finite and flesh, we are all human and subject to our fallen sinful condition. So we all experience doubts, questions, anxiety and worry. The best antidote is an absolute and resolute conviction that the infinite, almighty power of God is at work in our world and in our lives.

God made the world out of nothing, nothing is too hard for Him.

There is no sin too great to be forgiven.

There is no heart so hard that it cannot be changed.

There is no task given to us to do that is too hard.

There is no suffering too great that He will not be with us and sustain us.

We can do all things through Him who strengthens us.

If God is for us, who can be against us?

Let God's omnipotence be your assurance, faith, hope and confidence.

Think of your most impossible hope, your most impossible dream or desire and bring it to God.

Gabriel's news sounds impossible and then he declares nothing is impossible with God. The impossible is about to happen.

The incarnation is so counter cultural, so un-American, so humble. So impossible. We live in a culture that denies the supernatural, that looks down on what is poor and lowly, weak and foolish, that resists authority and especially anything looking like a king, and hesitates to surrender our wills to God.

There is one more way this Christmas story challenges our American culture.

Who of us thinks Mary is to be blessed and honored?
Who of us loves her character, her commitments, her faithfulness?
Who of us thinks she is a model of godly womanhood, of femininity?
Who of us uphold and praise such women and call them blessed?

What we are doing to women today is to make them as different from Mary as possible. What feminism has done to our view of women, is basically saying women need to be more like men.

Hollywood and the entertainment industry spews out movies and TV shows and video games filled with warrior women who beat up on and overpower men.

In what ways have we been sucked into our culture's views of women and the way feminism has destroyed femininity, and thinks it is better for women to act more like men? Why do we even dignify such trash by watching women whooping up on and killing men? It's ungodly.

Is that the example we want for our wives and daughters and sisters and mothers?

Are we willing to push against the tide and show honor and respect for women? To honor femininity, to speak well of the women in our lives? No demeaning language, no abusive talk or behavior. Wherever the Gospel of Jesus Christ has reached hearts and cultures, there has been positive change for women.

Do we find anything in this story about Mary appealing? Are we struck at all by her meekness and her gentle and humble spirit? Do we wish for all women the favor Mary had with God?

As Christians we need to resist being pressed and conformed to the world's mold and be a transforming influence. Will we start by honoring women as Jesus does? Will we encourage our daughters and granddaughters to seek the favor of God with a willing and gentle spirit submitted to the will of God and willing to say:

“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

1:38

We are so familiar with Mary's words, we can hardly hear them fresh. She calls herself a servant of the Lord, a slave girl of the Lord. Then she totally submits and surrenders herself to the will of God.

Everything was at risk for Mary, she knows the frightening cost. This would be the greatest trial her young faith ever endured. She was going to suffer the shame and humiliation and embarrassment of an out of wedlock pregnancy. Her reputation would be shattered. She was about to have the love of her life and her hope for a future destroyed. Her security of a home and family possibly gone. We will see the turmoil and upheaval it causes for Joseph next week.

In the face of all this she asks no further questions, and accepts the will of God for her. Her submission and acceptance are a most remarkable display of faith and trust and love for God.

Have you ever come to a place in your life where you have to say, perhaps with a bit of fear and trembling in your heart, God, whatever your will is, I submit and surrender to it and accept it as from your hand for your glory.

What about the Weinert family that has laid their little 22-hour old daughter in the ground?

What about when couples stand here with a child in their arms and answer, “Do you accept God’s will for your child whatever that will may be?” We do God helping us.

“May it be to me as you have said.”

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, ... equip you with everything good that you may do his will, *working in us that which is pleasing in his sight*, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Does that ever strike you as a bit scary? Working in us that which is pleasing in His sight. Who knows what is pleasing to the Lord? Who knows what God has in store for us and what He will take us through?

Who knows the twists and turns, the valleys, the dark nights that are ahead?
Who knows how different God’s ways are from our ways?

Who has the courage and strength and faith and willingness to say, “I am your servant, do to me whatever you wish according to your will and your pleasure.”

Who can say, “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord”?

Who can say, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

Who can say, "If it pleases the Lord, it pleases me."

Are we skeptics like Zechariah who says, "How is this possible?" or are we submitted servants like Mary who says, "Let it be to me according to your word"? Faith is tested by trials, by fire.

"Do you trust the Spirit enough to say: "I am your slave; take me; use your omnipotent power to put me where you want me, when you want me there, doing what you want me to do"?" JP

"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."