

# **Nothing is Impossible with God**

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**Luke 1 – Annunciation to Mary**

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Margaret was having a tough Christmas season. Her husband was out of town on business for most of December. Her kids were sick half the time, work was driving her crazy with year-end deadlines. Nothing was going right. About a week before Christmas she did some shopping at the mall during her lunch hour. She darted into a card store and bought a box of 50 Christmas Cards, already on sale because it was so late. That night she printed some address labels using the computer and put the kids to work. One signed the cards with the family's last name, a second stuffed the cards into the envelope, a third put on the address labels and the youngest stuck on the stamps, mostly upside down or sideways; but it got done, just in time.

The day after Christmas, Margaret was cleaning up and found a stray card between the couch cushions. She realized she had been so busy she never even read the card. She sat down on the couch and then cried after she read: "We're sending this card just to say, a little gift is on its way."

A little gift is on its way. That was the message that Gabriel gave to Zachariah and it is the message that Mary likewise is receiving from Gabriel today. For Zachariah it was a word of hope, an answer to prayer. For Mary though she had not been praying for a baby. She had no reason to, she was young, innocent and had her whole future ahead of her. This news would be troubling to her and could derail her entire future dreams. Pregnancy out of wedlock was often seen as a very disgraceful event in the culture Mary was living in. So news that she was pregnant before she and Joseph were married would be life altering for Mary especially.

Sometimes it can be hard to call those shocking and unexpected things of life a gift. An unexpected pregnancy, a concerning diagnosis, a debilitating accident that redirects your whole life. How do we respond to those unexpected gifts of life? How often do we even call it a gift? More like a curse or a painful dose of hardship perhaps.

When the Angel Gabriel first appears to Mary he first says, “Mary you are favored of God”. The Greek here actually means that Grace has been bestowed upon her. God has given her amazing grace. The words of the Catholic prayer to Mary comes from this verse and says it well. “Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.”

Mary is reassured here by the Angel that although this seems like a tragedy, she did not wish upon herself. An unexpected turn of life that will alter the course of all her dreams, God was with her. Add to that it was a grace, not a punishment. So many times, we struggle to see why something bad happens. We may even ask “what did I do wrong?” Others may whisper, “Did you sin? Is this why this happened to you?” And yet the voice of God tries to reassure us, “nothing you did caused this, you did not sin.” How do we respond? Do we, like Mary, hear the small voice within trying to calm our fears and tell us, “The lord is with you.” This is what grace feels like at those troublesome times of life.

Mary never really asks why me, but rather how. She struggles to understand how she will be with child; how will she be able to carry this little gift. When tragedy hits us, we often struggle with how, how will I go on. How will I recover from this and have a life still, when it feels like all my dreams are gone. Even others may be asking how can you recover from this?

I know that is what many people said after my friend Tom lost his right leg in a car accident a few years ago. Tom was a beloved, newly retired teacher and business owner in Minneapolis. Always cheerful, caring, giving back to the community kind of guy, in so many ways. When the accident happened, news came that he might not

ever walk again and that he had suffered severe trauma to his internal organs, broken ribs and right arm too. The community of friends rallied around Tom and his husband Dean helping where they could. Tom did lose his right leg below the knee and spent 40 days in the hospital and nearly a year in outpatient therapy to regain the use of his arm, hand and learn to live with a prosthetic. Tom calls life now his bonus years. He has since found a new purpose and lease on life. Not quite what Tom and Dean imagined but still working to improve the lives of others, especially those who have lost a limb. The accident not only altered his daily life and their dreams of retirement life, but Tom has found a new identity in the amputee community and a new passion helping others adjust to a new life as an amputee.

The same was true for Mary. She had to look past her immediate fear of the future and seek to embrace the new purpose, the new hope that the angel was sharing with her. Her little gift that is coming will bless others, change others in ways she could not imagine, and she is that gift bearer. She was given the opportunity to be a part of God's plan that would change the world. She maybe always dreamed of being a mother, but now her role in motherhood had an even deeper meaning and purpose in raising up the Messiah to know and understand this important calling for himself.

The Angel brought three words that brought peace to an otherwise scary situation for Mary and for all of us when the unexpected, life changing event occurs.

1. You are full of Grace,
2. God is with you
3. This will bear much fruit.

Mary receives these words instead of denying them and it gives her true peace. She says, "Here am I, your servant, may it be as you say." Instead of denying the new reality of her life, she embraces it trusting that God will be with her just she has been promised.

If Mary had remained in denial, which gives a false peace for a short time, she would have struggled with a deeper sense of guilt and impeded her ability to find joy and new purpose in her life.

The next part of the story is also important to us when we face life changing events like this. Mary goes to Elizabeth, who like her, knows the impact that these unexpected situations can have on a person.

Elizabeth becomes another messenger of hope and peace for Mary assuring her that what she has felt in her heart is true, God is with you and your new life does have meaning and purpose. When we seek out support from others, we will probably find the best support from those who know what we are going through. Even if we have not personally faced the struggle, we may find hope and inspiration to face our own battles when we see someone who has overcome a bigger tragedy and is making a difference in the world.

One story that Tom shared, was how his local barber arranged for another patron and amputee to stick around when Tom finally came in for a hair cut so they could meet. This helped Tom feel loved and supported by others and know that life would get better. Now today Tom also gives back by teaching and talking to other new amputees.

When life throws us a curve ball, an unexpected rerouting of the life we dreamed of it can be scary, hard and difficult to comprehend, but like Mary we can find peace in the midst of it, knowing that God gives us the grace we need, is with us through it all and that it will produce unexpected little gifts of joy that will offer hope to others.

We may feel like it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.