

December 20, 2020, Advent 4B, Luke 1:26-38

Have you ever thought about how incredible our Christian faith really is? And when I say “incredible”, I mean it in the literal sense of “something that seems too extraordinary or improbable to be believed.”

Think about our Christian message, the Gospel or Good News that we proclaim; we believe there is one and only one God, one divine, Supreme Being who created the universe and everything in it, including us. We believe that this great divine Being loves us so much that he was willing to become one of us in the incarnation of his Son, Jesus Christ. We also believe that the only begotten Son of God was willing to die for us as a sacrifice for our sins, even though he was perfectly innocent himself. After his excruciating death he rose from the grave to prove that sin and death have no power over him.

We go on to say that, out of his own grace and mercy he promises us that if we truly believe in him, we, too, can have eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

That is a truly incredible message if I ever heard one!

And those are just the basics, what we confess every Sunday in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. And a little aside here; the creeds are a great place to begin when looking for words to describe just what it is that we believe as Christians, “I believe in God, I believe in Jesus Christ, and I believe in the Holy Spirit”, etc.

But the incredible story of our faith goes way beyond the basics. We confidently proclaim that God loves us – this great, divine, Supreme Being – loves us, whether we feel deserving of his love or not. No matter how sad we feel, no matter how guilty we feel, no matter how shameful we feel, no matter how undeserving we feel, no matter how anything we feel, God loves every one of us even more than we love ourselves.

AND, God forgives even the most terrible things we have done and the most insidious deeds we could commit. God forgives us any time we come to him with heartfelt confession and forgiveness. As we proclaimed in the confession and absolution a few months back, God forgives us out of God’s radical abundance of divine mercy!

AND, we believe God never abandons or forsakes us, no matter how distant or disconnected we might feel.

An incredible message indeed! But perhaps most incredible of all, perhaps the most extraordinary and improbable part of this message is that all this comes from God’s own grace through faith and by the power of the Holy Spirit!

The message of our Christian faith is so incredible, it’s no wonder we sometimes can’t help but stop and think, “How can this be?”

“How can this be?”, as we heard in our Gospel reading, echoes Mary’s surprised response to the angel Gabriel when he came to her with an incredible message from the Lord.

Try to put yourself in Mary’s place: there she was, a young, innocent girl doing whatever young, innocent girls did in those days. The angel Gabriel suddenly appears to her and tells her she will conceive a son, even though there is no possible way she could conceive a child at that point in time. Gabriel goes on to tell her that, not only will she conceive and bear a son, but her son will be the Son of God! Talk about an incredible message!

AND he tells her that her son will sit on the throne of David forever (fulfilling the promise of God to David from centuries before). How could Mary possibly believe that? It was an incredible message. It was a message that seemed truly too extraordinary or improbable to be believed.

But after telling her that her relative, Elizabeth, had already miraculously conceived a child, Gabriel simply explains it all by saying that nothing will be impossible with God.

Is that a good enough explanation, “nothing will be impossible with God”? Mary seems to accept that explanation pretty easily. She doesn’t argue with Gabriel, she doesn’t seem to have any further doubts. Mary accepts the message and carries on with her mission.

Maybe there’s a reason why Mary found this message NOT so incredible. Being a faithful young woman, perhaps Mary recalled some lessons her parents had taught her, like the lesson of Abraham and Sarah. The story of Abraham and Sarah is similar to the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and just a little less incredible than Mary’s encounter with Gabriel.

Abraham is one of the great patriarchs of our biblical faith and Sarah was his wife. After years of trying to have children, when Abraham was 100 years old, the Lord promised them they would have a son. Sarah was a good bit younger than her husband; she was only 90 at the time, but it was still pretty incredible to think she could have a son. When Abraham asks, “Can Sarah, who is 90 years old bear a child?”, and Sarah says, “After I have grown old and my husband is old, shall I have a child?”, the Lord replies, “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?”

Nothing is impossible with God. If the Lord promises this couple, at 90 and 100 years old, that they will have a child, and they do, nothing is too wonderful for the Lord!

Can the Creator of the universe love us enough to become human like us? Nothing is impossible for God. Can the Son of God love us enough to die for us and rise from the grave to promise us eternal life with him? Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?

Can God forgive you and me when we turn our backs on him day after day and disobey him time after time? Can God know the depth of our pain when someone we love breaks our heart? Can God heal the relationships we jeopardize by our own selfishness, pride, and pettiness? Can God do all that? **NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD!**

The message of our Christian faith is truly an incredible message; incredible but not impossible. God promised an old barren couple they would have a son who would give rise to nations and Isaac was born. God promised this young virgin girl that she would conceive and bear a son who would be the Son of God, and Jesus was born.

God promises you and me that through faith in his Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can have a new life, and we are re-born.

In our human minds we think about this and ask, “How can this be?” But in our faithful hearts, we know the answer; nothing will be impossible with God!

Amen.