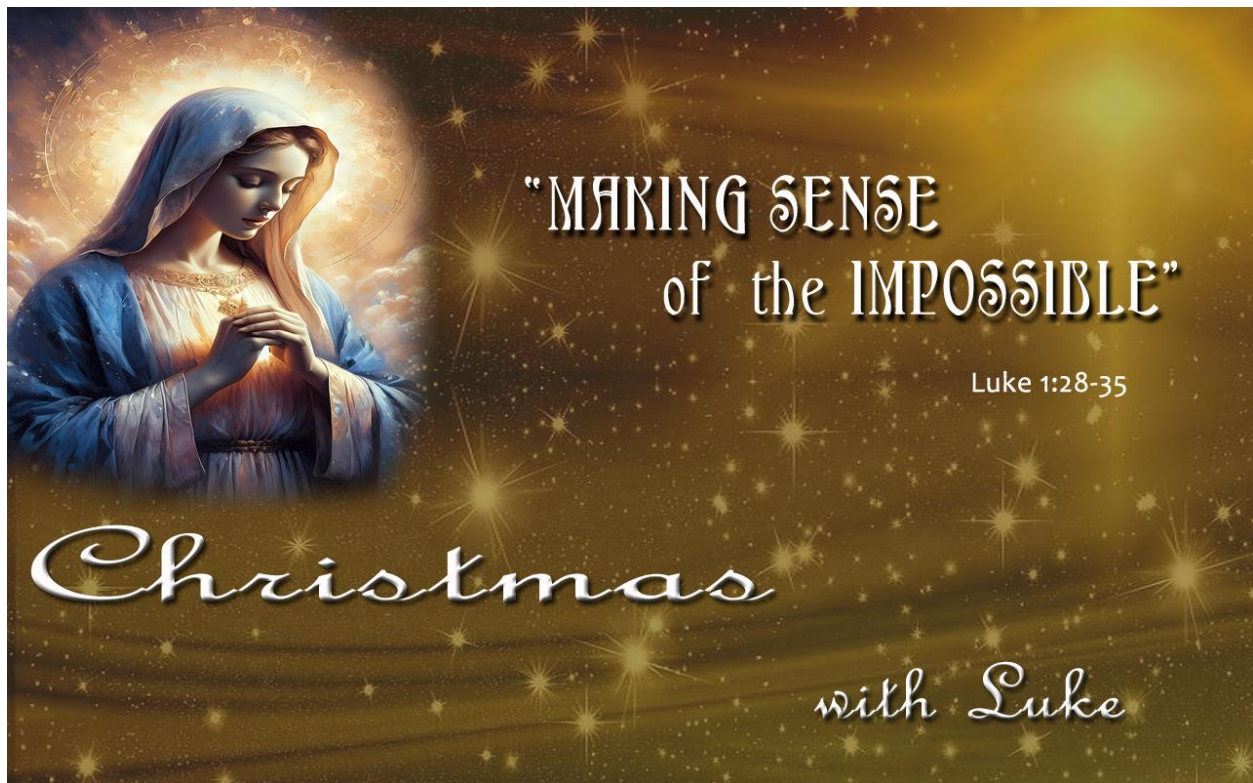


December 1, 2024

“Making Sense of the Impossible”



Luke 1:28-35

28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.

31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,

33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

34 “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Special Music: “Mary, Did You Know?” Pentatonix

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trW_ID9sBt0

Music for United Methodist Church

**Opening Hymn: “Come, Now is the Time to Worship”
Dean**

Phillips Craig &

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0oKf84dtEGs>

**Grace Praise Hymn: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” Polk Street Methodist
Church**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehyAQ8bdJBo>

Special Music: “Mary, Did You Know?”

Penatonix

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trW_ID9sBt0

Servant’s Hymn: “Go, Tell it on the Mountain”

FUMC Houston

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZRRR9IkdaE>

GOD AT WORK

Donna woke up in a warm bed, the smell of fresh coffee and breakfast in the air. The rain had stopped, and the sun was shining through the window. There was a stained-glass dream catcher hanging from the windowsill that caught the rays of the sun, rendering colorful patterns on the wall. She felt... content. Content and safe for the first time in almost a week. Her muscles no longer ached with the anxiety that had brought her to Katie Calloway's house. She felt so comfortable she didn't want to get up, but instead snuggle deeper into the blankets where she felt so warm and safe. But that would be rude after all the Callaways had done for her.

She noticed that her clothes, clean and pressed, were hanging on the handle of the closet door. Donna reluctantly pushed off the covers and started to get dressed. Her immediate goal was to retrieve her car and ponder what her next move would be. Out of gas and out of money. What was she going to do? She looked out the window and said with a sigh, "God, I really could use a break." Saying this didn't mean she wasn't grateful for all that Katie and the girls had done for her, just that she needed to find a way to keep moving forward. Going back was not an option.

Having finished getting dressed, she opened the bedroom door and walked slowly towards the kitchen. Katie was at the stove cooking eggs and sausage, while Brenda made biscuits and Jackie poured orange juice. There was also the smell of turkey in the air. It was only then that Donna remembered that this was

Thanksgiving Day, and the turkey smell must be coming from the oven. It didn't cause her to change her mind, though. She needed to find a way to get back on the road.

"Well, there she is!" said Katie. "Good morning, Donna! Did you sleep well?" In the light of the morning, Katie could see the bruise on Donna's face and noticed her left eye was swollen. She didn't mention it to the young woman but put down her spatula to give her a big, warm hug.

"Better than I deserved to sleep, Ms. Callaway," Donna replied, hugging her back.

"Now, don't be calling me Ms. Callaway. It makes me seem old. Everyone calls me Katie. Are you ready for some breakfast? Hurry up, girls. It's time to set the table. Brenda, please put the eggs on the table and Jackie plate the sausage. I'm going to take a moment and make some gravy for those biscuits. Be sure to put the butter out!"

There was a flurry of activity as the girls set the table and brought over the biscuits and the eggs. It didn't take but a couple of minutes for Katie to fix the gravy which she put in a bowl and delivered to the table. Donna hadn't eaten this well in days and she could hardly contain her excitement looking at the breakfast feast.

Everyone took a place at the table and Katie said grace. Donna didn't feel like she was a stranger, but more like an extended member of this family. That cozy feeling remained with her as Brenda started passing food in her direction.

“Ms. Callaway... I mean Katie, you have been so kind,” Donna said. “When we finish breakfast, I will be heading back out to find my car and see what I need to do to get back on the road. I have imposed on you way too much.”

“Nonsense, Donna. Don’t be silly. You need to realize that things are a little different here in Parable, TX. We take care of our people here. After you went to bed last night, I gave Sheriff Thom a call to let him know what was going on. He and his deputy, Dusty, went straight on out to find your car. They called Trent Willoughby who brought the tow truck and together they moved your car to the QuickStop so that Trent could see what was going on with it. Sheriff Tom came by, and I slipped into your room and took your keys to make things easier for them.”

“But you shouldn’t have done that, Katie. And there was no reason to get those gentlemen out in the rain last night,” said Donna!

“What’s done is done, Donna,” Katie replied. “Trent thinks he will have your car ready by this afternoon.”

“But it’s Thanksgiving, Katie. He shouldn’t be working on my car. He needs to be with his family,” Donna interjected.

“Trent’s folks are visiting his mother’s sister in Austin, and they left Trent here to take care of the station,” Katie rambles on without pausing. “Trent will be joining us for Thanksgiving dinner. Oh. And I also invited Pastor Chuck and his son Matthew as well. I just couldn’t leave those two to cook Thanksgiving for

themselves. They would have ended up eating hot dogs before watching the game. Their lives just haven't been the same since the pastor's wife passed."

There was a knock on the door and Brenda jumped up to answer it. It was Pastor Chuck, and he brought news.

"You must be Donna," he said holding out his hand. "Katie called me last night to let me know that you needed some help. I think we may have put something together for you."

"What do you mean, pastor? I haven't asked for anything. But I want to tell you that Katie and the girls have been wonderful. I am so very grateful. I don't know how to thank everyone. I don't have any way to repay you all for your kindness."

Pastor Chuck looked at her, also noticing the bruise and swollen eye. He also said nothing. "Look here, Donna. We talked about setting you up at the Bent Tree Motel until you were able to get on your feet, but we also realized that you may need a little more room than that. Randall Dickson went to visit his brother in New York and won't be back until after the holidays. I called him last night after talking with Katie. He had left me the key to his place so I could look after things while he was gone. He suggested that you stay there while he is out of town. He's got a couple of dogs and a cat that need to be fed and taken care of, and it would sure take a load off my plate if you would take him up on his offer. He told me that he would pay you for doing this for him. It might not much, but

it's better that being on the road through the holidays. Whatcha think? It sounds like a plan to me, and it will give you time to figure out what comes next."

"I can't do that, Pastor Chuck! None of you know me. I would be taking advantage. Nope, I just can't do that!" said Donna stubbornly.

"Of course you can. It's all been settled. I will take you to your car at the QuickStop this afternoon so you can get your things, and then we will get you settled at Randall's place. That should give you space you need to think and put a little cash in your pocket as well."

Katie spoke up saying, "It's a good thing, Donna. And the girls and I will come to help you get settled. And, if it will help, Daisy is looking for a morning waitress over at the diner. I'm sure she would love to talk to you about that."

Donna was flabbergasted. Where was all this coming from? What had seemed like a totally hopeless situation last night had become a ray of hope. When things look beyond impossible, it is difficult to make sense of the change in circumstances. She remembered the dream catcher in the window, and it reminded her that the essence of any situation can change in a moment with the right perspective and the grace of the right people.

"All right," said Donna. "But only until I can get my act together."

"Well, then it is settled," said Katie. "Let's get these dishes washed up and start getting ready for Thanksgiving Dinner. There's a lot to do, so let's get to it."

Donna started to collect the plates, but Katie stopped her. “Let the girls do it, Donna. Grab your coffee and join me and Pastor Chuck on the porch. We’re all going to get to know each other better so that we are better able to help you on your journey.”

Donna couldn’t remember ever enjoying a more wonderful morning, sitting on the cool porch, talking with new friends, and stepping into God’s blessing.

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.

31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

What do you do when God plops a miracle into your lap? What do you do when you can't explain what you see and hear? What do you do when the answers to your impossible questions come back to you in a way that you simply can't explain? What do you do when what is happening in your life defies logic, tramples on your serenity, and forces you outside your comfort zone? WHAT DO YOU DO?

Mary had so much going for her. She was a young woman with her whole life ahead of her. Her father had entered into a marriage contract to have her wed a man whom she found was very kind and caring. Everything was as it should be. She felt blessed knowing that God loved her, cared for her, and was preparing her for the days ahead. Life was rosy. Life was good.

And then, along comes an angel to disrupt her world, change the balance, push her outside of her comfort zone, bring her into a state of confusion, upend her world, and challenge her preconceptions by telling her that God was about to put her in a precarious and possibly devastating position. Suddenly, there is a

chance that everything that had appeared rosy just a few moments before, is about to be jeopardized.

Just look at all that she suddenly had to process:

1. **A visit from an angel:** While not unheard of, it was something few women had experienced. It was a surprise. It was humbling. It was scary. It was impossible. It must have made her think her mind was playing tricks on her. It was outside of the box in which her values and beliefs lived. The presence of the angel was unreconcilable.
2. **The message:** This was not a “Hi! How are you?” message. It was a message containing impossible information to process. Information that defied logic. It was a message that brought more questions than answers:
 - a. Why me?
 - b. Why now?
 - c. Is this a blessing or a punishment?
 - d. What will people think?
 - e. Will my betrothed understand?
 - f. Will I be ostracized?
 - g. Will my family reject me?
 - h. Will my peers judge me?
 - i. Will I end up raising this baby on my own?

And these questions all occurred before she even became pregnant with the Christ child.

3. The Burden:

- a. She now has to tell Joseph and her family**
- b. Will they even believe her?**
- c. All while dealing with the impossible notion of being the mother to God's Son while still a virgin.**
- d. How does she begin to process the knowledge that she is about to be the mother to the Son of the Creator? What does that even look like?**

Ask yourself, "What if this were to occur to one of the women among us?" How would we treat her? How would she treat herself? Do we really believe we would be more accepting of her situation today than the people around Mary in her time? It must have been hard not knowing how everyone else was going to react when she told them about an angel's visit and his message to her. Wouldn't we think she was either crazy, or maybe letting her imagination get the best of her? We might even think she was just saying things to get attention. When it was apparent that she was pregnant, maybe people might possibly have thought that the angel story was just a way to justify the pregnancy to avoid judgmental attitudes. How much simpler it might have been for Mary if the Angel had appeared to her when she was in a group of people so that she had some validation for her story.

But the angel didn't come for anybody else. Nor did he come to give her validation. Instead, God sent his messenger to comfort Mary and let her know that it was not some tragic event or punishment, but the greatest blessing that

God could bestow on any human being. God wanted to give her advanced knowledge that what was about to happen was the culmination of a plan that existed before time itself, and she was an integral part of implementing that plan. God was using her to show the world just how much he loved his children.

So, how do WE deal with the unexplainable in our lives? And please don't try to tell this old preacher that you have never once experienced something you can't explain in your life. We all have. I can think of numerous times in my life when something totally unexplainable happened. Things that I have never been able to logically put to rest. But the question we are dealing with is not "Do these things happen?", but rather, "How do we deal with these events when they happen?"

We all have three choices when it comes to wrapping our brains around the impossible.

- 1. We can keep trying to understand them by doing research, seeking out help, sharpening our pencils and doing the math hoping we don't wind up right back where we started. But generally, when we do that, we end up missing the blessing because we are totally focused on the 'how' rather than the 'why.' There are people who spend their entire lives struggling with a problem that they cannot solve and end up taking it to the grave with them.**
- 2. We can just ignore it and hope the situation resolves itself. That happens a lot more than we like to talk about. We keep avoiding paying that one bill that we believe is wrong. We decide that our eyes and ears**

are playing tricks on us because whatever it is doesn't belong in our three-dimensional Universe, nor can it be tucked neatly into the envelope of our existence. We tell ourselves we must have been dreaming, so we just go on about our business, once again missing the blessing that was intended. We simply choose to believe that it isn't possible so there can't be any substance with it.

3. We can choose to accept that something is going on here that we might never understand. But the resulting blessing is still real to us. Maybe God is trying to tell us something. Maybe God is trying to reposition us to meet a need that we are unaware of. Perhaps God is trying to heal us emotionally, physically, or spiritually. The question then becomes, "Are we too stubborn to just lean into the blessing without understanding the logic of how it arrives?"

Mary had the right idea. She stepped into the message and accepted the charge that God placed on her. And instead of chasing the 'why me?', she praised God and welcomed the opportunity to serve him in a capacity that she felt neither worthy of nor was prepared for.

Remember Donna and Katie in our story today? Donna, in her despair, had never expected to wake up on Thanksgiving morning in a warm bed, much less find the gracious nature of Katie and her daughters, who had welcomed her into their home and met her needs. But she would have missed out on that blessing if she had failed to step into the moment of grace that God had provided for her. And the Callaways had not expected to be in a position to help a total stranger in

need, but God provided, and they were all blessed by the opportunity. They were all engaged as the blessing unfolded and Randall Dixson offered up his home until Donna could get back on her feet.

That's where the biggest test of faith occurs in our lives; those moments when God is speaking to us or bringing change into our lives. When we realize that what we believe is impossible is actually God providing for us in unexpected and often illogical circumstances. When we accept the fact that we hear God's voice and embrace his plans, knowing that he will prepare us, guide us, and provide the necessary resources for something that we think is impossible; something that we feel we are incapable of, untrained for, unprepared for, totally unrealistic, that is when we become able to step into the miracle and get the greatest blessings he has prepared for us.

The blessings we receive through our unquestioned service to our Creator are the greatest blessings possible. All we need to do is stop asking why and simply say, "Yes, Lord." God is waiting on that 'yes,' so that he can bless us in profound and often inexplicable ways.

May God bless you all with the inexplicable.

AMEN

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