

Birthing the Impossible

Amina McIntyre

Ph.D candidate, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee

Luke 1: 34-37

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."^[b] ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him 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 ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ *Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"*^[c] ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born^[d] will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ **For nothing will be impossible with God.**" ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

It's Christmastide. We've sung all the songs. We've beheld the Lamb of God. We went and told it on the mountain. We've heard the Herald Angels sing. We've wondered What Child this was and sat still for the Silent Night. We've opened presents. We've celebrated the Christ candle being lit. We wrote and participated in Christmas pageants. We've watched all the movies. Maybe we were moved once again when Linus gave his speech at Charlie Brown's Christmas or wondered how that poor Grinch's heart could be so small. We've witnessed the reason for the season and miracles in our lives. Yet and still, many of us question the impossible. We hope for potential but doubt the tangible. We hope for the opportunity but doubt the reality. We hope for the ideal but doubt the manifestation.

In the passage in Luke, we just learned about Elizabeth's pregnancy. She wasn't a young woman. She hadn't been pregnant nor did she have a family. But she had been visited by an angel and told that her womb was opening. This was impossible, but it wasn't, for you see, there has been history of these occurrences with the God of Abraham. Allow me to trace the genealogy a little. Sarai, Abraham's wife, was barren to the point that they even brought in another woman to extend the lineage. Sarai laughed, but became a believer when she birthed the baby, Issac, changing her name to Sarah. She was the first of 6 women who had this occurrence. After Sarah

was Rebekah, Issac's wife. Issac already believed it was possible based on lineage, and they had twins Jacob and Esau. After Rebekah was Rachel, Jacob's second wife, the wife he worked 14 years to marry. She bore Joseph.

Samson's nameless mother in the book of Judges was also barren and encountered the messenger. The lineage doesn't stop here: Hannah, second wife of Elkanah had trouble conceiving, and after pouring her heart out to God, she bore Samuel. So when we arrive at Elizabeth, it's not actually out of place for a barren woman, perhaps up in her years or with a closed womb, to become pregnant. In the midst of this quite familiar story is an interruption with a story about a girl who has a similar experience. And midway through the conversation between the angel and Mary, the writers use a double negative (in the NRSV) to convey this phenomenon.

Let's talk about this sentence—*For nothing will be impossible with God*. When we worry about how we will engage youth and young adults,—*For nothing will be impossible with God*. When we worry about what might happen with “45” over the next year—*For nothing will be impossible with God*. When we worry about our finances or illnesses or work and school issues—*For nothing will be impossible with God*. The writer takes the doubt, worry, and intangible to make it something that we can see and accept as a truth and a fact. This line alone can teach us of many blessings, but it is what causes this statement to be said that we can learn from.

“But Rev McIntyre, the impossible is the impossible. God wouldn't use me, would God?” We have to understand the impossible isn't just a situation but a movement throughout your life.

The impossible starts before the miracle. ²⁸ “And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.’ ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.’” The angel enters and calls Mary “favored one,” the name as God sees her. Mary is confused because she is called by this name. Mary has yet to recognize the favor inside herself. God tells Mary to live in her calling before she recognized what her calling was. This makes sense later in her own parenting when Mary tells Jesus at the Wedding of Cana, “Go turn water to wine.” The scripture says God knew me before I knew myself. God knows what we're capable of. God knows the healing that's in your hands, how your next business venture will be funded, how you will make an impact in your church, community. There's a child in here right now that has been dreaming of a way it wants to be involved in worship but doesn't know it's possible because it doesn't realize that God has already named and ordained it.

The impossible will combine old structure with new innovation. Verse 35-36 reads, ³⁵ “The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born^[d] will be holy; he will be called Son of God.’ ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.”

As I mentioned, Elizabeth's pregnancy isn't what is out of place. See, for Mary, this kind of occurrence was very much, as Kendrick Lamar would say, "inside her DNA." What is odd is for a woman who is a virgin, unmarried, to receive the blessing of childbirth in the way that her ancestors did, but not in the way that her ancestors did. Mary's birth was full of so many impossibilities. Much like this year going out and next year coming in, Elizabeth's birth is the old way of how things happened, and Mary's is the new way. Later, when they meet and their babies leap from the anointing placed in their wombs, we see that nothing is impossible with God.

Mary knows that her situation is different. Mary knows Joseph won't take it well, but knows God will soften his heart to whatever is to happen.

The impossible will invite you to submit to what is possible, even after Christmas has passed and as we are knee deep inside of Christmas. Mary had nothing but faith and commitment. ³⁸ "Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'" Then the angel departed from her. The angel did not leave Mary until she confessed with her mouth that she was ready to receive this calling and step into her role. The angel did not physically leave until Mary spoke with her mouth her readiness to have her womb opened.

So on the other side of Christmas, while we are yet in Christmastide, after the birth has occurred, after the shepherds have recognized the star, after we've spent time with family, after the presents have been opened, after Linus speaks in a "Charlie Brown Christmas," after the Grinch's heart has grown 3 sizes larger, there is still more to the story. The impossible is already set up in your life if you're ready for your spiritual womb to open and birth the possibilities. The impossible only wants you to be willing to stretch your faith, stretch your gifts, stretch your dreams, stretch your talents, stretch your life, stretch your family, because you can handle God's calling. You can handle that impossible within yourself. God crafted the heavens and the world out of nothing, for God births the impossible. God allows there to be fruitfulness over barren land, for God births the impossible. God can bring justice like an ever rolling stream, for God births the impossible. God.

You oughta take out a sheet of paper or open the notepad on your phone right now and write down that thing God had been holding in your heart for you to do. You ought to declare 2022 right now to be the year you'll no longer sit on your calling. You ought to put away that doubt right now and invite God to call you by your Favored name. You ought to allow God to tell you how a traditional path will lead to new light.

For nothing is impossible with God.