

Dec 15th 2013 "Facing The Impossible"; Luke 1:26-38

The other Thursday several of us went together to see the film The Christmas Candle, and there was one scene in that film that really touched me. It concerned a young boy who wanted to be a preacher but unfortunately was unable to speak due to the recent and tragic death of both his parents, and the traumatic impact of that on him. But that Christmas he had prayed, as had several others, for a personal miracle.

Then on Christmas Eve as they gathered together, he surprised the whole community by standing in their midst and speaking. And as he talked of the Lord's goodness to him he mentioned his joy at being able to share with them his favourite verse which just happened to be Luke 1:37

³⁷ For with God nothing shall be impossible.

Although it was only a fictional story I found the faith behind that young lad's declaration to be very moving. The thought that we have a God to whom nothing is impossible.

This truth is a major part of the Christmas story, for those words were spoken to Mary by the angel Gabriel in that part of the Gospel of Luke that we read from this morning.

Mary is presented as a young virgin who has been promised in marriage to Joseph, who we believe to be an older man. There was nothing unusual about that and in many cultures that type of arrangement still happens regularly today. She lived in a fairly unimportant village in Galilee and no doubt had very low expectations for her future. She would marry, have children, and live out her days in Nazareth, just like the other girls of her age and status.

She had no reason to believe that she was special in any way or that her life would count for anything spectacular. Then one day God sent His angel to her with a most surprising message that was preceded by an alarming greeting. Luke 1: 28 says

The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

And what we notice in the next verse is that she was greatly troubled, not by the appearance of the angel, although that must have been really frightening, but by his words. Look at v29

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

She would never have had such words said about her in her life before. No one I'm sure would ever have told her that she was a highly favoured, highly blessed, highly thought of person. But here was the angel of God doing just that. Telling her how God saw her, and indeed that God was with her.

It reminded me about a man called Gideon in the book of Judges. An angel appeared to him too and addressed him as a mighty warrior. Judges 6:12

When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, 'The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.'

And Gideon too was at first distressed by the Angels description because Gideon saw himself as so different to what God saw him. Judges 6:15 has Gideon saying to the Angel

'Pardon me, my lord, but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.'

And in human terms Gideon was no doubt right in his self-assessment as Mary would have been in hers, but God saw Gideon and Mary in an entirely different way because He Was With Them. Note how that phrase was addressed to them both.

That divine echo that Don talks about in his participaper article is the factor that makes all the difference. Whenever God calls a person to follow Him and to do a specific task for Him He always takes into account the fact that we will never be alone. He will be with us, and therefore we should never fear that we might be unsuitable, underqualified, or inadequate. God chose us because He will be with us.

Well for Mary there was indeed a task for her to do and it was a huge task, and one that she, as a virgin, had every right to believe herself un-qualified for.

For she was to give birth to a son who she would call Jesus. And He would be great and would be called the Son of the Most High. And there was more that the angel told her about this child and I think that it was all too much for Mary, and I sense that she may even have interrupted him when she blurted out in v34

'How will this be, 'since I am a virgin?'

And then the Angel told her about the power of God over shadowing her and that a baby would be born, the Son of God. And that her very old relative, Elizabeth—barren still in her old age—was sixth months pregnant.

Then the Angel spoke the words that gave such hope to the young boy in that film.

³⁷ For with God nothing shall be impossible.

And Mary took those words to heart and her response was in v38

'I am the Lord's servant, May it be to me as you have said.'

J B Phillips paraphrases her words in this way:

"I belong to the Lord, body and soul, let it happen as you say."

That was exactly the response God wanted from Mary. A total surrender of herself to God's will despite how impossible it seemed to her because the Angel had told her, and he should know, that with God with her nothing that He willed through her was impossible.

You see that statement was not made by a human being to another human being, but by an angel of the Lord. That's why we should not doubt it.

Indeed, the only other person to make this statement was Jesus. God become man.

And he said it to disciples; and He says it to you if you belong to Him this morning. And He wants those of you who He is drawing to Himself to hear it too. To God nothing is impossible, and God is with us. Now that doesn't mean that God has locked Himself into doing everything that we think He should do. Neither does it mean that we will always understand or appreciate the way God goes about doing the impossible in us.

But it does mean that whatever situation you are in at the moment. Whatever pain or sorrow you are dealing with. Whatever task you are concerned about. Whatever fears you are wrestling with, As a believer you can be assured that the God of the impossible is with you and He has plans for you right now that if you were to see them in all their fullness, you would think they were impossible.

God will do them, but He wants from you the complete trust He got from Mary. That won't be easy because God deals in a different time frame to what we have, but it's the only way forward for each and every believer. If we hold back our trust and obedience, then we will stagnate or drift backwards in our faith.

But when we trust despite our pain. Push on despite our fears. Persevere despite our failings, we will discover that God is always with us, and that in the end it is only through our obedient walk with Him that we discover fullness of joy.