

Fourth Sunday in Advent
Luke 1:26-38
Preacher: Vicar, Jim Goodyear

St. Peter's Lafayette Hill, PA
December 21, 2008

Impossible!

They said it couldn't be done. How many times in your life have you heard a similar comment? I recall a time when it was thought a man would never step foot on the moon, an African-American will never be president of the United States, a woman would never be elected to the US House of Representatives or Senate, travel between London and Paris only by boat or airplane. Before my time, people only imagined talking with someone across town with out traveling there, reading at night time with light other than a fire in the fireplace. Here we are in the 21st century and things we thought would never have happened, have; never say never.

President Kennedy challenged this nation to place a man on the moon before the end of the 1960's decade. I remember watching on television when Neil Armstrong "made one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" on July 20, 1969. The nation will inaugurate its first African-American as President on January 20, 2009; women have been in the house of representatives and senate for decades with the first woman as Speaker in Nancy Pelosi; today one can travel in their car between London and Paris in the Chunnel – an underwater passage way in the English Channel. Today we talk with friends and neighbors down the road not over wires but wireless devices called cell phones. I can talk with my son in Iraq or Florida or California any time of the day and it sounds like he is in the same room.

Our lives have changed directly or indirectly over the years with possibilities that once seemed impossible. Each day we are bombarded with advertisements to buy this or to buy that 'to make life easier' newer gadgets that you wonder why they are even in existence. Thomas Watson, the chairman of IBM said in 1943, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers." Imagine our world today with out computers. Computers are used for the minutest of tasks – to operate systems in our cars, our electronic devices, some are used to play music and watch television.

The reading from Luke today begins with a visit from the angel Gabriel to a virgin named Mary, a young woman who is engaged to Joseph, a hometown boy with a good or at least decent job – a carpenter. The angel's visit is alarming if not

scary, but the announcement is astonishing and quite frankly, Mary deems it to be impossible: “You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus” (Luke 1:31). Impossible, how can that be. Who am I to bear the great I am for the world. I am but a young girl. What will the neighbors say about me – a woman pregnant before marrying her husband? This can’t be happening to me. But God...

Eventually Mary is receptive to this news because Gabriel tells her that his name will be Jesus which means, “He will save” high and exalted, Jesus is described as one who “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.” “Mary did you know?” that your baby boy will one day walk on water? Save our sons and daughters; has come to make you new? Will give sight to the blind; calm a storm with his hand; has walked where angels trod. Mary did you know that your baby boy is heavens perfect lamb?

Mary ponders all this, but not for long. She says, “Here I am, a servant of the Lord; let it be according to your Word.” She accepts this child, and the course of human history is changed forever. What a difference a baby makes. We know how a baby can change our lives; sleepless nights, dirty diapers, crying uncontrollably. And to think of what might happen in the future; walking, talking, going to school, college education. I doubt Mary even considered any of those things. After all, Gabriel was sent by God. God wants nothing but the best for us. He sends a baby. Do we really want this baby? Are we ready to welcome this child – not into the world – but into OUR world? Or are we more inclined, upon hearing the claims this child puts upon us, to hit the road and get outta here?

Our challenge today is to consider whether we are open and receptive to Jesus coming into our lives or is it easier to let someone else do it. It is so significant that Mary said yes to her own particular baby and was willing to risk her reputation as an unwed mother in order to allow the Son of God to enter the world. She didn’t worry about her engagement to a little known man, her social standing, her health. She didn’t spend a minute thinking about how she would care for this child. Instead, she said yes to a baby who would grow up to be the Savior of the world, and provide a way for us to be cared for eternally believing that God would take care of her and this new child.

Are we willing to be this open, this receptive this faithful to the promises of God? Are we willing to embrace the Christ Child and will this child make a difference in our lives? When we say “Here I am, servant of the Lord” we are

making a commitment to being open, receptive and faithful to the promises and the priorities of God. We are showing a willingness to allow the Christ child to be born in us today and everyday; to influence our life.

When I was the president of our congregation council about fifteen years ago, we were faced with tough decisions that affected the long term ministry of the congregation. There was an apparent need for a social gathering place, they wanted to build a youth program. They wanted to have the conveniences of a newer church building and be like the one across the street but the reality was they had a building that was 150 years old and they were not the same church across the street. Yes, when I think back on that time, it sounds vaguely familiar to some of the stories I have heard at St. Peters. It seemed like the decision making process left Jesus out in the cold. Everyone seemed to be pushing their own particular agenda. One particular meeting, I opened with a devotion of music. I then asked, 'where is God?' Each person spent the next twenty minutes or so reflecting in their own way what God desired of this congregation. When we returned, the conversation led us to discover new ideas about ourselves. A plan was soon developed that allowed for the congregation to grow into the faithful people God wanted them to be. Once God and the saving power of Jesus Christ was welcomed into the conversation, new life sprang forth. What was once thought impossible, soon became a reality. Building conversions were developed, people stepped up into leadership positions, and today this congregation is growing. Not everything came at one time. It is only now 17 years later that that original plan is being completed.

Even personally I have been challenged. As a teenager, I sensed I would someday work in the church. Believe it or not, I remember preaching my first sermon when I was fifteen. No one else in the youth group wanted to stand up in front of the congregation! Over the years, I allowed other people to influence me from decision process by not going into ministry. Reasons were placed in front of me I thought valid at the time prevented me from hearing God's call. Once I opened myself to hearing God's word, it became apparent I was too become a servant of the Lord. Barriers I thought were in the way soon were no more. The once impossible is nearing a reality. Isn't that the way we often live our lives? We know there is something there, but we let our own selves get in the way. But when we let God into the conversation, great things happen. When we welcome Jesus, into our lives, the impossible becomes real. Life is given to each of us, to accept and share with others.

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. (v 30). What an amazing gift this is, to be favored by God – fully accepted and supported; no questions asked. God chose Mary the same way he has chose you. He comes to us in the form of a little baby; an innocent child that will save us from our sins and give eternal life. Martin Luther was deeply troubled by his sin, and struggled with the question, “How can I be accepted by God?” Luther’s breakthrough was the discovery that he was completely dependent on the mercy of God through faith in Jesus Christ. In fact Luther’s discovery was a rediscovery. He unearthed what Mary already knew – that salvation is a gift from God, one that comes through faith rather than works. The same is true for us: We become the favored ones of God when we put our trust in Jesus. In one of Luther’s Christmas sermons he said there were three miracles that occurred in Christ’s birth: God became human, a virgin conceived and Mary believed. For Luther, the greatest miracle was the third miracle, Mary believed.

If we are going to follow Jesus, we need to be a servant’s of the Lord. This means finding the Lord’s favor through faith, believing that God is always with us, trusting Jesus to save us and showing obedience to the Son of the Most High. Serving God, as Mary did, begins with saying “yes” to God. Watch what was thought impossible become real.