

WHAT IS MORE INCONCEIVABLE?

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ December 20, 2015

²⁶ In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 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 be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name 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 the house of Jacob 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 upon 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. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God." ³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. (Luke 1:26-38)

Dear pilgrims on our journey to see the Savior born in Bethlehem,

There comes a time in a man's life where he has to admit that something was better than he expected. Maybe it's when he finds out college isn't so bad after all. Maybe it's when he realizes his wife's cooking isn't so bad after all. For me, some of those times have come with a number of movies. One of those movies is *The Princess Bride*. It has a little bit of something for everyone – some action, some romance, some comedy. The story begins when Princess Buttercup is kidnapped by a Sicilian criminal mastermind named Vizzini and his two henchmen. Vizzini has laid careful plans so as not to be followed, but it is all for naught as a mysterious man in black is close on their heels. Despite all his attempts to shake him, the man still follows. With each foiled attempt Vizzini utters the famous word, "Inconceivable!"

The Princess Bride is probably not the only time someone has used the word "inconceivable," but it certainly is one of the more famous uses of the word. Vizzini used the word exclaiming how he couldn't conceive in his mind how the man in black was foiling his plans. I wonder, how many things might you think are inconceivable? Now I wonder, if you went back and looked at those things you found utterly inconceivable in your mind – how many of them would be utterly impossible. It may be inconceivable to lose 30lbs, but for many it is not impossible. It may be inconceivable to make a billion dollars, but it is not impossible.

So you see, there is a slight difference between the word inconceivable, and impossible. But when we take a look at the virgin Mary from our gospel this morning, and consider the news she heard from the angel Gabriel – we might find it both inconceivable and impossible. The virgin would be with child and give birth to the Son of God Most high. Chances are you focused on the fact that Mary was a

virgin who was going to get pregnant. And while it certainly is inconceivable for a virgin to become pregnant, that's not the only inconceivable part of the sentence. WHAT IS MORE INCONCEIVABLE?

1. The virgin birth or that he would be
2. The Son of the Most High

(1)

The book of Galatians records for us that “**when the time had fully come God sent his Son.**” Over the last several weeks, we have been using that passage to describe what it meant for the time to have fully come. We have seen how God has set the stage for his Son to be born. He did that not only on a great and grand scale with the rising and falling of nations, but he did that on a very personal and intimate scale – preparing those directly involved with the Savior's birth. Today our focus is drawn to Mary.

Jewish custom was for young teenage girls to be chosen by older Jewish men for marriage. This was just tradition. It was also tradition for those who were engaged to not sleep with one another until the official marriage ceremony. And even though they were engaged, the practice involving marriage among the Jews regarded the couple as husband and wife. This is seen in the first chapter of the gospel of Matthew where even during the time of their engagement Mary and Joseph are referred to as husband and wife.

And so you can imagine the stigma that would have come upon Mary if she was found to be pregnant before the marriage took place. So it only makes sense that God would announce the birth of His Son to the virgin mother. Like he did for Joseph, God sent the angel Gabriel to the backwoods town of Nazareth, to the insignificant region of Galilee in the northern part of Israel. The angel greeted Mary.

“**Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.**” Just so you know, this was not a common thing. It was not common to have an angel visit you and then say ‘you're highly favored.’ And so you begin to understand why Mary was puzzled by the angel's words. The angel explained how she would be the one who would bear the Savior of the world. “**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 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.**”

What was Mary's first reaction to hearing the news? It is similar to the reaction you probably had. She said, “**How will this be since I am a virgin.**” It would be literally inconceivable that a virgin could conceive. And so Mary was understandably wondering about this part of the prophecy. It's this inconceivable notion that has led many to dismiss it as false, or to dismiss it with saying the word for “virgin” can also mean “young woman.” But the rest of the story bears out how Mary really was a virgin and not just a young woman. When she asked how this is possible, she literally said “since I have not slept with a man.” And the angel acknowledged the seeming impossibility of this happening when he said, “**nothing is impossible for God.**”

The angel explained how it would happen – “**The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.**” Don't overlook those special words to Mary. God

was going to be with her in a very special way. It would take special patience and faith to go through what she was going to go through. There would be many who would look at her skeptically, Mary herself may have had doubts about her worthiness to birth such a child. Through all of that, God would watch over her.

This was the way our Savior was to enter the world. This is what was necessary, this is how God chose to work. Every other human born into this world is conceived and born in sin, because they are born of two sinful people. The only way Jesus could avoid being conceived in sin is to have the Holy Spirit plant him in the womb of the Virgin Mary. This way, Jesus shared in our humanity, but not in our sinfulness. Truly inconceivable, but **WHAT IS MORE INCONCEIVABLE?**

(2)

WHAT IS MORE INCONCEIVABLE is the reason why God would even do it, and what he would accomplish by doing it this way. Think about it. We give God no good reason to send a Savior to our fallen race. In fact, often times we give him every reason to not send a Savior. But really the one reason God does have for sending a Savior, is that he promised to send one. All the way back at creation. After Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, God gave a promise to save them and their descendants. He elaborated on that promise throughout history. He gave specifics, like the one Gabriel mentioned – **“God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.”**

What is inconceivable about all of this? He wouldn't look like a king and he wouldn't act like a king. At least not a king as the world thinks about kings. But we get a clue at the kind of king he would be. Earthly kings come and go, their reigns are temporary. Jesus reign is eternal, never ending. Jesus' reign was never about territory conquered, his reign was about conquering hearts. He explained this to his disciples, he explained this to Pontius Pilate – “my kingdom is not of this world.” And yet people still asked, **“When are you going to restore the kingdom of Israel?”**

It's a question many still ask today – “When is Israel going to be restored?” But physical Jerusalem and physical Israel is not the goal of Christ's kingdom, but rather that is the starting point from which his disciples were to spread the gospel of grace. When God talks about Israel being saved in the New Testament, he makes it clear he's talking about believers – both Jew and Gentile, like in Romans – **“It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are descendants are they all Abraham's children...it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.”** And in Galatians, **“If you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”**

This is how Jesus would have a kingdom that will never end. Sometimes we take for granted that we know this. We take it for granted because the Holy Spirit has already worked in our hearts to believe this message. But just think how inconceivable it is. The prophet Isaiah had a clue, **“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”** Think about that for a moment. Think about how inconceivable God's plan to save us is. We never would have come up with it on our own, and it is only by the grace of God that we even believe it now.

May we remember this whenever we are tempted to question or doubt God's goodness. May we remember this whenever we are tempted to think something God has said is impossible. Because the most impossible thing, the most improbable thing, the most inconceivable thing, is that God wanted you. And if that inconceivable thing happened, then anything else can happen as well. So WHAT IS MORE INCONCEIVABLE – a virgin birth or a Savior? The attention is certainly drawn towards the virgin birth, that's the place the critics attack. But it is just as inconceivable for God to have sent his Son to save us. May we treasure the fact that our inconceivable God revealed himself to us so that we might know what is inconceivable.

Over the last couple weeks, during this short season of Advent, we have taken a look at the preparation God granted to those who would be directly affected and involved in the coming of Jesus the Messiah. First we looked at Zechariah in the temple as he was told his barren wife would bear a son who would prepare the way for the Savior. Next we looked at how exactly that son, John the Baptist, prepared the way. Last week the angel Gabriel came to Joseph, the husband of Mary, and this week, the angel came to Mary.

In each instance, God provided what was necessary to pave the way for his Son's birth. But in each instance, God also looked for a measure of trust, or faith, in his plan, no matter how inconceivable it was. As we prepare to welcome our Savior's coming once more this Christmas, I hope you have gained a greater appreciation for God's caring preparation and also the participants in God's plan. God is just as interested and involved in your life as he was in the lives of Mary, Joseph, John and Zechariah. May we be like those individuals and echo the words of Mary, **"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."** Amen.