

It's God's Work.

Text: Luke 1:26-38

Doesn't God make it hard to believe?

Why does God fulfil his promises in such strange ways?

Remember Abraham and Sarah?

For many years they lived with the promise of a child.

But that child was born only when it was abundantly clear that they could no longer have children.

Sarah was long past the age of child-bearing.

When it was humanly impossible...

God gave them the child of His promise.

And when we read this opening chapter of Luke's gospel, the beginning of the NT, the first thing you read is about a woman who was too old to have a baby...

And the impossible happens...she is pregnant with a very special child.

She is pregnant with the last and greatest prophet...

The one who showed the way to Christ.

Then you are introduced to a woman who gets a baby before she even has a husband.

It is through these two women that God brought into the world children that the generations before have been waiting for...the ones we depend on too.

Don't you think that many people would, and do, say that this is a wonderful story, but they don't believe it...at least not literally.

But I think the whole point of the story, with its seemingly impossible aspects, is deliberately like that.

The whole point is to make us fully aware that everything about Christmas...

Everything about our salvation...

Is about God...It's about God and his work.

The events cannot be explained away easily,

except by acknowledging God and his work.

The salvation of this world did not come easily, and those who became key players in that redemption often found themselves very clearly displaying the mighty work of God.

From Genesis on, you find many narratives of women being informed by God that they would soon have a baby.

In nearly every case, this is great news, because the women in question had so far been unable to conceive... and in not a few such situations, the childless woman was well along in years and so had long since consigned her dream of having a child to the ash heap of her life.

As some of you know, infertility is an exceedingly painful thing to experience.

That has been true throughout history, though in biblical times the social stigma attached to a woman unable to have a baby made it even worse.

So when someone like Sarah or Hannah or Elizabeth find out that God is going to give them the gift of a child after all, the joy must have been unspeakable.

This is God doing the impossible...

So we would know it is ever only the work of God.

When these women had their babies...their one and only response is praise to God.

Yet Luke 1 also has another woman, unlike the other women of the Bible.

For Mary the news of a child is still incredible news...

But for different a reason.

Mary has *not* been pining away for years to have a baby.

She's not even ready to have a baby yet!

And she is not married yet either.

So Gabriel's announcement of an impending pregnancy was not the answer to Mary's prayers.

It did not solve a long-standing problem with fertility.

In short, this simply was not the time for Mary to have a baby.

But that is at least partly the point of this story:

it's not about Mary's time or plans

but is simply and solely about God's timing, God's plans, and God's work.

God is intervening in this world, upsetting schedules and re-aligning lives because that's what it takes to get God's premiere work of redemption accomplished.

Right off the bat in Luke's gospel first Zechariah and then Mary find themselves on the receiving end of a quite spectacular visit from the archangel Gabriel.

Now initially you might think that receiving such a visit would be like winning Lotto:
what a great thing to have happen to you!

Except that throughout Scripture the people whom God takes the time personally to visit generally get set up for a pretty difficult life.

Mary is no exception.

She has found favour in God's eyes...that is good news,

but Mary will discover...being the mother of God's Messiah will not be easy.

She'll spend many years worrying herself sick about the odd things that her son ends up doing and saying.

Ultimately, of course, she'll watch him die horribly in a public spectacle just outside Jerusalem.

But Mary humbly accepts the role that God has given her,
as the mother of the Son of God.
She recognized the work of God in her life and in salvation history.

Everything that happens through the story line of the Bible, our salvation history...
Is all about God and his working out our salvation.

The story of the birth of Jesus is no exception.

In fact the truths of Scripture rest on our believing that it is the work of God.
The very heart of our Christian faith stands on our recognising God's hand.

Our cynical world laughs, or even dismisses the claims of a virgin birth.
It is simply impossible they say.

Or maybe we are a little too scientific, or sophisticated, or street smart to believe such tall tales.
It is simply impossible they say.

But that is the point...what is impossible for man is possible with God.
It should never be something we can easily explain away.

Our creeds and confessions highlight the virgin birth...
They bring out that Jesus is true God...begotten of the Father.
They also state that Jesus is true man...born of the virgin Mary.

Not believing this has repercussions...
If Jesus was not divine, if he is not God...
Then he died on the cross only as a man dies (however innocently).
Then there is no payment for our sins...yours and mine.

If he wasn't truly man, then he could not represent us as the 2nd Adam.
He couldn't be new head of all humanity.

Of course that's not the way we would have run the show.
We would do it differently.

We ask, "is that any way for God to act?"
And I would answer to you, "Absolutely!"

For God has always demonstrated his power through weakness.
He demonstrates his power through a baby lying in a manger.
He demonstrates his power through a seemingly insignificant itinerant preacher who travels not very far from his birthplace in any time through his life.

And yet, his influence has been greater than any army, or navy that has every sailed or marched.

Please understand that God does things his way.

And so He does it exactly the way it should be done.

How else would God do it?

The message for you, however, is that you cannot celebrate Christmas if you do not believe in God.

Sure you can swap presents, have great family get togethers, enjoy holidays, sing carols and wave candles.

But Christmas is about God.

Christmas is God's work.

The kingdom is God's kingdom.

John the Baptist was sent by God

Jesus was the Son of God.

The whole event was the work of God.

It is pleasant to sing carols, to catch the mood of Christmas, to enter the spirit of Christmas.

But it is not enough.

In the child of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and even more in the Son of Mary...

God has shown that salvation comes from him.

Christmas is a time of praise for the wonderful works of God.

Only accepting and believing in the work of God do we have strength for today and hope for tomorrow.

God used these people to bring Christ and the Goodnews into the world.

God used these people with their fear and trembling,

To make the ministry of Jesus Christ possible

God still enlists people to bring Christ to the world.

It is still the work of God.

God still uses you and me to bring Christ to the world.

And the need is urgent.

Everywhere people need to know about God and Jesus Christ.

Our story is about the impossible, amazing work of God to save us.