

CHRISTMAS REVERSION

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:47-55; Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

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December 22, 2002

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Most adults would love to revert to childhood during the Christmas season. William Willimon calls this phenomenon "Christmas reversion." We long to recapture the experience the joy and wonder of the first Christmas we can remember. The first Christmas I remember was when I was about four years old. After I'd gone to bed, mom and dad put up the tree, strung the lights, hung the tinsel and ornaments, and placed all the gifts under the tree. Early Christmas morning my mother called, "It looks like Santa came last night." I jumped out of bed, ran downstairs, and saw a fairyland of beauty. I had no idea our living room could look so beautiful decorated as it was. When we're younger we see so much better. Our vision becomes blurred with age. For example, when I was a child I saw an angel. But my parents, who could not see as well, explained that I really saw a young woman wearing a white choir gown, not an angel. Fred Buechner claims people often see only what they think is possible. Most adults don't see angels because we don't think it's possible to see angels. As we grow older we see less and less because we have so limited the realm of the possible.

When Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary, she was still young enough to see angels. Mary was probably about 13 or 14 years old, the age of the girls in my Wednesday's Word Bible study. They giggle a lot and talk all the time. They pass notes. They're beginning to notice boys. They like to dress and pretend like they're much older than they really are. But one thing I've noticed is that they see so much more clearly than I can. They see things adults find impossible to see or believe. They're old enough to know how babies are made -- but they don't have the trouble some of us have about the virgin birth of Christ because they know with God nothing is impossible. They're old enough to have known disappointment, but young enough to see Nothing is impossible for them to achieve themselves becoming a neurosurgeon, a minister, or a Nobel prize winning poet or scientist -- "For nothing will be impossible with God." I love teaching these young women because when I leave the class I see better. They enable me to see nothing is impossible with God. Wouldn't it be great if we all could have a Christmas reversion enabling us to see what, in our adult cynicism, we have come believe can not be seen?

Gabriel announced that the Virgin Mary would conceive and bear a son even though she was a virgin.

"For nothing will be impossible with God." The Virgin Mary believed. The announcement of a birth is usually joyous but it can also come as a shock. And sometimes the announcement is unwelcome because the mother is poor and doesn't know how she can feed another child. Sometimes women find themselves in abusive relationships or fear serious birth defects so the news of pregnancy is feared. And many an unmarried teenager fears the announcement. But the Virgin Mary said to Gabriel, "Let it be." She was able to overcome her initial fear because she was raised in a home that expected God's promise of a Messiah to be fulfilled. She was far more familiar with the Old Testament than most of us and she loved and believed God's promises. She believed that one day the Son of David would reclaim David's throne. She remembered the story of how Adam and Eve were cast out of paradise when they ate the forbidden fruit. She remembered the wonderful promise that one day a woman's child would crush the serpent's head. She had meditated upon the Old Testament prophecy, "Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son." Was it possible she was that promised virgin?

Even if it ^{were} possible I'm sure the Virgin Mary pondered the angel's message. "What will this unexpected pregnancy mean for me? Will I survive childbirth? Will my parents still love me or will they be ashamed of me? Will my *spiritual* family accept me or will they cast me out of the synagogue? Will I have to raise the baby all by myself or will Joseph stay to help?" Mary had questions and fears but she said "No" to her fears and "Yes" to God. Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us that saying "Yes" to God doesn't mean that you're not afraid. It means that you're not going to let fear stop you. So finally, Mary said, "Here I am, let it be with me according to your word" because she believed the word of Gabriel. *"With God nothing will be impossible."*

The Angel Gabriel says to us this morning, *"With God nothing will be impossible."* We may feel weak but God is able to strengthen us. We may be scared of something but God is able to give us courage. We have all kinds of doubts and questions but it's possible for God to bring us to the obedience of faith. Tom Tewell, the minister at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, has said that the seven words that we most need to hear; the seven words that will change our lives are, *for with God nothing will be impossible*. Our world desperately needs to hear Gabriel's good news. Is it possible for the Israelis and Palestinians to live together in

peace and security? *"With God nothing will be impossible."* War with Iraq may be averted. It's possible, *"For with God nothing will be impossible."* Amanda Beatty and June Hoffman brought back news of a South Africa ravaged with AIDS, hunger and crime. Is there any hope for South Africa? *"With God nothing will be impossible."* Will Afghanistan ever be blessed with a democratic government? *"With God nothing will be impossible."* Will retail business in Oxford ever thrive again? *"With God nothing will be impossible."* Will the dream of a new recreational park and high school ever become a reality? *"With God nothing will be impossible."* Will the Eagles go to the Super Bowl this year? *"With God nothing will be impossible."* Is there anyone here who needs to hear those words? Are you involved in a destructive relationship with a spouse, sibling or child and you wonder if it's possible to resolve your conflict? Is it possible to tell somebody that you're sorry, you miss them, you love them but you just haven't been able to yet? *"With God nothing will be impossible."*

I wish we could all become like little children again. I wish we could all have a Christmas reversion that would enable us to see what we've lost sight of; that would enable us to really believe the message of Gabriel to the Virgin Mary. *"With God nothing will be impossible."*

"Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed...to bring about the obedience of faith - to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen."