

# *Sermon Text for December 16, 2018*

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II Samuel 7:1-11, Luke 1:26-38

## ***“Confidence in God”***

Is it too much of a cliché to say that Advent and Christmas has lost its focus on Christ? Probably. I remember when I put a Starbucks cup up here on the pulpit because people were so up in arms about the lack of Christmas references in a Starbucks mug. Why do we expect culture to be following a Christian perspective when we have a hard time actually living like Jesus could be here 9 days from now. We expect from culture what we refuse to follow. The Scripture that we are going to read is usually used to teach us of the faithfulness of Mary, or turn our eyes to the interesting character of the angel Gabriel. When in reality what we find is a statement on who Jesus is. How did Jesus come into being? We read here through the power of the Holy Spirit and the overshadowing of the Most High upon Mary.

These verses more than any other in Scripture prepare us for the birth of Christ by giving us a clear picture that our Savior was born of a woman, and was the Son of God. These verses help us to have a confidence in Christ that over this period of time has now become diluted and distracted because our confidence relies upon what we can buy and see. It is not the fault of this amorphous hazy thing called culture, it is the fault of our own disinterest in the expectancy of the coming of Christ. It is our overlooking Advent and wanting to get to Christmas before it is actually time and we haven't built up the expectation that we need. Hearing the Scriptural proclamation, all things are possible with God, and even recognizing and coming to terms with a virginal conception allows us to have a confidence in Christ that we can have in nothing else.

Christmas has to be a time when our confidence in God is waning. How many of you are absolutely exhausted when you get to this time of year? We find our energies depleted because the time is running short for shopping and cooking and cleaning and all sorts of things that I hear about. There needs to be, there just needs to be more to Christmas than this time of confusion. I want you to hear this Scripture and take it as a breath of fresh air, let it relax your minds and your bodies and allow it to breathe confidence into you. A confidence that doesn't come from your buying power but rather from your relationship with God.

## **READ SCRIPTURE**

There are so many people in Scripture who show an unmitigated love for God that it is always difficult to focus in on one or two. Mary is one of many women who demonstrate their servanthood in complete sacrifice. I think of Hannah, Samuel's mother who promises to set her first born son apart, to consecrate him to God. So when Samuel is born she turns him over to God by taking him to the temple where he would serve for the rest of his life. As long as he lives he belongs to the Lord.

In Gabriel's message to Mary he tells her that this son will be holy. Holy means literally set apart, put aside for God. It is the same word in the Hebrew for Nazarite. The only way that Hannah could set her son apart, the only possible way that Abraham could take his son up the hill to give him over to God, the only possible way that Mary upon hearing that she was pregnant by God could say at the end, "here I am the servant of the Lord," the only possible way for any of these people in the Bible to go ahead with this is if they knew that all things were possible with God. They had a confidence in God that was unshaken and stronger than any force in this world.

In our first Scripture we find the covenant that God makes with David. We read how God says to David, I have been with you since you have been a shepherd, remember that David? I have been with you by cutting off all your enemies, including the king at the time, Saul. I have been with you through everything, and now I want you to be the one to build my house. I know you have the confidence through your life experiences, you have seen the presence of the Lord in a very real and tangible way, so you know that nothing is impossible with God. So now that you have the confidence, go and do it.

Back to our New Testament Scripture, the message that Gabriel brings to Mary is literally: Impossible does not exist with God. It is not in God's vocabulary. Our Scriptures contain examples of that fact, one of which we will see today in Luke chapter 1. Our lives ought to contain testimonies to that fact and it ought to reinforce our lives so that we live with a confidence that is unshaken. If we are able to eliminate the word impossible from our vocabulary, the way that the angel Gabriel states it has been eliminated from God's then we will be able to see the kingdom of God here on this earth in our life time, or at least a hint of it.

Throughout Christian history the relationship between Mary and Jesus has been interpreted in a variety of different way. There are those on the one extreme who consider her the co-redemptress with Christ. As you can imagine, that is not a Protestant perspective. We consider her a servant of the Lord. There are those on the other extreme

who consider her a loose woman who had an affair with a Roman soldier, we consider her a virgin ready to God's will, visited by the Almighty God. In Scripture we find her asking Jesus for a miracle, chasing after him when she hears that he lost his mind, waiting outside a crowded house to talk to him, by his side at the cross, at the feet of the Apostles as the early church moved forward in faith.

Consistently we find her by her son's side. We find her confident in God's promises when all others had turned away. We find her at the best and worst of times a steady rock. This Scripture that we read in Luke is called the annunciation. Artists have depicted the annunciation and usually what you see is an angel hovering over Mary, speaking to her and the Holy Spirit is being washed over her. She is in a kneeling, hands clasped, in a state clearly of submission. But that isn't really the case in this Scripture now is it?

Gabriel visits her and announces to her that she is to have a son, and she says: What? You need to give me a little more information than that. She does not, like Joseph in Matthew who merely listens to God's word, never speaks and we don't even know what kind of effect it had on him if any. Here Mary takes a very active role in wanting to know exactly what the plan is.

Have you ever wondered why when Gabriel earlier in Luke visits Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist and he is told of the miracle of her wife, who is barren, will conceive and have a son. What does Zechariah do? He questions. What is the result of his questioning? He is punished with muteness.

Talk about a double standard. Mary almost does the same thing. Gabriel tells her about the conception and she asks how is this going to be? Explain it to me. Zechariah though, said prove it. I want a sign. How are you going to show me that this is true. The difference between these two people is not a double standard, because God always has the same standard and that is grace, but the difference is that Mary wanted to know more, Zechariah wanted proof. Mary was confident of God's power which she proves at the end by stating here I am the servant of the Lord. Zechariah wanted proof, he was hesitant and he received a sign, be careful what you ask for, and he received a sign of muteness until his child was named. Mary received a different sign, and that was the pregnancy of her relative Elizabeth.

The confidence that we have in God in our lives dictates how we live our lives, how we act, what is important to us and what slides off our back. If we put our confidence in our own abilities then when we fail, and we will, then we have nothing left.

If we put our confidence in our might then we will only be able to rely upon that might for security. If we are not confident in God then the result will be insecurity. You know what happens with people who are insecure? They take steps to make other people insecure. Likewise, when nations are insecure, then they take steps for security that at times go against that which is in God's plans. An insecure leader takes steps to ensure that those around him are also insecure. A leader who is confident does the right thing knowing that in the end all things work for good for those who trust in the Lord. That makes those around him and nations around him trust in him and be able to follow him because that is a confident leader. Sometimes insecurity can be misinterpreted as confidence, especially on a global stage.

You will find people confident in God reaching out creatively, taking risks, knowing that they are trusting the Lord for all things and burning boats that would return them home behind them unafraid of the future. I hope you are able to feel the confidence in God that comes from this Scripture.

But this Scripture is not about Mary. It isn't even about Gabriel, but it is about Jesus Christ, the root, the foundation of our confidence. This Scripture is written to give us a confidence in our Savior that is unshakeable. This Scripture tells us about the future birth of Christ as it was foretold in Isaiah. Listen to Isaiah 9: For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Now if this doesn't give you confidence in Jesus Christ, then you need to have your pulse checked.

In Matthew at the announcement of the conception to Joseph, not Mary, it is explained that he will come to save the people from his sins. We have all heard the commentary on that Scripture that explains the etymological root of the word Jesus from the Hebrew yeshua which means God saves. Well today, I am here to tell you that what you heard could very well be wrong. In Luke, there is no mention of that. The name Jesus in the Greek comes from the Hebrew name Joshua whose root is sawah which means God help! What a name to instill confidence. As Jesus would walk up to a crowd the people would say, here's Jesus, God help us.

This Scripture in Luke was the evangelists way of saying that the word was made flesh and dwelt, lived among us. This is Luke's take on the in-carnation. In the flesh. This is the message of Advent to Mary and to all of us that God was born as one of us, lived, died, rose again, so that we would have confidence in him.

This Scripture speaks to God's initiative of grace and power. We hear again the question, is anything impossible with God? We find that Jesus through Mary comes from humanity just as much as he comes from God and he came to answer the question by saying no, nothing is impossible with God.

We remain confident not because of what we have done or accomplished but because of what God continues to do. We learn that impossible does not exist with God, and so it ought not to exist with us.