

Natalie W. Bell  
 December 12, 2021  
 Third Sunday of Advent

***The Impossible***  
***Luke 1:26-38***

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.*

*28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."*

*29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.*

*30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.*

*32 He 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.*

*33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

*34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"*

*35 The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.*

*36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.*

*37 For nothing will be impossible with God."*

*38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.*

Do any of you remember the Tsunami that hit southeast Asia on December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004?

In 2012 a movie came out about the disaster.

The movie is called ***The Impossible***, and the title is fitting.

It is the story of ***Maria Belon***, her husband, and their three young sons.

They were enjoying a beachside vacation in Thailand that day.

The boys were playing with their father in the resort pool,

when a strange roar came, and then a *30 foot wall of water* washed away the entire resort, taking the family under and into a nightmarish journey of survival and reunion.

Over 200,000 people in 11 countries died from the tsunami that day. Somehow, they survived.

Maria and her 10 year old son Lucas were together, the father was with the younger ones, Thomas and Simon, but *neither* Maria or her husband believed that the other family members had survived. Maria was badly injured after spending several minutes submerged in water, and being carried along the current with dangerous debris.

The movie chronicles what it took for them to survive, and the twists and turns it took for the father to finally get the whole family *reunited*. Because the film is so realistic, and it's all true, it's one of the most *scary and inspiring* movies I've ever seen! Definitely not for the faint of heart!

But the best part of the film was reading about *its creation*, and the way the actors befriended the real family to make the film *true to life*.

Listen to what *Maria said* about her ordeal:

*"I learned what real generosity was through the tsunami.*

*People who didn't know me spent hours looking for my family"*

*"[Before] I was always AFRAID of things.*

*The tsunami was an incredible GIFT.*

*I embrace life. My whole life is extra time."*

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/real-life-stories/real-story-behind-impossible-miracle>

Think about that. Before, I was **always afraid**---the tsunami was a *gift*.

Wow.

The Impossible situation was a gift.

Have you ever found that to be true in your life?

Ever had an impossible situation that became a gift?

Have you ever had a *blessing wrapped in suffering* and hardship?

I thought of that movie and her words,  
as I re-read this *Annunciation story* of Mary.

And I wondered, *what did Mary say* about her experience,  
as she looked back later?  
What did she say, about being chosen to give birth in such a *scandalous* way,  
out of wedlock, with a wild story about conception by the Holy Spirit?  
What did she say, about having to *give birth among the animals* in the manger,  
*away from home*, in Bethlehem?

What did Mary say, as she looked back over her life,  
*Especially after the death* of her firstborn son on the cross?

Would she say that the whole Impossible situation was a *gift*?  
I bet she would.

But then again--aren't some of our *blessings wrapped up in impossible situations*?

Think about Mary's situation--  
The road she was being asked to take was no walk in the park.  
When the angel Gabriel comes to her and says,  
*"Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."*  
Mary *does not say*—that's awesome! Fantastic!  
The Bible says she was *perplexed* by his words,  
and *pondered* what sort of greeting this might be.  
In other words, she was thinking, *'what is going on here?'*

Then the angel says to her,  
*"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God"*,  
which means Mary WAS *afraid*.

Then Gabriel proceeds to tell her that she is going to give birth to a son,  
name him Jesus and he will be the Son of God!  
Talk about *feeling overwhelmed*, just imagine what was going on in her head.  
Can you imagine her feelings? Her fear?  
Her desire to wake up from this weird dream?

It wasn't lost on her that this 'great news from God' was wrapped up  
in a *life-changing, scandalous, scary road* ahead for her.

We've heard the story so many times that we've *lost the shock of it all*.  
This is *great news when WE* read it,  
but imagine how it was interpreted by a poor, young unwed teenager?

*How can this be, since I am a virgin?*

What will I tell my *parents*?

And what is *Joseph* going to say?

How quickly will he *disown* me?

Talk about an impossible situation!

She basically learns that this great announcement means  
*the end of her life as she knew it*.

That's why I think it *takes her awhile* to welcome the announcement.

It's only *after Gabriel explains* how this is going to happen,

Only *after* he tells her about *Elizabeth's* miraculous pregnancy,

Only *after* he says *Nothing will be impossible with God...*

Only then does Mary accept the news, and say:

*"Here am I, ... let it be with me according to your word."*

Have you ever noticed that some of your *blessings* are wrapped  
In the *impossible situations* of your life?

When in your life have you been *blessed by the very thing*  
you thought was impossible?

*Fanny Crosby* wrote over 8,000 hymns. Some of her most famous ones include:  
Blessed Assurance, and Safe in the Arms of Jesus. *Yet she was blind*.

Fanny went *blind* as an infant, and she never learned Braille, although she attended  
a special school for the blind in New York, and went on to teach there.

Her lack of sight seemed to enhance her other senses,  
and it certainly enhanced her poetry.

The devotional Streams In the Desert, on December 9<sup>th</sup> said this about her:

*"Joy sometimes needs pain to give it birth.*

*She could never have written the beautiful words "I shall see him face to face" if  
not for the fact that she had never gazed upon green fields, evening sunsets, or the  
twinkle of her mother's eye...the loss of her own vision helped her gain remarkable  
spiritual discernment and insight".*

L.B. Cowman, Streams in the Desert.

Has that ever been true for you?  
Impossible situations and hardship---giving birth to *joy? To new possibilities?*

It seems to be that way for many of our *ancestors in the faith*.

**Moses'** hardship in Egypt meant God used him to save his people.

**Joseph's** enslavement and imprisonment meant God used him to save his own family and the people from famine.

**Paul's** hardships led to such blessings and writings!

And **Mary**—the hardships she faced as the mother of Jesus are easily forgotten today, but what seemed impossible to her  
*revealed the possibility of salvation* for all of us!

After Jesus' birth his parents took him to be dedicated in the temple, and there a man named named **Simeon** blessed Jesus, then said to Mary:

*"This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel,  
and to be a sign that will be opposed  
so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—  
and a sword will pierce your own soul too."*

How wise he was—for *she would one day stand  
beneath the cross* that took his life.

What swords have pierced *your soul*?

What *pain* has brought you blessing?

We have a *lot to learn from Mary*.

Although the **Roman Catholic church** has long venerated Mary as the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God.

And the **Eastern Orthodox Church** has also venerated her, as the **Theotokos**, the God-bearer,

**Protestants** like us have all too often *ignored* Mary.

What if we haven't given her enough attention?

Because the truth is,

Isn't Mary a **prophet**—called like other prophets like Isaiah or Ezekiel?

Isn't she a **leader**, like Moses?

And she is the **mother of Jesus**, our Savior!

I wonder, isn't Mary really the **first disciple of her Son** Jesus?

Her entire life is changed by his birth,

and **she devotes her entire life** to Him—from his birth to death.  
Isn't she an *example for all of us*?

Because doesn't God call each and every one of us *to do some hard things*?  
Some *seemingly impossible* things?

*What do you do* when faced with that 'impossible situation'?  
What impossible situations are you *facing right now*?

When have you needed to hear the words of Luke 1:37:  
***For nothing will be impossible with God.***

Over the years, I have **written down** some seemingly impossible prayer requests,  
and stuck them on little pieces of paper in my Bible.  
Some of them **were answered** in ways that I could never, ever have imagined.

Other are still in process.

One of them I saw this week, and I've been asking for this prayer to be answered  
for over ten years.

It **seems impossible**.

But then we have God's word, and God's promise:

***For nothing will be impossible with God.***

So we keep on believing, right?

***What seems impossible in your life today?***

When my Dad had a massive heart attack in 2007, and spent months in ICU,  
we were told on more than one occasion that he had no hope of survival.

It seemed impossible, day after day...but he did survive---and live to see 8  
grandkids grow up.

And his illness **brought all my siblings closer** than we had ever been before—  
a connection that is still strong today.

***That impossible situation brought new possibilities.***

Mary's story is so powerful, because it's really **OUR story**, isn't it?

We all **have our lives interrupted**, at one time or another,

With something that seems impossible.

And we are asked to trust and obey,

Hanging onto God's promise that

***nothing will be impossible with God.***

It reminds me of **Romans 8:18**, where it says;  
*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.*

***And in Romans 5:3 Paul reminds us that:***  
*we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,*  
***4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,***  
***5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.***

What if the **challenges** we face,  
 the impossibilities---what if they can ultimately lead to **hope**?  
 And even **joy**?

And what if **God wants to do miracles** in our lives today?  
***What if God wants to SHOW us that nothing will be impossible with God?***

Theologian A.W. Tozer once said:  
*"Anything God has ever done, he can do now.*  
*Anything God has ever done anywhere, he can do here.*  
*Anything God has ever done for anyone, he can do for you."*

***Do we believe that my friends?***  
***Do we?***

Isn't that the **Good News of the Gospel** today?  
***That Nothing will be Impossible with God?***  
 May we embrace that promise, and hold onto it with everything inside of us.  
 And for that, all God's people say together, Amen.