



“Imagine the Impossible”

Monday, December 24, 2018
Nativity of Our Lord – Christmas Eve
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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well on behalf of the staff and the leaders of Trinity Lutheran Church I am very pleased to welcome you all to Christmas celebrations that we're having here. We actually have five services that started actually at 2:00 and will go all the way probably to about 12:30 in the morning, so it's a long day, but it's a day of celebration.

In Lewis Carroll's book, *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice has a conversation with the Queen of Hearts about believing in the impossible. Alice says, “One can't believe in impossible things,” and the Queen replies “I daresay you haven't had much practice. When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Well, sometimes I believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

Some things are just impossible. For example, standing at a grocery store line and looking at what the person in front of you is buying. Reading with your eyes shut, that's impossible. Finding an NFL officiating crew that can call a clean game (laughter) Getting more than a quarter inch on your five-inch ice scraper trying to get the frost off your windshield. Sneezing with your eyes open, impossible. Licking your own elbow, go ahead try it, fine, lick your neighbor's elbow.

Can you imagine the impossible though? Some of us remember the 1980's USA Olympic Hockey team beating the perennial world champion the Soviet Russians as the crowd is shouting “USA,” “USA,” and the seconds are ticking down to the end of the game and announcer Al Michaels says, “Do you believe in miracles?” Ahhh.

Like Alice though, not everyone believes in miracles or impossible things.

In the 1980's when Arlene Gardner of Estill Springs, Tennessee, claimed to see the face of Jesus on her General Electric freezer that was on the front porch of her mobile home, not everyone in town was impressed with the heavenly vision. The mayor of the small town was quoted in *People Magazine* saying, “If Jesus were coming to this town, he would've come some place different than on a damn freezer.”

Modern people have trouble with the impossible. We think of miracles for an earlier time, a biblical time. The Great Flood, Moses parting the Red Sea, Manna, bread from heaven, or what Christians celebrate today, the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary.

You can probably even find some biblical scholars and skeptics of all stripes who believe that this birth is nothing but a mythological invention borrowed from Persians or Greeks, or Romans. Although I am not sure that any respectable Jew would buy into some Greek or Roman myth to explain the birth of their precious Messiah.

Of course, later apostles who wrote the creeds which we'll say a little bit later, are one example who believed that the birth narrative that I read just a little while ago is not myth, but history.

Martin Luther said there were some great miracles that are a part of that story. Actually, he says there are three miracles. The first one is that the *Word* becomes flesh, that the infinite God of the universe, the one who made the heavens and the earth and all that there is chooses to become a human child. Chooses to become one of us.

The second miracle is that this child is born to a young woman, who many believe was a virgin.

The third miracle Luther says is that she believes the angel's announcement that she is going to give birth to this Messiah and her response to this pregnancy as a girl of all of 14-15 years old is one of faith. We hear from the Bible that she says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." She accepts the fact that God had chosen her to be the bearer of God.

Luther writes of Mary, "She held fast to the word of the angel because she has become a new creature. Even so we must be transformed and renewed in heart from day to day."

I wonder if what Luther is talking about here is actually a fourth miracle. The fourth miracle being that through faith we who follow Christ, born in Bethlehem, can as well become children of God.

Luther says, "This is the hardest point, not so much to believe that Jesus is the son of the Virgin and God himself, as to believe that this Son of God is ours." Could it be that the greatest miracle of Christmas is the reality of God being born in us, even though as imperfect as we may be, we are reborn as children of God.

Futurist Len Sweet says this, "It's only when you cross the border from the possible to the impossible that you're in God's territory." And in imaging the impossible, the possible is imagined.

This year for many members of Trinity Lutheran Church as well as perhaps for your own family of friends that you know, you have had a lot of different experiences. Some have suffered accidents, suicide, divorce, health emergencies, loss of loved ones, depression, addiction, and some even war.

But at the same time, we have also expensed birth, redemption, forgiveness, hope, healing, comfort, community, grace and peace. And God our Emanuel, the one who dwells with us has been with us right in the middle of all of those things that I just mentioned.

The word *Miracle* in Latin, literally means *something that is amazing, something to marvel at*"

Our God specializes in the unexpected and the unexplainable. And like with Mary, we are left to ponder what does all of this mean. "How can this be?"

For a few moments this Christmas we experience the joy and love of the birth of Jesus with family and friends, and for some it will be enough for the whole year. But what if we could, what if we could abide with the baby Jesus just a little bit longer. What if we believed the impossible throughout the whole year?

Maybe we would see Jesus in the face of a stranger or reconcile with an old friend. Perhaps we could forgive ourselves for past mistakes that we made and the people that we've hurt. Maybe we could see ourselves in a community of faith, a family of believers to be strengthened and supported, or perhaps we could live out our faith every day with gratitude and thanksgiving for all that God has done through this child born in Bethlehem.

Thanksgiving for such an amazing and impossible gift to each one of us. The birth of Jesus brings us peace and love and hope and life and truth and salvation. These were promises that were declared a long time ago and continue to be proclaimed today. They were proclaimed by prophets and apostles and evangelists and pastors and parents and teachers. Jesus is born for you and for me.

I have to admit even though I am a pastor, I don't understand miracles. I guess they wouldn't be miracles otherwise if I understood them. But I believe that God can do impossible things for each one of us. He is the God of the unexpected, he is the God who tells us something about himself in this birth, in this child being born in Bethlehem. A love born for each one of us and all of humanity so that we might bring a little bit of God's grace, peace, and love into a world to share with family, friends, and strangers alike.

Can you imagine that?! Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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