

Enterprise 12/18/2005

“NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE” II Samuel 7:1-11, 16 Luke 1:26-38

The Bible teaches that the grace of God always comes to ordinary folks like you and me. The greatest king of Israel was a poor, humble shepherd in his youth, but God elevated him to be a prince over his people and the ancestor of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mary was a poor, young woman of Nazareth, but she became the very mother of God through her obedience to God’s will and her acceptance of his grace. The promise and hope of Advent are for us, the common people, for we, like David and Mary, are important to God, and he calls us to be his sons and daughters.

Although the Bible lessons we read may focus on human persons like David and Mary, the chief actor in all the biblical dramas is God. This is certainly true in the Christmas story. While we read about Mary visited by the angel Gabriel, it is God who is most important. God sends the angel. God gives the message. God gives the son to Mary, and God showers his grace upon the world through this child.

The grace of God is evident in the Christmas story, for God was sending the world a gift. The power of God is evident in this story, for Mary, a young virgin, would bear a son. Also, Elizabeth, an old, barren woman will bear a son. Indeed, with God nothing will be impossible. This is our theme today. With God, all things are possible. We rejoice because we have a powerful God, who is also gracious and loving. What you and I need is

something to hold onto, something to anchor our lives to, something that will give sense and purpose to our existence. Here it is! The good news announced by the angel that the Son of God is to be born and that his kingdom will have no end!

It is fascinating to me how the secular world is attracted to Christmas. There is a universal appeal to this season of joy and gladness. Everyone really wants to be swept up by the goodness and holiness of this holiday. Even those folks who do not consider themselves at all religious seem eager to celebrate the festival of Christ's birth. But for so many it always turns out to be somewhat empty. After all, drinking much spirits will not really put the Spirit of Christmas into anyone. Spending much money on gifts will not assure you of receiving the gift of God's Son at Christmas. Merely attending a dozen parties and seeking to have a good time will not automatically guarantee your joy in this season. The only way really to be grabbed by the Spirit of Christmas is for you and me truly to hear the gospel as announced by Gabriel, "He will be great, ... he will reign for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." When we hear this good news, our only proper response is the same one Mary made, "let it be to me according to your word."

It is never enough for Christmas to consist solely in outward expressions and activities. All of the trappings of Christmas are finally meaningless, unless they are based on an inner, spiritual reality. All the decorations, the parties, the programs, the gifts, and the family gatherings of Christmas are symbols. And, like all symbols, they are worthless and trite if

they do not point us to the deeper truth and reality. For example, the Christmas tree is only a pine or fir or spruce tree with little lights and pretty decorations on it, unless we realize that the evergreen tree is a symbol of eternal life in Christ, and that the lights symbolize Jesus, who is the Light of the world. Likewise, our Nativity scenes are just a bunch of ceramic or cloth or wooden figures in and around a little shed, unless the whole reminds us of God's great love in sending Jesus into our world to be born in a stable in Bethlehem.

Yes, it is very sad to me that so many people celebrate Christmas without ever getting deeper than the externals, the symbols. But you and I can enjoy all these even more, for we know the reality that is communicated; we have something solid to grab onto; we believe that God so loved us that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to be born unto us to be our Lord and Savior! Oh! What a gift God has given to us! Glory to his name through Jesus Christ, who is the gift of gifts.

Again, this year, we must hear the Christmas story, and we must marvel and wonder at it. How did the angel look? How must Mary have felt? How indeed did God decide on her? Why was Jesus born in a stable? On and on our questions could go. The wonder and excitement of this ancient story are endless. But it all seeks to say to us that with God nothing will be impossible. That is the bedrock of our faith. When we can let go of trying to control our own destiny

and say in simple faith and trust, “Lord, let my life be according to your will,” then we will know the peace and joy about which Christmas speaks.

The saddest thing in the world is for someone to go through life without understanding that there is a God who cares deeply about him or her as an individual person. You and I know this great truth, but we do not always practice the presence of God in our lives. We go about our normal daily routines as if God were just up in his heaven, millions of miles away, and not at all concerned about what we are doing. How sad it is when you and I forget the great truth that God was trying to show to us through the coming of Jesus—the truth that God is always with us.

Sometimes I hear people say that they wished that things were like they were back in biblical times. What they mean is that they wish that they could be visited by the angel Gabriel, or see Jesus perform a miracle, or hear St. Paul preach a sermon. That would be great, wouldn't it? However, things have not really changed that much. There are still miracles around, and you and I can commune with Jesus any time we want to through his Holy Spirit. All we have to do is to sense the presence of God in the middle of our ordinary days. It is the matter of getting to the deeper level of understanding, of seeing the reality beneath the symbol. This morning we have been visited by the angel Gabriel, and we have been told about a wonderful birth of the Son of God. We have been assured again that God is powerful and gracious and able to do what he chooses to do. We have heard the mysteries that St. Paul noted had been hidden for long ages, but are now revealed to us to bring

about the obedience of faith. What more can we say than to echo Paul's outburst of praise—"to the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ."

Yes, there is truth in the Christmas story. It is wonderful truth that is able to capture our minds and hearts and spirits and to fill us with hope and joy. Remember that it is unto us that a child is born; it is unto us that a Savior is given. You and I are the recipients of this greatest gift that has ever been given. Now the question for us is, "What are we going to do with this gift?"

For children, one of the most exciting aspects of Christmas is getting presents and gifts. I remember how anxious I would get to open my gifts. Sometimes I could not wait, and there were several times that I surreptitiously opened a package or two to see what it was, and then wrapped it back up. I am probably the only one here this morning who would confess to such. I just couldn't wait until I could play with my new toys and stuff. I thought that I would bust before Christmas finally came.

When I finally did get to open my presents, I wanted to play with them or use them or wear them right away. I never could understand the adults who could get a gift and just put it away in the closet or some drawer. When somebody gives you something, you are supposed to enjoy it and put it to use. Now I know that all of us have had the experience of receiving a gift that we did not know what to do with. Do we exchange it, or throw it out, or save it to give to somebody else who won't know what to do with it either?

Well, the point I am trying to make is that God has given us all this wonderful gift of his Son, and it is extremely important what we do with the gift. Many people ignore the gift completely. They never bother even to unwrap it. Other folks do at least unwrap the present of Jesus Christ, but they never put him to use. They leave him in the box and stick him on a back shelf, where they forget all about him. But some folks receive Jesus Christ very gladly. They truly rejoice, and they allow the gift of God's grace in Jesus to make all the difference in their lives. It may take us a while to learn how to make the most of this gift that God is seeking to give us. In fact, it may take a whole lifetime, but we have to receive Jesus and let him have our time. If we keep him hidden away in some closet, we will never learn how he can give us all joy and peace and hope and love. Brothers and sisters, the gift is given. Are you accepting it?

Glory be to God for his gracious gift. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.