

Ponder the Possibilities

Luke 1:26-38

Wondering If the Struggle Is Worth It

One of the most hectic sites on any Holy Land trip is the Church of the Nativity.

It was that way when Cheryl and I visited the Holy Land. There were people buzzing about all over the place, inside and out.

The lines were long and, quite honestly, a bit disorganized. Those in charge weren't really all that friendly. There was a lot of waiting and elbowing your way in.

Eventually, we descended down a short staircase which led to the small cave where Christ is thought to have been born.

You had to get on your hands and knees to look in and even then you didn't really know what you were looking at. It was all a bit confusing.

A funny story that goes along with that, Cheryl and her friend knelt together after what was about an hour wait. The two looked at one another and asked, "*What are we supposed to do now?*"

That's kind of the way it is making your way to Christmas. The lines are long. The hustle and bustle isn't all that friendly. There's more than a little elbowing your way through.

In the end you are left wondering whether the struggle was worth it. You might even find yourself more confused than when you started.

Your response might be like that of Cheryl and her friend, "What am I supposed to do now?"

The Road to Christmas

Today we find ourselves on the road to Christmas. Today marks the beginning of Advent, that four week journey anticipating the coming of our Lord.

I hope your journey is a good one. I pray it is filled with God's many blessings all through.

I can pretty well guarantee that will happen if you keep your focus where it needs to be—upon the great gift that is Christ.

God's Most Gracious Act

There's a lot to ponder this season of the year. Coming to grips yet again with the greatest gift ever given puts us to considering God's most gracious act.

By offering Christ, God intersected life in a wonderfully profound way. He did so innocently, humbly, and in all power.

He offered hope and promise to a world that so desperately needed it.

The birth of Jesus was foretold by an angel of the Lord, made possible by the Holy Spirit, and celebrated by the heavenly host.

A Lot to Ponder

Mary was at the center of it all. She was obedient in every way, even though she wondered why she was the one so chosen.

From the very beginning, all the way through to Christ's birth, Mary "*treasured all the things that had happened and pondered them in her heart.*" (Luke 2:19)

As we said, there is a lot to ponder this season of the year and we will make effort to do just that as we meet here for worship.

We will ponder not only the report of scripture surrounding Christ's birth, but what that birth means to each of our lives.

In the end, hopefully, we will be found obedient just as Mary was in doing God's bidding, however he might call.

The Place of the Highly Favored

The news the angel Gabriel reported to Mary was most surprising. After all, Mary was a virgin engaged to be married.

Gabriel announced that she was "*highly favored*" and that "*the Lord was with her.*"

Indeed Mary was set aside for a very special task. She was to give birth to the Son of the Most High.

There's a place where every one of us is "highly favored," if for no other reason because God is with us.

I am so thankful for the presence of God in my life. I can't tell you how much that means to me.

I step back from life every once and awhile and ask myself, "*Why? Why in the world would the Master of the Universe want to bother with a guy like me?*"

That's where love comes in. God loves each of us so much that he would do anything to convince of that love.

The great word from John 3:16 serves as a wonderful Christmas message.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever believes in him would not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Christmas is a celebration about the fact that God has given and has done so profoundly. And by giving as he has done, God paves the way for you and me to become his children.

There is no more highly favored place in the universe.

"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (John 1:12-13)

Obedient Come What May

The scripture reports that upon hearing the news that she would give birth to the one who would "*rule over the house of Jacob forever,*" Mary was greatly troubled.

The news would have unsettled any of us. To have had an angel approach us, as did Gabriel with Mary, would have sent us wondering as well.

In a way, Mary took it all in stride. She was the sort of person who would be obedient come what may.

Her response at the end of Gabriel's visitation was "*May it be to me as you have said.*"

I wonder how many of us are prepared to have that sort of resolve when the Lord comes calling on our lives.

How many of us are willing to make our lives that available?

We are more into holding on, rather than letting go. We are more into dictating, rather than responding.

We can learn a great deal from Mary in this regard.

In a sense Mary was always “*pondering.*”

She followed Jesus all the way to his death. Even though she wondered what it all meant, in her heart of hearts, she knew it led to good.

And indeed it did. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus ushered in a whole new era where life, not death, would be the order of the day.

New life would forever reign supreme.

Upon hearing the announcement that she would carry the one who would sit at “*the throne of his father David,*” Mary was content to live into what God had in store.

That should ring true for us as we make our way not only through this blessed season of the year, but through all seasons.

Abiding in God and looking forward with excitement and anticipation to what he has in store puts us at the very place where he wants us to be.

In effect, we live out a child-like faith.

There’s no coincidence that Christmas captivates the child in all of us. We just take things on faith and look forward to see how the blessings will fall.

Making the Impossible, Possible

The angel of the Lord re-assured Mary that all of this would take place on account of the power of the Holy Spirit.

We should not be surprised this Christmas at anything the Spirit does.

As John puts it in John 3:8 the Spirit is “*like the wind, we know not where it comes from or where it goes,*” yet it has a way of taking hold of our lives and making what seems impossible, possible.

There is a wide-eyed expectancy at Christmas. We are on the edge of our seats waiting for God to act.

We are struck by the fact that “*Nothing is impossible with God.*” (Luke 1:37)

That sort of assurance goes well beyond the power of positive thinking. God’s work is just that, God’s work. We don’t conjure that up by just thinking it. Rather we stand faithfully obedient waiting for the surprising ways God will intervene.

God may very well surprise you during a time of private devotion or public worship.

He might surprise you gather with family and friends or maybe even someone with whom you have been estranged for a long, long time.

God may very well surprise you while at the bedside of someone who is in a nursing home or in the hospital. That might even happen while doing some act of service.

The things that once seemed impossible might very well come to pass. I have a few of those “impossible” things in my own mind and look forward to God acting in powerful ways.

What are the things in your life that seem to be impossible for you—a relationship, a work situation, a health concern, the grief from the loss of a loved one?

“I am the Lord’s servant” was Mary’s reply.

She would hold fast obediently to what God was unfolding for her life. May we do that same and, by so doing, may we ponder the possible.

Don’t be discouraged. We serve the Lord of the possible.

A Word about Margaret

This Christmas we celebrate the first birthday of our beloved granddaughter, Margaret. She is an absolute delight, even though she is about to wear your mom and dad out.

Brian and Cassie have had a really tough time getting pregnant down through the years and have gone to some extraordinary means to do so.

After their first child they really didn't know if a second was possible. They remained ever hopeful though.

Young Margaret was born last December 22. She was the greatest Christmas gift ever.

At St. Thomas Hospital in Nashville where she was born, there are huge banners all over the passage with the passage, "*With God nothing will be impossible.*"

Now I know they quote that as a matter of branding, but it holds a much deeper meaning for me.

"*With God nothing will be impossible.*" What a great thing for a pair of brand new parents to be reminded of, particularly parents who waited and waited for their young daughter to be born.

I'd also say it's not a bad thing to hear for a couple of grandparents who waited and waited as well.

It's not a bad thing for any of us to hear.

Let's Ponder the Possible

Let's ponder the possible.

The birth of a child ushers in all sorts of optimism. Hope and promise rule the day. The sky's the limit. The possible trumps the impossible every time.

That's why those commercials for banks that feature a brand new baby and then quickly reminds us about braces, college expenses, and wedding receptions kind of turns me off.

I'd much rather live in the moment and rejoice over the new life that has come.

That's the way it is for Cheryl and me as we celebrate our grandchildren. We are absolutely giddy over what's possible for each of them.

This Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of Christ, I pray that each and every one of us is just as giddy about those we love.

I also pray that we find ourselves absolutely elated about the possibility of Christ being born anew in us.

Those who give themselves to Jesus are "*born again*" and in being "*born again*" the possible, not the impossible, becomes a way of life.

So then, let's ponder the possible this Christmas.