

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Luke 1:26-38

For nothing is impossible with God.

Some things fallen human reason just takes for granted:

We can't know what will happen tomorrow—Yet since the Fall into sin, God has been telling us what will happen tomorrow. A Child would be born of Eve's offspring and the Holy Spirit, and He would crush the serpent's head and ransom our fallen race. Eve could only give birth to death and disorder, as her sons, Cain and Abel, quickly demonstrated, but God would prepare a Virgin's womb to bring forth what Eve could not: eternal life. Eve means "the mother of all the living." But, as Adam was the father of death, Eve, through the devil's deception, became the mother of all the dying. Only the living God could father new life, and a humble, believing Virgin, gave that new life human flesh. Eve was led astray by a promise from the devil. Mary assented to a promise from the Father. The devil's promise, as it always does in all its forms and at all times, birthed fear, hatred, decay, disharmony, depression, and destruction. God's promise, as it always does in all its forms and at all times, birthed certainty, love, renewal, peace, joy, and resurrection.

God may have created the world, but He is not all that involved in it now—Thomas Jefferson and many of our founding fathers, contrary to popular myth, were not Christians, but deists. A deist believes there may be a deity, maybe even a Christian-like deity, but that he is minimally concerned and involved with the affairs of this world. He may have imbued mankind with inalienable rights, as we are wont to say, but he certainly is not going to protect or enforce them. That is up to us, and so we write a Bill of Rights and establish checks and balances. The deist's god is like a watchmaker, who makes a watch, sets it to run, and sends it out, never to deal with it again. It is not his responsibility to fix it if it breaks. You break it, you buy. Unfortunately, this is the god even of many who call themselves Christians. God may have laid down certain laws in the past or created things a certain way, but we have evolved and developed, we have progressed, and we alone are the ones involved in this life now. Surely, God won't mind. After all, who of us has ever seen God or heard Him speak up to voice His displeasure. As one person I tried warn of God's judgment for a particular sin once told me, "He hasn't said anything to me about it so far." Of course, He had in His Word, but that didn't matter anymore. Why would God want to be involved or concerned with such mundane matters as make up our lives? God lives in heaven.

God lives in heaven—It is true, isn't it? That is why so many thoughtlessly pass over all the wonderful names He has revealed Himself with in His love and irreverently refer to Him as "the man upstairs." In the movies, He's the old greybeard on a throne on a cloud. God is in heaven, so why should we be too concerned about Him here? When was the last time God paid my bills? But is God just in heaven? St. Luke resolutely answers, No. God is in the Virgin's womb. He is God and man, growing in the stomach of His mother. Those of you in Bible class know the drill. What we can say of one of Christ's natures, that is, His human or divine nature, we can say of His person, although not of the other nature. Can God be conceived? No. Was Jesus conceived? Yes. Is Jesus God? Yes. So, who is in Mary's womb now? True God and true man. But God can't be born? I know, but He was. How? Jesus was born. Make sense? Good, cause it is not supposed to. It is a mystery, that is, something we never could have thought up or known unless God revealed it to us. We can wrap God in swaddling clothes, but we can't wrap our heads around Him. God has revealed it to us to believe it, not to explain it. And it would be impossible to examine it scientifically anyway, because science rests on observable, repeatable things, and at no other time in all of history has a virgin given birth to the Son of God. Believe it or not, sometimes God can accomplish things science cannot explain or duplicate, even today. Those of you who have ever listened to a doctor toss out possible diagnoses like darts at a dartboard know that is true. Nothing is impossible for God. Yes, God is in heaven, but He is also here on earth, in flesh as a child, on the altar with the bread and wine, and in your hearts through faith. God can accomplish the impossible, all without our counsel or assistance. Believe it! You don't have to prove it. He'll do that.

God needs our help—Our sinful human reason loves this one. That's why I get eighty-five advertisements sent to me each week telling me sure-fire ways to help God build His house, the Church. It's nothing new. David thought he would build God's house as well. After all, David was living in a temple while God dwelt in a tent, the tabernacle. Since God hadn't built a better house for Himself yet, David decided to help Him. But, to David's surprise, God told David no thanks and to mind his own business. God would build His own house through His own chosen servant. God told David in our first lesson, "You won't build me a house. I will build you a house. I will establish your throne for all eternity through my Son and your Son." God did later build a temple through Solomon, but the greatest temple was yet to come, the temple that men would seek to destroy but would be rebuilt in three days. And God didn't only build one temple, He didn't only turn the Virgin's womb into a temple, but He also still turns every Christian's heart into His dwelling place through faith. God may use us at times, to teach us to trust Him and grant us the privilege of being a part of His marvelous plan, but God does not need our help. We need His, and that is why Gabriel's message and Mary's open heart and sanctified womb are so important today.

Great people come in impressive packages—This is the general rule for our world. But the greatest Man came in the least impressive package. The world went on as normal outside that humble house the day Gabriel came to the Mother of God. Nothing changed so far as anyone could tell. The Son of God was growing in Mary's belly, but no one had a clue. There was nothing impressive about it, and there wouldn't be, until it all was viewed in the light of His resurrection and through the eyes of the holy Evangelists and Apostles. A manger. A carpenter. A Nazarene. A street preacher. A condemned criminal. A crucified Jew. "When does it get impressive?" unbelieving ears ask. It doesn't get impressive when you view it piece by piece. It stayed unimpressive as fishermen preached it to common slaves and women and hid from the powers of this world in upper rooms and catacombs. It only gets impressive when you view it all together, and remember what is being accomplished. God became man in Bethlehem, grew in knowledge and stature in a carpenter's house in Nazareth, preached in the streets of Israel, was wrongly condemned of our sins, was crucified, and then rose and ascended to heaven in victory, all to save us from ourselves. But where is He now? Wouldn't it be more impressive if we could see Him? We will see Him, and how we see Him then will depend on how we've seen Him now and every time He revealed Himself to us in His Word. If we have seen Him as the most impressive of men, the Savior of the world who worked through humble means to accomplish heavenly ends, we will see Him as our eternal, redeeming Brother and Lord. If He has failed to impress us, if we have found more impressive things to capture our eyes, we will see Him as our condemning Judge.

Kings are born of queens and live in palaces—That is how it normally works, but our King was born of a humble Virgin, whose greatest humility was not her earthly status, but her submission to the bidding and promise of the Lord in faith. Mary opens her mouth in response to Gabriel's message and at the same time teaches the Church to pray and sing. "*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*" Oh that our lips would speak such faith whenever what is possible with God seems impossible to our minds! Mary has just agreed to face scandal and persecution, exile and her Son's execution in bowing to the Lord's will, and yet she sings with joy in the Magnificat, which we still sing with her in Vespers.

God does not have to fit into our head. No, He fit into a human belly, but will never fit into a human head. The only human mind that could ever grasp the mysteries of God rationally was the eternal Mind, Reason, and Word Himself, who Himself was the revelation of them. Sometimes we can't imagine the things God has planned and can't see all that He is working. Such is the case today. God takes flesh in a Virgin's womb. Who would have imagined it? No one could see it, not even Mary. She and Joseph would simply have to believe it, to believe that nothing was impossible with God. Jesus lives in the Virgin's womb today, but He also lives in you through faith. You cannot see it. You must believe it. He lives in you, and where Jesus is, there God is, and where God is, nothing is impossible. Amen.