

## ***Don't Touch Me***

Luke 1:26-38

December 16, 2007

In January of 2002, a hospital in London, England, mistakenly sent letters to over 30 unsuspecting patients informing them that they were pregnant. The hospital's computer system, which normally is used to send form letters telling people that their operations have been postponed, was in the hands of a clerical worker who hit the wrong key. And so, instead of informing patients about a rescheduled procedure, the computer sent identical form letters telling the recipients that they were "great with child." Among the recipients of the letters were six elderly men.

Can you imagine the surprise of those six men? "Your doctor at Such-and-Such hospital is pleased to inform you that you are expecting a baby!" Quite a shock, to say the least.

Some of the women were probably surprised as well. "How can it be?" some of them may have asked. "That's not possible! I think I'm going to be sick!" There was possibly some high anxiety in the homes of some women patients who received this letter.

Don't you think Mary, the mother of Jesus, experienced troubling thoughts when the angel of the Lord first appeared to her? Mary was a virgin engaged to be married. She had never been with a man--even the man she was to wed. But one day, an angel of the Lord appears to her and announces, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Having an angel appear to you is surprise enough, but his message is a stunner. Listen to it again:<sup>26</sup> *In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,*<sup>27</sup> *to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.*<sup>28</sup> *The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."* Luke 1:26-28 (NIV)

Now the Bible doesn't tell us what Mary was doing when the angel appeared to her. She may have been deep in prayer at the time, but it's doubtful. Women of that era didn't have a lot of time to spend in spiritual contemplation. They were up at the crack of dawn baking bread and drawing water and cleaning the house and spinning yarn and mending clothes and grinding wheat and caring for children. Most likely, Mary was engaged in some boring domestic chore when the angel appeared to her. The Lord chose to enter an ordinary life in an extraordinary way.

Luke records, "Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob

forever; his kingdom will never end.' "(vs. 29-33, NIV).

It's a story that never grows old. It thrills us every year with its simplicity and yet great beauty: <sup>13</sup> *Then he said, Hear you now, O house of David, Is it a small thing for you to grieve men, that ye will also grieve my God?* <sup>14</sup> *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and she shall call his name Immanuel.* Isaiah 7:13-14 (Geneva Bible)

The impending birth of a child is a source of both joy and apprehension in most households. Will it be a boy or a girl? Will he or she be healthy? Who will the baby look like? There are many superstitions and old wives' tales that claim you can predict a child's destiny by some physical characteristic at birth. According to a book of superstitions collected by Alvin Schwartz, here are a few indicators of your child's destiny:

If you have a bald-headed baby with big feet, it will get straight A's.

If it has a big mouth, it will be a good singer.

If it has big ears, it will be generous.

If it has curly hair, it will be lucky.

If it is born on a Sunday or on New Year's Day or during a full moon, or if it has a full set of teeth when it arrives, it also will be lucky.

But if it has only one tooth, it will be a vampire.

Was the baby Jesus bald-headed, big-eared, or born on a Sunday? Who knows? Mary certainly wouldn't need to use superstitions or old wives' tales to tell what Jesus would be. An angel told her before he was even born. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."

Pastor Bruce Larson tells of how one mother's prophecy shaped her child's destiny. Don Morgan lost his mother when he was a small boy. Many years after her death, a family friend shared with Morgan the details of one of his mother's last conversations. The friend had asked, "Are you worried about Donny?" And the mother replied, "He's going to be all right. He is going to serve God all the days of his life."

Don Morgan was too young to really know his mother. No one had told him that this was her prediction for his life. How could she have known that he would become a pastor? Had God given her a special vision of his future? Morgan says he will never know the answer to that question on this side of heaven.

## **I. IT IS POSSIBLE**

*Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will*

*be great and will be called the **Son of the Most High**. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”* Luke 1:29-33 (NIV)

It is interesting to note that the angel refers to Jesus as "Son of the Most High." There are many names for God in the Bible. There is El Olam, the God of Eternity. El Shaddai, God the powerful Provider. Yahweh Shalom, the Lord is peace. But the angel identified Jesus, the coming Messiah, as the Son of El Elyon, the Most High God. This is a name of greatest sovereignty and glory. It is almost as if the angel is saying to Mary, “The God of Anything-Is-Possible is speaking to you!” And the angel reinforces this message when he reminds her that her cousin Elizabeth, who was infertile and well past childbearing age, is also with child by God's power. *Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.* Luke 1:36 (NIV) The conclusion to the angel's message is: “For nothing is impossible with God.”

When you hear those words, how do you respond? Most of us nod our heads and smile. But do we really believe it? Some of us, perhaps, have family members who are not believers. We have been praying that they will come to know God. But do we really believe that will happen? Hear the word of the Lord: “For nothing is impossible with God.”

Some of us have loved ones who are trapped in addictions. We no longer recognize them as the people we once cared about. We pray for their restoration, but we'd be surprised if they actually kicked the habit. “For nothing is impossible with God.”

Some of us have lost our way in life. We're not sure what we want, but we know it is not what we've currently got. We yearn to believe that there is more to life than constantly running like a hamster on a wheel. But do we believe that God has the answers for our life? "For nothing is impossible with God."

## **II. KEEPING THE FAITH**

*Mary said to the angel, "But how? I've never slept with a man."*

*The angel answered,*

*The Holy Spirit will come upon you,*

*the power of the Highest hover over you;*

*Therefore, the child you bring to birth*

*will be called Holy, Son of God.* Luke 1:34-35(MSG)

Mary's greatest qualification for being chosen as the mother of God's son was her faith in God. When the angel told her that nothing is impossible with God, Mary believed him. *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered.* Luke 1:38a (NIV)

It's that simple. In spite of her poverty, in spite of her humble station in life, in spite of the Jews' current oppression by the Roman government, in spite of the fact that Mary was a virgin, she still believed that God could do exactly what God said God would do. God works through those people who have faith in God and respond when God calls. Nothing else about them matters.

Abraham was too old, Moses lacked eloquence, Joseph was the youngest kid and he had a prison record, Ruth was a working-class widow, Rahab was a prostitute, David was a simple shepherd, Simon Peter had a temper" You look at this list and suddenly realize that it's kind of a rogue's gallery. But every last one of them experienced a transformed life when they put their faith in God. God chose them because they believed in God and they responded when God called.

Someone once pointed out that one sign of spiritual maturity is, the quiet confidence that God is in control, without the need to understand why He does what He does. Mary had that kind of faith. She believed in God's promise and she accepted God's plan.

Many years ago, Pastor David Wilkerson was visiting a friend whose young daughter was in the hospital. As he looked at the child's injured body, David Wilkerson prayed, "God, I'll do anything You ask me to do, only spare my wife and children." It seems like a reasonable prayer. Some of us pray that exact prayer every day.

A strange thing happened after David Wilkerson started praying that prayer, though. He reports that his relationship with the Lord changed significantly--for the worse. The joy and power he felt in the past while praying disappeared. He became obsessed with his fears. He seemed to be losing his faith altogether.

Finally, David Wilkerson realized that this prayer, though understandable and quite human, was also a prayer lacking in faith. Think about it. "God, I'll do anything You ask me to do, only spare my wife and children." Could he not trust his own family to God? He began to realize that his lack of surrender was choking off his relationship with the Lord. Once he surrendered his life entirely to God, his joy and faith returned. David Wilkerson became a successful evangelist, the founder of Teen Challenge, and the author of the best-selling book *The Cross and the Switchblade*.

### **III. SAYING "YES" TO GOD**

In this Christmas season, Mary gives us a perfect example of how to say "Yes" to God. Just for a moment, Mary is given a glimpse of eternity. Salvation has come, not just for the

rich and powerful, but for the poor and oppressed. Salvation has come, not just through an earthly kingdom, but through an eternal kingdom. Salvation has come, not just for the Jews, but for the whole world. Just for a moment, Mary experiences God's vision for the redemption of humankind. How does she respond?

Mary answered "*May it be to me as you have said.*" *Then the angel left her.* Luke 1:38b (NIV) There is no more perfect way to say "yes" to God's plan. She saw the vision, she accepted the promise, and she was included in God's plans. That could be the story of every person who seeks to follow Jesus.

Evangelist Alan Walker once told about a girl who had a rich and lovely voice. She was singing in the choir of a church in East London. Her fame spread until one Christmas she was invited to sing one of the lead parts in "Messiah" at the Queen's Hall.

One of her closest friends went to this girl's teacher, asking whether he thought her friend was equal to the task. Here was her teacher's response: "If she tries to remember what I have tried to teach her," he said, "and merely tries consciously to follow the rules of correct breathing and voice production, she will break down. But if she can forget everything and think only of the wonder of the message she is singing, she will be all right."

The night came. At last she stepped forward and began singing, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." The music flowed in great beauty from her lips. She forgot the audience and the occasion, and sang as one who knew the meaning of it all, sang in the strength of the living Christ whom she knew and who was in power within her own life. As she sang, the audience was strangely moved. That night was one to be remembered. Why? Because she was not trying merely to follow directions or obey a set of external rules; she had found a Spirit of power, within. Open your heart to the Lord Jesus as know the peace that passes understanding.

This Christmas season, you and I can experience power within our lives by saying "yes" to God's plans and purposes. "Nothing is impossible with God." Open your heart fully to Jesus, the Immanuel, God with us. May Christ be born in you today.