

“THE WORD MADE FLESH”
Isaiah 7:10-17, Hebrews 2:9-18, Luke 1:26-38
December 3 & 4, 2022

“In his book *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Zondervan, 1995), Philip Yancey shares an episode from his youth when the concept of ‘the Word becoming flesh’ dawned on him with profound meaning. He says,

“I learned about incarnation when I kept a salt-water aquarium. Management of a marine aquarium, I discovered, is no easy task. I had to run a portable chemical laboratory to monitor the nitrate levels and the ammonia content. I pumped in vitamins and antibiotics and sulfa drugs and enough enzymes to make a rock grow. I filtered the water through glass fibers and charcoal, and exposed it to ultraviolet light.

“Now, you would think, in view of all the energy expended on their behalf, that my fish would at least be grateful. Not so. Every time my shadow loomed above the tank they dove for cover into the nearest shell. They showed me only one emotion: fear. Although I opened the lid and dropped in food on a regular schedule, three times a day, they responded to each visit as a sure sign of my designs to torture them. I could not convince them of my true concern. To my fish I was deity. I was too large for them, my actions too incomprehensible. My acts of mercy they saw as cruelty; my attempts at healing they viewed as destruction.

“To change their perceptions I began to see would require a form of incarnation. I would have to become a fish and ‘speak’ to them in a language they could understand.”¹ And we have to ask ourselves, “Are we any different when it comes to us responding to God?”

You see, God was in a very similar situation with us. He designed this marvelous world to enable life to perpetuate and to be sustained by His loving care, too. Yet we respond like Philip’s fish to His graceful provision. Though we have an abundance of food, good housing, adequate medical care, a bunch of amenities at hand, and all the oxygen we would ever need, our response to God’s presence is most often the same - total fear. We also run and hide away from God because He’s too much for us.

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 144)

God is too big for us to understand, so it would be easy for us to think that all God is out to do to us is zap us every time we do wrong, or to punish us at every turn in our lives. And so, in order to communicate with us and help us to understand that He only intends good for us, God did the miraculous thing of becoming human like us. His Word became flesh. He did this so that we could come to love Him and honor Him, and give thanks to Him for all He has provided for us. God came to us in human form so that we might find life in Him and acknowledge Him as our provider.

But it's one thing for us to comprehend that God could become like us, and it's quite another thing for us to comprehend the way that God chose to enter into our world. It's once more over the top and beyond our understanding. Yet we have written accounts to help us understand what God did. And even with those written accounts, it demands faith on our part in order to understand it. Listen to how God chose to become human and be with us. This is Luke 1:26-38. (READ Luke 1:26-38)

God had already done a mighty work for Zechariah and Elizabeth in order that they might have a son. Even in their old age, when Elizabeth had lived well beyond child bearing years, God touched her life to enable her to conceive and have a baby. That baby was to be named John, and he would become the forerunner of the Messiah, to prepare the people to receive the Christ. God opened up the womb of Elizabeth to remove the disgrace cast upon her for being barren, and to bring forth the herald of good tidings for all the people.

And then, Gabriel is sent to visit a young woman in Nazareth, pledged to a man named Joseph. They have not yet come to live together, for the marriage had not yet taken place. But in the tradition of the Jews, the betrothed were considered married, and nothing but divorce or death would end the marriage. But they would not live in the same house or have sexual relations before the marriage.

Mary was at the other end of the age spectrum than Elizabeth. While one wanted desperately to have children, but couldn't, the other was still young enough to not even be married. One was old, and the other was young, but God looked into their hearts to see the deep faith that they had and determined that they were the right ones to bless with special children, one through the natural way for pregnancy to

happen, and the other through a very unique and divine way. Both of these women were chosen by God in order that their faith might bring about the Salvation of the world.

Now God chose to work in Mary because He knew her heart and her desire to live in such a way as to be faithful to following all of the Lord's commands. She had found favor with God. So God invited her to do something very special for Him, to allow Him to bring forth a baby through her without the influence of human interaction. The Son Gabriel told her she would have would not be "*born...of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God* (John 1:13)." God's Holy Spirit would overshadow her and bring about this marvelous thing. Much like God's presence had overshadowed Mt Sinai when He gave Moses the 10 Commandments to the people of Israel, God made Himself present inside Mary in order to become like one of us.

Being that no man was involved, God enabled Mary to conceive and become pregnant with His holy Son, who was with Him in the beginning of all creation, and would bring Salvation to all who would put their trust and faith in Him. This child, the Son of God, would become the pathway for all people to return to the Lord. This child, Jesus, would grow up to teach us about God's love for us, so that we could put our full trust in Him and live for Him every day of our lives. This child, Jesus, would be the only one who could ever become the perfect sacrifice to take the sins of the world on Himself, pay the price for those sins in His death on the cross, and forever indemnify all those who put their trust in Him, follow Him and claim Him as their Savior and Lord from their own penalty of sin, thereby removing the fear of eternal death from them. Only the Son of God, the perfect man, could do such a thing for us.

But God needed a woman who would be willing to let Him work through her to be a part of the process of bringing the God-man Jesus to the earth. God would nor force Himself upon any woman to make the Salvation of the world become available to all of humanity.

So God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary to let her know the plan of God to bring about the Salvation of the world. Gabriel explained what God would do in her IF SHE WAS WILLING to let

Him do it. She was God's choice to do this great work. Yet He didn't imposition her with this task. He gave her the choice to either receive it or to reject it.

Mary, for her part, never questioned God's plan, but only wondered how the child would be conceived since she was still a virgin. How could God accomplish it outside of the natural way that children come into the world? She needed no sign, unlike Zechariah did when Gabriel told him what God would do. Mary only wondered about how God would make it happen. Gabriel helped her to understand that this would be God's doing so that the child would be called "holy."

It is at that time that Gabriel lets Mary know about her cousin Elizabeth' pregnancy. Now it is interesting to note that when Elizabeth became pregnant, she "*remained in seclusion for five months*" (Luke 1:24). She wasn't ashamed about her pregnancy, or embarrassed about God's gift to her, but she quietly praised the Lord God for providing for her, even in her old age. So the news of Elizabeth being pregnant had not yet traveled to Nazareth. Knowing of her situation, Mary would have been encouraged to see that even what was thought was impossible, was now possible when God made it happen.

To give you an idea of what it may have been like for Mary to have this opportunity to become filled with the Holy Spirit so that God might work in her, let me give you an example of how that might affect a person.

"There is a splendid moment in the movie *Jurassic Park*, when world-class paleontologist Allen Grant, who has devoted his life to the study of dinosaurs, suddenly comes face-to-face with real, live prehistoric creatures. He falls to the ground, dumbstruck. The reason is obvious. It is one thing to piece together an informed but nonetheless imperfect image of dinosaurs by picking through fossils and bones. But to encounter an actual dinosaur—well, there can be no comparison.

"For many people, spirituality amounts to picking through the artifacts of faith that survive from long ago and far away. In that bygone era, humans saw God, heard his voice, and experienced his awesome, though at times terrible, power. But that was then. Today, those kinds of gripping encounters with God—with a God who wasn't an illusion, but Someone who was real, Someone you could see, and

touch, and feel—well, there could be no comparison.”²

Mary was awestruck with God’s request to use her to bring about the Messiah of the world. She had learned about how God had worked in the lives of others in the past, and she trusted the accounts of how He had interacted in the lives of her ancestors. But it was something else to actually be in the presence of one of God’s angels, AND him asking her to do a miraculous thing for the Lord God. Certainly it would have astounded her and caused her to wonder, “*How can this be?*” (Luke 1:34).

Yet, she did not reject God’s invitation, but willingly stepped into her role as a servant of God to allow Him to do this strange, but marvelous work in her. We’re not told in the account of exactly when God overshadowed her and filled her with His Holy Spirit to begin her pregnancy. But once she made her statement of faith, “*I am the Lord’s servant...May your word to me be fulfilled*” (Luke 1:38), God moved in her to make the process begin.

But who could she tell? Who would believe her if she told them about Gabriel’s visit and God’s plan for her? She was just a teenager. Though she was betrothed to Joseph, what would everyone think as she began to show her pregnancy? The consequences of her decision could be detrimental for her.

But God did not call Mary to be the mother of God and then leave her stranded to figure it all out by herself. He didn’t tell her all that would take place. God simply invited her to begin the process and trust that He would take care of all of the details. For certainly, if God wanted His Son to become human like us, He knew what could happen if He did this marvelous thing. He knew His laws against premarital sex. He knew the consequences put in place for women found to become pregnant without being married. He knew the ridicule and the harassment that would come from other people toward Mary when they discovered she was pregnant. He knew the questions that would arise, and the shame she would face. Yet God knew the heart of Mary and had chosen her because He knew her willingness to do whatever He asked her to do. Though she was young, Mary had the faith and the determination to fulfill God’s plan, even if everyone turned against her.

² (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 83)

So God began to put other people in her life that would give Mary the support and encouragement she would need to continue her service to the Lord. Knowing about God's miraculous work in Elizabeth gave her the idea to go to her for counsel and support. So Mary makes the trek to Judea to visit her elderly cousin. And immediately upon hearing her voice, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit of God and given insight to all that He was doing in Mary (Luke 1:39-45). And "*Mary stayed with Elizabeth (and Zechariah) for three months and then returned home*" (Lu. 1:56). During that time Elizabeth would be able to pour into Mary the support and encouragement she would need to do this great thing that God had called her to do. The Word was now becoming flesh to dwell among us.

But let me ask you a serious question. "What do you do when God invites you to do a very hard thing? How do you respond when He presents an "impossible" opportunity to you that He needs to have done?" You see, throughout history, God has called His people to be faithful to Him, even agreeing to do strange and incredible things. How we respond is vital to what God is able to accomplish through us.

God gave Mary the option to receive this great work He was calling her to do. She could have said "No" to Gabriel's message. But God knew her heart and knew how she would respond to His call for her to do this great work.

But what about us? When God calls us to give up that lucrative job and take another position in a humble business so that He might work through us, how do we respond? When we have our hearts set upon a particular career, but God calls us into another line of work, what do we do? When we are called by God to stay true to our spouse, even when we are presented with opportunities to betray that trust, what do we do? When God calls us to leave the denomination that we have always been a part of our whole lives to join with another church, what do we do? When we are called to be faithful in all our business interactions, yet are faced with the chance of a lifetime to make millions on a shady deal, what do we do? How do we respond when God calls us to follow Him and trust in Him with our whole hearts? Do we have the determination within us to follow the Lord when He calls for us to do some strange thing that we think is absolutely impossible?

Tony Evans tells it this way: “A blind girl, one day, was caught in a fire on the tenth floor of a building. She could make her way to a window, but she couldn’t see anything. She felt the heat and smelled the smoke of the fire. Then she heard a fireman yell, ‘Jump, jump!’

“She said, ‘I’m scared to jump. I can’t see.’

“The fireman said, ‘If you don’t jump, you’re going to die. Take the risk, and jump.’

“It’s bad enough to jump from ten stories high, but to jump when you can’t see where you’re jumping - that’s terror. In the midst of the chaos and confusion, she heard another voice, ‘Darling, jump, I’ve got you.’ She smiled and said, ‘Okay, Daddy, I’ll jump.’

“Jesus Christ is inviting us to jump. He knows we’re nervous, but just jump. He knows you’re scared, but just jump. Remember, we’re talking about your Daddy. We’re talking about Somebody you know. You’ve seen what He can do”³ so trust Him at His word and follow His call. Do what He is inviting you to do and you’ll never regret it. God will use your faithfulness to do great work, even what you might think is impossible, because there is nothing that is impossible with God.

We may be blind to what God can do, but He knows what is possible if we put our trust in Him. He calls us to trust in Him and follow His guidance every day so that we can do His work.

Then, “in his book, *The Hungering Dark*, Frederick Buechner writes: Those who believe in God can never in a way be sure of Him again. Once they have seen Him in a stable, they can never be sure where He will appear or to what lengths He will go or to what ludicrous depths of self-humiliation He will descend in His wild pursuit of man. If the holiness and the awful power and majesty of God were present in this least auspicious of all events, this birth of a peasant’s child, then there is no place or time so lowly and earthbound but that His holiness can be present there too.

“And this means that we are never safe, that there is no place where we can hide from God, no place where we are safe from His power to break in two and re-create the human heart, because it is just where He seems most helpless that He is most strong, and just where we least expect Him that He comes

³ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 97)

most fully.”⁴

Mary’s faith in God gave her the ability to do what He was asking her to do, bring forth into the world the Messiah of God, Jesus Christ. She trusted that as God became human like us, we could find rescue from the wages of our sin, which leads to eternal death, and find eternal life with Him instead.

All Mary knew about what the future held for her if she did as God asked her to do was she would “*conceive and give birth to a son*” who would be called Jesus. Her belief in God allowed her to trust that Jesus would “*be great and [would be] called the Son of the Most High*” (Lu. 1:31). Her whole life depended upon the words of Gabriel being completely true. She needed to concede that there is nothing too difficult for God to do, if she remained faithful to Him, trust in His powerful word, and then step out in that faith to allow Him to bring all things together so that it could be accomplished.

But we have the opportunity for us to do the same thing, as our awesome God continues to work in our world today. As much today as any other time in the history of humanity, our world needs saving. So that means we need to trust in the Lord God Almighty and listen to what He calls us to do. It may seem absolutely ludicrous when we first hear it, but when we trust that God has all things in His control, that He has the power to make everything come into being, He can bring about just what He has called us to do. It is our place to surround ourselves with faithful followers of the Lord as our support system, be encouraged through His Holy Spirit, and then step out to do what He has called us to do. Who knows, but the world may depend upon our faithfulness. If not the world, then the person next to us, or the one hearing about our faith in what the Lord calls us to do. If the Lord calls us to do it, don’t question it, just get moving on making it happen. Let’s pray.

Father God, thank You for the faith of Mary, who submitted herself into Your care when You called her to become the virgin mother of Jesus. Thank You for her witness to us of Your faithfulness to all who will believe in You, and accept Your invitation to do Your work. Give us the courage to be that faithful, so that we might accomplish all that You have called us to do, impossible as it may seem, in order to bring about Your glory in all we do and say. If you can do the miraculous in the life of Mary, you can do in our lives, too. We submit ourselves to Your will today, in Jesus’ Name. AMEN.

⁴ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 140-141)