

Read Luke 1:26-38

We just read the gospel of Luke's version of an angel appearing to a young woman named Mary and announcing to her that she will give birth even though she is a virgin. And not only that, this child will be named Jesus and he will be called Son of the Most High. This is indeed a miracle to celebrate. But do we celebrate this miracle throughout the year? Or has this "miracle" become pretty ordinary in our everyday lives and in our everyday culture?

Saturday Night Live is a show that has been around since I was a kid. A couple of weeks ago they gave their interpretation of what the Christmas miracle has become in our churches. I am going to invite us now to watch this Saturday Night Live clip. Enjoy the humor in this clip. All of us church folks are the butt of the jokes here.

But as you watch this clip, I invite you to ask yourself these questions. How is the culture around us interpreting the organized church? How is the culture around us interpreting what we believe about the Christmas miracle? With these questions in mind let us watch this clip from Saturday Night Live.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiuYmM0IG6o>

I laughed when I watched this clip. I thought about my own attempts at soft humor from the pulpit which was depicted in this clip. I thought about my own experience with people being less than enthusiastic by being in a church service. Several of my pastor friends have commented on Facebook that this clip mirrors their experience in the church.

So has this miracle story of the birth of Jesus Christ become mundane and boring to us who show up in the church on the Sunday before Christmas to worship?

An angel appears to a woman named Mary and says to her that she will give birth to a child and this child will be called Son of the Most High. We hear once again that Mary is perplexed by this since she is a virgin. But then Mary comes around and says, "Here I am, use me." Has this message of an angel appearing to Mary become very ordinary and common to us?

If this miracle is no longer a miracle to us then how do we recapture the mystery of the Christmas birth?

I wonder if part of the reason that this story has become mundane is because we have elevated Mary to be someone very different than us. We know that in some Christian traditions, like in the Catholic tradition, that Mary is viewed as somehow different than the rest of us.

She is referred to in the Scripture as "the favored one" so we interpret this to mean that she is holier than the rest of us in some way. But "favored" in this verse does not mean that she is different. "Favored" does not mean that she has done something to earn this designation. Being called "favored" simply means that God is choosing her for this very specific and important responsibility.

Mary is an ordinary person, like you and me, living in a small town in a rather insignificant region of the world. She is female in a society that values men and she is young in a society that values wisdom and experience. If God can choose Mary for such an important responsibility then God chooses you and me for significant reasons as well.

We also tend to focus on Mary as being different than us because she is the virgin who becomes pregnant. But another way to read her virginity in this story is as a sign that she is incapable of doing this miracle herself. All of us, like Mary, are incapable of accomplishing God's will on our own. We alone cannot do what God alone is able to do through us. Mary is a vessel of God like we are vessels of God's will.

But even though we are not able to accomplish these things ourselves, with God nothing is impossible. Mary affirms this and we are invited to affirm this as well. Like Mary, we are invited to affirm that with God, nothing is impossible.

But many times we have a hard time with this act of faith. We doubt what God can do or we simply make God's actions historical rather than normative for today. But we yearn to see these miracles even as we doubt what God can do.

Mary is transformed in this story from the virgin unable to bear God's good news to the pregnant one who has no choice but to give witness to God's miracles. Are we capable of being the same witnesses today?

Think back to the video that we shared from Saturday Night Live. Are we the bad and unprepared actors in God's story who simply go through the motions of worship and witness? Do we have low expectations of what God can do through our Christian faith?

Or are we the ones who, like Mary, have come to believe deep in our core that with God nothing is impossible?

So do we face challenges before us with the belief that with God nothing is impossible? Do we look at situations in our families at Christmas time and believe that with God nothing is impossible? Do we look at opportunities in this church and believe that with God nothing is impossible?

Do we want to be like Mary in this story? Do we want to be the ones who are touched by God and used by God and then believe in our core that with God nothing is impossible? Or do we want to be the Christians who poorly go through the motions like in our opening video?

If some television producers showed up at your house and if they showed up here for worship, what kind of video do you think they would put together? Would they put together the kind of video that we watched earlier? Or, watching you and me, would they put together an inspiring video based on the premise that you believe, and that I believe, that with God nothing is impossible?

Do you believe like Mary that with God nothing is impossible? Or has the story of an angel appearing to a virgin named Mary become for you just another cute story to somewhat celebrate once a year?

Do you believe that with God nothing is impossible? AMEN.
