

Faith shines most clearly in the realm of the humanly impossible – impossible births, impossible life situations, impossible moments of need, where only God’s direct, miraculous intervention will answer the cries of the desperate believer. May these Bible notes remind us of God’s power to give life from the dead and to bring regenerating power into the lives of sinners saved by grace.

Monday: Read Luke 1:26-35**May it Be to Me as You have Said**

The announcement of the angel to Mary is one moment of having to trust in God’s power to do the impossible. We see Mary, overwhelmed by the astounding events leading up to the announcement of the Virgin Birth, unable to do anything but cry out: “How will this be...since I am a virgin?” She cannot grasp how God can keep His promise, bringing to birth the Son of God, miraculously conceived in her womb! All she can do is lay her mind, heart and will before the Lord and say: “May it be to me as you have said.”

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God for this clear demonstration of the nature of saving faith. Faith is in its essence a submission to the Word and the Promise of God: “Yielding obedience to the commands, embracing the promises and trembling at the threats” of God’s Word is the way our Westminster Confession chapter XIV paragraph 2 describes faith.

Lord, grant us such faith, content to rest in what you say you will do. Thank you that your Holy Spirit alone is able to produce such implicit, trusting faith in us, and He will do it. Amen.

Tues/Weds: Read Luke 1:38 and Psalm 110:2-4**By His Spirit, A Willing Spirit**

Martin Luther said that there are really two miracles contemplated when the angel Gabriel visits Mary. One is the miraculous conception of the life of the Christ-child in Mary’s womb. Some Reformed scholars speculate that perhaps this miraculous conception occurred immediately when the angel greeted Mary in Luke 1:28. After all, Gabriel announces there that the reason he can greet her as “favored one” is because the Lord is “with her,” i.e., that already the Spirit has entered her womb to cause the conception of the Christ-child. One biblical fact that could support this view is that the Holy Spirit is that presence which conveys life. And the Word of God, in this case spoken by this angel, is what enables spiritual life to be born in us. So Christ by the Word is born in Mary’s womb.

But just as momentous as this miraculous conception is the willingness of Mary to believe what she could never imagine or accept by her own reason or understanding. She is willing to submit to the Christ-child’s life in her though it would bring scandal upon her and her husband to be, Joseph. After all, who had ever heard of a pregnancy of an unwed young lady without a sinful accomplice?

But Psalm 110:3 promises that one sign of the Messiah’s coming and His rule is that He would make His people, “willing in the day of His power.” This is only possible by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people who would otherwise refuse to submit to such life-altering dictates of God.

After all, in today’s pro-choice world the so-called ability to forge one’s own way and succeed by one’s own choices is exalted as *defining what it means to be human*. Who today would naturally accept such a hitherto unknown miraculous conception and birth?

But God is able to change the inclinations in Mary and in us so that *His desired purposes for our lives* is accomplished. By His Spirit, He worked in Mary “to will and to act” (Philippians 2:13) according to His desire for her life, for her womb, and for her future. By renewing the sinful and self-enslaved will of Mary, the Holy Spirit empowered Mary to accept God’s will as her supreme good and the goal of her young life.

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks for the new disposition and new nature which comes to birth in all believers who by faith are enabled to glorify God with their bodies, souls and whole beings. Let us ask God to make us more and more like Mary – moved simply to ask that all events in our lives would be “to us, according to God’s will.” (Luke 1:38) Sing about such submission to God’s will, only possible by God’s Spirit, using hymn # 644:

1 May the mind of Christ my Savior
live in me from day to day,
by his love and pow'r controlling
all I do and say.

2 May the Word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his pow'r.

3 May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

4 May the love of Jesus fill me
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self abasing,
this is victory.

5 May his beauty rest upon me
as I seek the lost to win,
and may they forget the channel,
seeing only him.

Thurs/Fri: Read Luke 1:39-45

Faith, the Child of Regeneration

One of the clearest examples in the Christmas story of God’s sovereign, regenerating work by His Spirit is in the response to the greeting which Mary gave to Elizabeth when they met in the hill country of Judah – both carrying miraculously conceived children: John the Baptist in Elizabeth and the Christ-child in Mary.

When the mother of our Lord greets the Baptist’s mother, John leaps in Elizabeth’s womb. It was an immediate effect of being in the Christ-child’s presence. This is what scholars call, “the immediacy of regeneration.”

Today’s passage is typically used to support the immediacy of regeneration. When Mary came to Elizabeth, John the Baptist leaped in his mother’s womb in response to the presence of Christ in Mary’s womb. No gospel was preached to John at this point. He was not baptized or circumcised. Yet, he leaped in the womb because he recognized Jesus’ presence. Such joy is possible in Christ’s presence only for those who have been given new life, so it is likely that John had that new spiritual life. And being in his mother’s womb, it could have come only if God had acted on him directly. His faith came later, after his birth, when he was capable of belief, but his faith was evidence of prior regeneration; his faith was not itself regeneration. Similarly, if we have saving faith, then we know we have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

TableTalk Devotional 1/21/21

Meditate and Pray: Thank God that, however weak it may be, our faith is the fruit of the sovereign work of the Spirit which God will never abandon.

Sat/Sun: Read Galatians 4:4-7**A Birth in our Souls**

Just as God brought life into the womb of the Virgin Mary, so He brings life to us when Christ is born in us and by faith we receive God's forgiving grace and justifying righteousness. This is the teaching of Galatians 4:4-6. God at just the right time "sent forth His Son" to be born by the Spirit in Mary, and so He sends the Spirit at just the right time so that we cry out, "Abba, Father" as newly-adopted children indwelt by the regenerating Spirit.

This is how the Scriptures invite us to view the gospel, and this is their central testimony: "In the fulness of the time, at the strategic moment – something happened, something decisive, unique, once for all, the intervention of God, a visitation from on high, in which God has made Himself known in grace and mercy to mankind."

This (God coming down in the birth of Christ) is the central affirmation of the Christian faith. To say anything less or anything else, is to miss the mark completely. Christianity stands or falls on this basic reality. Either this is true, or the whole fabric of the Faith falls to pieces. There can be no modification, for this is Christianity...

Now this is important for two reasons. The first is this: Christ has entered into our life, into human life, once for all. And since that is so, Paul must go on to say something else: which he does in Galatians 4:6. "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba Father." Not only has God sent His Son into the world: He sends His Spirit into the hearts of men. And this is what takes the Christmas story out of the past into the present, out of the romance of history into the grim, despairing world of our time, to bring hope to us, and joy and peace. It was a true insight that made Charles Wesley write in his Christmas carol *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*:

Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.

This is the real issue of the mystery of the Incarnation: not merely that Christ should be born in the world, but that He should be born in us; not merely that there should be a Virgin Birth, but also a virgin birth of faith in our souls. Amen!

Rev James Philip

Meditate and Pray: Invite the Spirit to continually dwell in our hearts, with continual renewal, remodeling, and ever increasing life eternal.