

"No Way!"

Text: Luke 1:26-38

A great and mighty wonder, a full and holy cure
The Virgin bears the Infant with virgin honor pure.

The Word becomes incarnate and yet remains on high
And cherubim sing anthems to shepherds from the sky.

Repeat the hymn again: "To God on high be glory and peace on earth to
men!"

Amen. (TLH 76)

Dear Fellow Christians:

Like it or not, you have to keep up with the ever-evolving English language or it will get away from you. Let it get away from you, and you can expect misunderstandings and, if you are affected by such things, embarrassment. The words stupid, sick, crazy, and dirty are all now used, so I am told, as both positive and negative adjectives and adverbs. You just have to figure it out by context. If a musician, for example, is described as "sick," it could mean he is ill, a pervert, or exceptionally good at what he does.

You also need to pay attention to when words revert to their original meanings. For a couple of centuries, "bad" meant bad, something that was undesirable – the opposite of good. Yet at some point the meaning of "bad" shifted 180 degrees so that it could also mean "good" – as when someone told you that their new pickup was "bad." Yet now "bad" seems to have shifted back to just undesirable – except maybe when it is used by folks who are old enough to know better and yet still try to "talk like young people." (Note to parents: Don't try this at home.)

The expression that forms our sermon theme for this morning is no exception. It too has undergone a change in recent years. "No way" used to mean "impossible" – and that was pretty much it. Now "no way" is also used to express wonder or appreciation at something you believed to be impossible, but that you nonetheless now believe did actually happen: "*You found a whole pack of hundred dollar bills hidden in the wall of your house? No way!*"

The truth that we will explore this morning on the basis of God's Word is the fact that the opposing uses of "no way" actually reflect a problem that Christians need to address. The text on which we will base this morning's study is found in the Gospel of Luke, the first chapter:

^{ESV} **Luke 1:26-38** *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy--the Son of God. ³⁶ ¶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.*

These are God's Words. May God the Holy Spirit continue to fill you with wonder at the fact that he has given his own perfect, holy Son, but also his perfect holy words to guide and instruct us. Confident that he will work powerfully in each of us through these words again this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

As Christians, you and I never want to saddle God with our own limitations; that is, we never want to imagine that God can only do what man can do, or that he is only capable of what man believes to be possible. Several forces work against us here on a daily basis. The first and most powerful is our own personal experience. The second is our lack of understanding when it comes to God's truth and God's communication of that truth to us. The third is our natural skepticism. We'll examine all three in greater detail in an effort to better recognize the problem.

Do you believe that man can fly? Not in an airplane or hang-glider or any such thing, just with the body with which we are born. No, of

course not. Why? We might imagine that our rejection of the idea is based on logic, reason, or science, but that's really only secondary to the fact that we've never *seen* anyone fly. Human beings can't fly because no human being has *ever* flown, and mankind has believed that to be true long before we understood the science behind wings and lift and feathers. And yet Elisha watched Elijah being taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, and the disciples watched Jesus bodily ascend from the face of the earth. The point is that our experience trumps our knowledge every time. Even if Elisha and those disciples outside of Bethany had possessed advanced degrees in astrophysics, they would nonetheless have believed in human flight because they saw it with their own eyes.

The second factor that causes us to limit the power of our God is our lack of understanding, both of our God and of the truths that he communicated to us in his Word. So also Nicodemus thought Jesus daft when Jesus spoke to him of "being born again." What Nicodemus envisioned by those words was obviously much different than what Jesus was actually saying.

The third factor that causes us to limit the power of our God is our own natural skepticism and pride. No one wants to be thought of as ignorant or gullible, so man naturally rejects anything and everything that he cannot see or verify, and we are naturally suspicious (skeptical) of anything that defies or transcends the generally accepted bounds of possibility and reason. In other words, our need to be accepted makes us naturally want to reject what our society as a whole rejects.

So it is throughout the Bible we witness opposite reactions, even from believers, when confronted with divine truth that transcends the normal order of things. Both Abraham and Sarah reacted with a "No way!" when the angel announced to them that they would have a child in their old age, but each meant something entirely different. While Abraham's reaction was "No way – *that's great!*" Sarah's reaction was just plain "No way." – with a little laugh of ridicule tossed in for good measure. When the spies were sent by Moses to reconnoiter the Promised Land, Joshua and Caleb reported back with something of a, "No way! *The land that God is about to give us is incredible.*" The report of the other ten spies was, again, just plain "No way. *Can't be done.*"

Which brings us finally to the Christmas story and the events surrounding our text for this morning. When Zechariah was told by the Angel Gabriel that not only were he and his elderly wife going to have a child, but that the boy was actually going to be the Great Forerunner of the promised Messiah, his reaction was the very logical and reasonable,

"No way." Not No way! That's great!" Just, "No way." Gabriel rewarded his faithlessness by removing his ability to speak until the child was born. The object lesson should be obvious: *"You doubt God's Word because your eyes, experience and reason have told you such a thing is not possible? Very well, you will be able to do nothing but watch until your sight also tells you not only that God can be trusted, but that with God nothing is impossible."*

Contrast this with Mary's reaction to some equally "impossible" news in our text. Where Zechariah and Elizabeth, though old, were told that they would have a child by natural means, and doubted, Mary was told that she would conceive as a virgin. *Her* reaction? "No way. *Awesome! How?*" A careful reading of our text gives evidence of her faith, for Mary did not ask, "How can this be?" but "How will this be?" The fact that the ESV got the translation right here is reinforced by Mary's final words to the Angel: **"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."** In other words, *"I'm not sure I got how that will work, but you said it, so I believe it."*

Because of the sinful adoration of Mary by some Christians, there's a danger of over-reacting in the opposite extreme. In other words, because some give her too much credit, we tend to give her too little. Yet just look at Mary's reactions here. Look, marvel, and seek to emulate – for here we see a perfect example of just what we seek to learn this morning.

It begins with Mary's first reaction, which was one of utter humility. Note that Gabriel's first words weren't, *"You are, as a virgin, going to have a baby."* What were they? **"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"** Note well the profound humility in Mary's initial response: **"But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be."** These first words give us a window into Mary's heart and character. In fact she seemed to be less startled by the news that she was going to have a baby than she was by the Angel's statement that she was **"highly favored"** by God himself, and that that same God was **"with her."** The default attitude of human beings is *"Of course God is with me,"* and *"It is only natural and right that God favor me."* This human arrogance is demonstrated most often in the negative – when bad things happen to those who then question God with a *"Why me?"* God's reply, if he chose to verbalize it, would probably be *"Why not you? What have you ever done to deserve anything better from my hand?"*

Scripture Readings

Carry now this whole account of Mary into your own world, your own existence, your own relationship with, and reaction to, God. What do you learn – about your God and about yourself? More specifically, which "no way" is your typical reaction when faced with life's challenges and God's promises? Is yours most often the reaction of Zechariah or of Mary? "No way!" or "No way, that's awesome!" God has, for example, promised you that if you **"seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these other things will be added to you."** With you is it typically "No way! Yea!" or "No way"? God's promise: **"I am with you always."** "No way! That's awesome!" or just "No way." From this morning's text: **"For nothing will be impossible with God."** "No way - yes!" or just "No way."

Understand this well. This is in no way an academic or unimportant exercise. The stakes here, the downside, is much greater than just causing yourself unnecessary anxiety or misery here on earth by doubting God's promises. The stakes are eternal. They are life or death, heaven or hell, because the gospel itself is the greatest of all of God's "impossible" promises. The very means that God has devised for our salvation flies in the face of all that we hold reasonable, logical, or rational. It make no sense whatsoever that the holy Son of God would sacrifice himself for the sins of others. It is profoundly illogical that God the Father would pour out divine wrath upon the *only sinless man* ever to have lived and died. It flies in the face of our logic and experience that God would require *everything* from the man who had no sin, and yet *nothing* from those of us who do. And yet all of these are true. All of this is exactly what God did when he offered up his own dear Son as our substitute.

As Christians we also need to learn how and when to use the old school "no way." Satan will continue his assault on the truth. To his efforts we are supposed to apply our "No way!" The world will seek to sow doubts concerning morality, the inspiration of the Bible, the age of the universe, the sanctity of life, and the God-established roles of men and women. No way. Our own sinful flesh will plead with us to flirt with sin, compromise the truth, and to slide into soul destroying apathy. No way.

As you therefore prepare to celebrate your Savior's birth, remind yourself that just as God kept his incredible promise to send his Son as our Savior, so our God can also be trusted to keep every single one of his other promises to us. Doubt it not. Revel instead in the incomparable power and grace of your God, and know that he can most certainly be trusted to do every single thing that he has promised. And then ransack your Bibles to find those promises. Amen.

^{ESV} **2 Samuel 7:6-11, 16** I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. ⁷ In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" ⁸ Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. ⁹ And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰ And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹ from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'"

^{ESV} **Romans 16:25-27** Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-- ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

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The Fourth Sunday in Advent – December 24, 2017

The Opening Hymn – 85 (*Stanzas 1-6*) (*Red Hymnal*)

"From Heaven above to Earth I Come"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Scripture Lessons: (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)

The First Lesson: (2 Samuel 7:6-11, 16) Note especially in our first reading the *direction*, for therein we learn one of the great lessons of Scripture. David wanted to demonstrate his gratitude to God by building a temple in his honor. Yet God refused the offer. His point, in part, was to teach David (and us) that it is not all about man doing for God, but God doing for man. David wanted to build a house for God, but God declared that he is the one that would build a "house" for David – a family line from which the Savior would be born and all the world blessed. So also man does not save himself; God does that.

Psalm 66 (Supplement page 37)

The Gospel Lesson: (Romans 16:25-27) Our second reading this morning gives direction, purpose, and meaning to all that we say and do during the Christmas season. Without this direction, it would be very easy to allow Christmas to become for us what it has become for all those who do not know Jesus Christ – a rather hollow and sentimental time that actually has little lasting consequence or meaning. God did what he did in connection with Jesus Christ for one purpose: that sinners might be saved.

The Confession of Faith -

Nicene Creed – (*Supplement page 5*)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 705 (*Brown Hymnal*)

"Come, O Long-Expected Jesus"

The Sermon – Luke 1:26-38 (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)

"No Way"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 324 (*Stanzas 1-2*) (*Red Hymnal*)

"Jesus Sinners Doth Receive"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (*Brown Hymnal page 17*)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (*Brown Hymnal page 20*)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 85 (*Stanzas 14-15*) (*Red Hymnal*)

"From Heaven above to Earth I Come"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (44) Average (42) December Mortgage Balance (\$0!)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Christmas Eve Rehearsal
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
	-5:00 p.m.	– Christmas Eve Service
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Christmas Day Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer has returned the call to Immanuel of Mankato. That congregation has now called Pastor Neal Radichel.

Annual Voters' Meeting Notes – The 2017 membership roster (which will become official on 12/31) was presented for review (copies can be found on the mailbox table). Current membership includes 66 communicants and 30 pre-communicants (including "souls under our care"). Treasurer Adams reported a YTD General Fund deficit of \$3,774, offset in part by \$1,480 underspent to the budget. Gary Miller and Mike McEnroe were elected to fill the two open Church Council positions. The Voters resolved to cash in our CEF note with the Synod and to use the proceeds to pay off our current mortgage and to purchase a new copy machine. Our automatic Missions offering was raised to 12% of our General Fund offerings, and our CBP estimate was set at \$15,000 for FY19. The Voters resolved to thank Fred Adams for his many years of faithful service as our Treasurer. The Church Council's non-budget spending limit was increased from \$500 to \$1,000.

Christmas Schedule – Our Christmas Eve service is this evening at 5pm and our Christmas Day service is scheduled for tomorrow at 10am.