

According to our calendars, today is Christmas Eve. But we still see the blue of Advent before us. We are singing Advent hymns. And the white Christmas candle in the center of our wreath is unlit. This begs the question: Is today Advent or is today Christmas?

We're about as puzzled as is Mary in our text. An angel suddenly appears to her. That's puzzling in itself. Yet what he says to her is even more puzzling. He tells her that she will conceive in her womb and bear a son, and that the child will be called the Son of the Most High God.

But although she is betrothed to Joseph, she is a virgin. What the angel tells her, therefore, is not possible. And so, Mary is puzzled. It's not that she objects to what the angel tells her. It's not that she refuses to believe the angel. It's not even that she doubts the angel's message to her. Mary believes the angel. But her faith needs some assurance. And so, she asks, "*How? How will this be?*"

And assurance she is given. "God will do this," the angel says to her, "*for with God, nothing will be impossible.*" And this is good enough for Mary. "*I am the servant of the Lord,*" she replies, "*Let it be to me according to your word.*"

When was the last time an angel visited you with such an impossible message for you to believe? And don't say never. Say today, this very morning. Angel means *messenger*. And thus, the one who stands before you today, though not Gabriel, is the one, the angel, who carries God's message to you. And it is just as impossible to believe as was Gabriel's message to Mary.

She did not sense a child within her. She wasn't all of a sudden warm and glowing, thus indicating that what the angel said was true. There was no evidence whatsoever to prove that she was now with child.

And so with you. God wants you to believe that the same Jesus who was within Mary, dwells within you. You do not feel Him either. That's not Jesus causing your inner being to feel all warm and fuzzy. It's your breakfast, or dinner from last night. Mary could not see Jesus within her, nor can we. She could not sense Jesus within her, nor can we. She believed, not because of what her eyes, or her senses told her, but because of what God spoke to her through His angel.

Faith based upon our senses is not faith at all. Faith does not trust our eyes or our feelings. It trusts what God declares in Holy Scripture. And He declares you to be His holy child in Christ Jesus, and that your Lord is dwelling within you just like with Mary.

But our senses and our feelings might very well tell us just the opposite. I feel my sin. Don't you? I feel it sometimes weighing very heavily upon my heart. I don't sense Jesus in my heart. But I do sense all my wrongdoings there.

God's angel told Mary to believe what she could not sense, what she could not feel. And the same for you. Do not believe your heart. Believe God. Yes, it is very true that you are a wretched sinner, as I also am. It is true that our sins are damning.

But if your heart tells you that there is no way God could ever forgive someone like you, God is greater than your heart, and He does, what to us is impossible. He declares it so – He calls you His holy child in Jesus. He has forgiven you of all your sins. He does not condemn you. He gives you a place in heaven with Jesus.

“How?” we ask with Mary. “*How will this be?*” We need assurance as she did. And God gives it to us. Look at your Savior, Jesus, on the cross. There is assurance for you. He died on that cross also for you. Scripture declares that He carried your sins, and paid the penalty that you deserved. Look at your baptism, for “*Baptism now saves you.*” Your baptism is not your work. It is God’s work, His miracle. It is Jesus, for He is in the water for you with all the gifts of His cross. Remember your baptism every day, and every day say, “I am baptized into Christ. I am forgiven of all my sins. I have been given a place with Jesus in heaven.”

Don’t be puzzled. With God, all things are possible. And since He places His promise in baptism, this comforting Sacrament is pure assurance for you.

So, what about today? Is this Advent, or is this Christmas? Can it not be both? In Advent we hear the promise of the coming Christ. Christmas is the fulfillment of that promise. Today is both because God’s promises are sure and certain. Where He promises to give Jesus, because His promise is so certain, there is Jesus given for you. Where there is Advent, there is Christmas.

And so, this morning I say to you, “Blessed Advent!” And later today, I say to you, “Merry Christmas!” Amen.