

Luke 1:26-28

Little Jimmy wasn't so little anymore. He was starting to ask questions about Santa Claus. The wrong kind of questions. Not questions like "Who is he?" or "Where does he live?" or "When will he arrive?" But questions beginning with the word "how?" "How does he manage to...?" Well, you know the rest.

There are some questions that are better not asked. We've all done it, and not just when we were little. Sometimes we discovered that the answer was rather unpleasant. Sometimes there was no answer.

A young woman, a virgin by the name of Mary, asked one of these "how" questions in our text. It seems simple enough. "*How will this be?*" She was at a loss. God's angel had appeared to her, and she could not wrap her mind around what the angel had to say. "*You will bear a Son,*" Gabriel told her. "*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.*" "*But I'm a virgin,*" Mary responded, "*How will this be?*"

It's not that Mary was a doubter. She had found favor with God. She was a believer. She trusted in the promises of God. That's why you, also, have found favor with God. "The Lord looks upon you with favor" are the words you hear Sunday after Sunday in the benediction. You who believe have His favor. You believe that which He promises to you.

But some things that God says are hard to swallow, aren't they? Had the angel told Mary that the Son of the Most High would descend from heaven through the air and land in her lap, that would have made sense. That, at least, she could have understood. But for the Son of God to be conceived within her, a virgin? That's just a little beyond her. That cannot be figured out with the mind. That can only be believed in a heart of faith.

But Mary was a believer. Believers don't just believe the easy stuff. They believe the hard stuff. The stuff that makes no sense. The angel did not answer Mary's question. "*How will this be?*" she asked. The angel Gabriel simply said that the Lord will bring it about. "*Nothing shall be impossible with God.*" That was good enough for Mary. "*Let it be to me according to your word.*" She did not understand. She could not figure out the "how." It made no sense to her reasoning mind. But God said it through His angel. God would do it. That was good enough for her.

And it should be good enough for us. What do you believe about God? Just the easy stuff? Or do you, like Mary, believe everything God has promised...even that which makes no sense...even that which we are unable to wrap our minds around and figure out?

There are people who question whether they are truly Christians. Their doubts come because they don't see the evidence in their daily life. And they don't always feel within their hearts that they are God's Christians.

Mary did not have such doubts. She did not feel pregnant. She could not feel the Son of God within her. As the angel spoke God's words to her, Mary could not sense the Holy Spirit overshadowing her and conceiving the Christ within her womb. There was no evidence

anywhere which supported the words of the angel. Not then. Later, as the Child grew within her, it was clear to her that she was pregnant. But the angel told her to believe God's promise before that evidence would come. Mary was to believe that through God's words spoken to her, He was bringing it about. He was doing what His angel said He would do.

God's promise to you is the same as His promise to Mary. The Christ, the Son of God, has come to dwell within you not through the air, not in a way our puny minds can figure out, but in the same way He came to Mary--through God's words being spoken.

When you were baptized--God's words being spoken with the water in the font--Christ came to you just as He came to Mary. When you eat the bread and wine of the Sacrament on the altar--God's words being spoken over these elements--Christ comes into you just as He came into Mary.

But not everyone has the faith of Mary. And everyone, including you and me, want to make sense of it all before we believe. But that's not faith, then, is it? Faith takes God at His word. If you believe in God, then you believe what He says and promises.

God says that you are a sinner, even if you don't feel like a sinner. Even if we've cleaned up our lives, sin still lives in our hearts. Sin is not just an act we do; sin is a condition. It's the fatal disease we inherited from our parents. We are born dead in sin, God says. We are born His enemies. We are born without the ability to come to Him and believe in Him. It's true, not because we can sense this or see it; it's true because God says it.

But friend, just as true is God's word to you in Christ. Jesus died for you, for all of you. All your sin was laid upon Him. You didn't see it happen. But God says it did. And God declares that you are forgiven of your sin because of it, because Jesus went to the cross. Even if you don't feel forgiven, God says you are. Even though you see sin in your life, God assures you that the curse of your sin was borne by Christ. He took your punishment. He was declared to be the sinner, and you are declared to be innocent and holy.

This is what your baptism means. You cannot feel the water still on your head, but it's there. God never looks at you apart from your baptism into Christ. He never sees your sinfulness. He only sees that your baptism has washed your sins away.

More important than "how?" is "Who?" "How can this be?" we're tempted to ask. "*With God nothing is impossible.*" God has done this. He did this for you through Jesus Christ. Through the Child conceived in the womb of Mary, God now calls you His friends. Through Christ, God is at peace with you. Through Jesus, who was conceived, born, suffered, died, and rose again, you are able to celebrate Christmas with joy having the hope of eternal life.

It doesn't matter what you feel this Christmas. Whether you feel happy or sad, you have a Savior. Whether you feel Christmas joy or not, your God loves you and forgives you. God's Word trumps our feelings and emotions. His Word is always true. He brings to pass that which He promises. Mary believed this, and the Christ was born, born from her, born for her. Now you can believe this too. Amen.