

You all know what a "placebo" is... right? ... It is the power of the **brain** to eliminate pain or disease... merely by the belief that treatment is occurring. For example... fake pills are given to patients... and by thinking the pills have healing effects... the patient's pain and/or disease is cured. ... But... did you know... that the placebo has an evil twin... called the "nocebo"? Researchers have only recently become fascinated by it.

The BBC made a documentary on it... in which the following comments were made:

"We have long known that expectations of a malady can be as dangerous as a virus. In the same way that voodoo shamans could harm their victims through the power of suggestion, priming someone to think they are ill can often produce the actual symptoms of a disease. Vomiting, dizziness, headaches, and even death, could be triggered through belief alone. It's called the 'nocebo effect.' But it is now becoming clear just how easily those dangerous beliefs can spread through gossip and hearsay—with potent effect."

The power of belief and suggestion is remarkably powerful... and possibly even deadly. ... So how important is it to take what we believe seriously? ... If belief in a false thing can kill or heal... what can belief in the real power of God—do?

In this portion of Luke... we find God's solutions or answers to situations that seem to be "**Out of the Question**" or impossible. We face impossible situations all throughout our life. It may be a health... or financial problem... (or perhaps)... a conflict with a person that seems to be unresolvable.

(LISTEN TO ME)... It is our "**Out of the Question**" circumstances that give God the opportunity to show us that He can do the impossible any time...

any day... in any way He chooses. ... “**Out of the Question**” situations are like magnets for God’s intervention in the life of believers. ... All throughout the Bible we see God’s answers to “**Out of the Question**” events.

* In Genesis, the Lord delivered Joseph from prison overnight to the position of Vice-Pharaoh of Egypt.

* In Exodus, the Lord freed the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery and parted the waters of the Red Sea when they were trapped by Pharaoh’s army, enabling them to flee to safety.

* In Exodus, when the people were struggling with thirst, the Lord quenched their thirst with water that came from the smitten rock.

* In Joshua, the walls of Jericho fell after God’s people followed God’s instructions and marched around the city for seven days.

* In Joshua, the Lord caused the sun to stand still so the Israelites could defeat the Amorites in battle.

* In Daniel, he protected the three Hebrews who were thrown into the fiery furnace. He protected Daniel when he was thrown into the den of lions by shutting their mouths.

* In the Gospels, we find Jesus feeding 5000 hungry people with a little boy’s lunch.

All throughout the Bible we find accounts like these (of God providing solutions or answers to “**Out of the Question**” or impossible events.) ...

Today we come across the record of two impossible pregnancies. ... One woman (Elisabeth) was old and beyond her years of child bearing (or so she thought)... yet... the Lord gave her a child that had been growing in her womb for six months.

The other woman (Mary) was a virgin who would be given a child by God Himself. ... (Unbelievably)... the daddy would be God... and her baby

would be the Son of God (the Messiah.) ... Her baby would be the solution to the problems of mankind. ... Her baby would grow to be a man that would do the impossible.

Let's take a look at the announcement about the birth of Christ... and from it... lets seek to glean important insights on God's answers to our own - "**Out of the Question**" events. (But first a little review...)

Last week... we saw that the Angel (Gabriel) had carried out his mission to **Zechariah** (John the Baptist's father). ... John would be the forerunner to the Messiah. ... And Gabriel had delivered a message of joy and gladness about John's birth. ... Nevertheless the reception that Zechariah gave him... (even with his good news) had **not** been altogether favorable. ... Zachariah's reaction (in essence) had been: "*Yeah... Right. How can I be sure of this?*" ... And now this same Gabriel is given another commission. (But stop and realize this)... the message Gabriel (now) must deliver... is even **more** unbelievable !

In comparison with the commission which Gabriel had carried out about six months earlier... this new message might bring even colder skepticism. Gabriel will say: "*Mary... even though you have never had sex with a man... you are going to have a baby... God Himself will impregnate you with His Son.*" ... Now just imagine what Mary's response would be (if she were you or I) ... "*Yeah... Right. How can this be? This is out-of-the-question Impossible! Go away. Leave me alone! I'm planning a wedding!*"

Today... we move NORTH from Jerusalem to Nazareth. Six months after the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias... he appeared to Mary.

Luke 1:26

The location of Nazareth made it a hot bed of corruption. It was frequented by Roman soldiers... merchants... and travelers that went back and forth between Jerusalem and Tyre. Drunkenness and immorality were common practices of these travelers. So the city had a reputation for depravity. It's citizens had a lot of contact with Gentile ("dogs"). If you were from Jerusalem... or any other city in Judah... you would be suspicious of anyone who was from Nazareth.

Thankfully conditions seem different than when I first moved to La Pine... but people in Bend used to look suspiciously on anyone who was from La Pine. ... Bend merchants would ask me for extra ID when they saw I was from La Pine. ... A popular joke was – "*Why do people from Bend like to shop at yard sales in La Pine?*" ... (ANSWER) "*So they can get their stuff back.*" ... La Pine was not known for it's good character. Just like Nazareth the assumption was: "*Can anything good come out of La Pine...?*"

But chosen-little-Nazareth teaches us another lesson. In spite of its corruption... there were godly people in the city - such as Mary and Joseph. They were godly because they chose to do what was right. If you are a Christian and want to live for the Lord... you can ... Blaming the environment that you were raised in... for your sinful decisions... has no merit. ... Mary was such a godly young lady from (no-nothing) Nazareth – BUT the Lord chose her to be the mother of the Messiah. ... What an honor for her! (You see) Mary chose to be pure before the Lord.

(Remembering our passage from last week)... we will see a definite contrast between the announcement to Zacharias... and the

announcement made to Mary. ... This contrast sets the **tone** for today's passage.

The previous announcement about John came to a **priest** in the midst of a **public** worship service at the **high holy place** of Israel's capital. ... The announcement about Jesus comes **privately** to a humble woman in **a little rural village**. ... Luke contrasts the **greatness of the setting** of the announcement about John... with the **simplicity** of the announcement about Jesus. ... The tone of Jesus' birth announcement matches the tone of His whole ministry during His first-coming to earth. ... The great God of heaven sent the gift of salvation to humans - in a serene **un**adorned package of **simplicity**.

(How true it is) that in the **world's** eyes... Mary was not of much account. She was too young to know much of the world or to have accomplished anything. (Most Bible scholars estimate that she was young as **12 years old** and not older than **14 years old**.) So she was probably a very young teenager. ... As with all poor peasant girls... she was illiterate... her knowledge of the Scriptures would be limited to what she had memorized at home... or heard in the synagogue.

From all indicators... her life would not be extraordinary. She would marry humbly... give birth to numerous poor children... never travel farther than a few miles from home... and one day die like thousands of others before her — a nobody in a nothing town in the middle of nowhere.

We cannot miss an inescapable fact: *the greatest news ever proclaimed in Israel came to the humblest of its people!*

As we study the Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary... we must accept the essential spiritual fact of the entire gospel: the Lord comes to needy people — to those who realize that without Him they cannot make it — to those who acknowledge their weakness and spiritual lack. ... The good news of Jesus is NOT for the proud and self-sufficient.

Luke 1:27

In ancient Jewish marriages... the word “engaged” (or “betrothed”) had a different meaning than today. ... A Hebrew marriage involved two stages... the **kiddushin** (betrothal)... and the **huppah** (marriage ceremony). ... The marriage was almost always arranged by the families of the bride and groom... often without consulting them. ... A contract was made and was sealed by payment of the **mohar** (the dowry or bride price)... which was paid by the groom or his family to the father of the bride.

The marriage contract was considered binding as soon as it was made... and the man and woman were considered legally married... even though the marriage ceremony (**huppah**) and sexual intimacy often did not occur until as much as a year later. ... The betrothal period served as a time of probation and testing of the bride's sexual purity. It was during this period of betrothal between Mary and Joseph... that Gabriel delivered the message of the future birth of Jesus. ... What Mary was about to hear from the angel would have significant impact on her engagement.

Mary is clearly said to be a **virgin**. There is no ambiguity about the idea here — Mary had never had sexual relations with any man. Luke mentioned it twice in the same verse (here) so there would be no possibility to misunderstand. ... Luke (the **physician**)... would (of all people) be the

most skeptical about such a birth. ... He must have had an understanding of the birth process as only a doctor would have. And yet he is the one who records in detail the angel's message to Mary... that she (*a virgin*) was to be mysteriously impregnated by God's Holy Spirit... and that no earthly father was to be involved.

Luke... (in doing his research before writing his gospel) said that he interviewed the eyewitnesses. No doubt he spoke often with Mary (the mother of Jesus) and we can imagine him saying: "*Now... Let's go over the facts one more time. What really happened?*" ... [P A U S E] ...

Many people... who have been connected with the church all their life... have never been able (intellectually) to accept the idea of the Virgin Birth. But if you think it's just *impossible*... then I would question your view of God. You are limiting God. ... In the words of J. B. Phillips's great book of thirty years ago - *Your God Is Too Small*. ... Christians believe in a God who is big enough to deal with our most pressing personal problems. He is big enough to deal with our most pressing national problems and the problems of our world. ... Our Creator and Redeemer is the God of the impossible. ... If belief in a false thing can kill or heal... (as in placebos and nocebos)... what can belief in the real power of God—do?

Luke 1:28-30

In spite of the angel's cordial entrance... Mary was startled. She experienced momentary fright. Why? Well... because of his "heavenly aura"... but in all probability (also) because she... (though being a young woman of excellent moral and spiritual character)... was still a sinner... who was now unexpectedly face to face with a strong... brilliant... sinless

being. ... The fact that Mary was **troubled at his saying** shows her humility. Mary was surprised to hear such extravagant words said of her.

I like what Warren Wiersbe wrote:

Mary's response reveals her humility and honesty before God. She certainly never expected to see an angel and receive special favors from heaven. There was nothing unique about her that such things should happen. If she had been different from other Jewish girls, as some theologians claim she was, then she might have said, "Well, it's about time! I've been expecting you!" No, all of this was a surprise to her.

Gabriel told her (first of all) that she was "*highly favored with God.*" – And Mary was troubled by it. ... Probably because of her humility... she may have been thinking, "*Why me? I'm too insignificant to find favor with God.*" But verse 29... says that she was greatly troubled.

Luke used a very intense word in the Greek language - διαταράχθη (*dee-a-tar-ox-they*). She was mulling over the question - *what sort of greeting might this be?* ... She heard that God was with her and that she was an object of his grace.

The literal sense is that she kept pondering the meaning of the greeting. Whatever Gabriel's surprising and glorious appearance was like (telling Mary not to be afraid) ... Mary was able to get past the shock... and then ponder deeply the meaning of his greeting... as she sought understanding.

This is a truly remarkable picture. Young and inexperienced as she was... Mary was not a flighty... shallow "young thing." ... This tells us that she was reflective and meditative.

The angel then explained why Mary was considered "favored."

Luke 1:31-33

Mary was hearing that she would mother the long-awaited promised Messiah... and she got the idea! ... Gabriel's words were quoting 2 Samuel 7:8–16 (a foundational Old Testament prophecy – written 800 years earlier - that the Messiah would sit on the throne of David forever.) ... No doubt Mary had heard those very lines in the synagogue readings and knew that they were about the Messiah.

She understood the gist of the angel's announcement: "You are going to become *pregnant*; you are going to call your son's name Jesus (which means "*Salvation*." "*You are going to name your Son "Salvation"*... He will sit on the throne of David forever and He is going to be the *Son of God*..." (And by the way – to a 1st Century Jew "Son of God" meant all the characteristics of God – He would be God – Himself.) ... What an earful! What an incredible announcement!

Humble... reflective Mary thought about it — and understood. Then she asked the logical question: "*How will this be since I am a virgin?*" (We will see that in the next verse) — literally she asks: "*How can this be since I have not known a man sexually?*"

Mary was not disbelieving—she was simply asking for enlightenment. The question was biological: "*God, how are you going to do this?*"

Such questioning is not really bad for anyone who believes. "*God, how is it possible?*" Do you have this blessed curiosity? ... Have you asked... "*God, how are You going to handle my 'Out of the Question' circumstances that I face in my life?*" ... But here's the key: ask it like Mary – believing that He will!

Luke 1:34

When Gabriel appeared to **Zacharias** (as we saw last week)... the old priest's question was rooted in unbelief. ... Mary had a question too... but hers was rooted in faith and total acceptance of the prophecy. ... Mary knew what would happen... but she did not know how it would happen. Her question was asked in wonder-filled faith. ... Zacharias asked with skepticism... wanting a sign before he would believe. (We are about to see more evidence of Mary's tremendous faith.)

Luke 1:35

Gabriel provided a straightforward answer. He declared that this would be a supernatural conception involving no man—it would be the work of the Most High God through the Holy Spirit. God originally created humanity out of nothing... and He would soon create out of nothing what Mary needed to conceive a child.

The conclusion is very logical: “*Therefore also the holy offspring will be called the Son of God*”. ... Not of Joseph - but of **God!**

The word “*overshadow*” gives us the proper understanding because it is used all over the Old Testament to describe *God's presence* (for example... in the Temple at it's dedication... and leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt)... It is also in the New Testament for His overshadowing presence at the Transfiguration where the cloud of glory overshadowed Jesus... Moses... and Elijah on the mountain.

In Genesis... God's hovering presence overshadowed the waters... just before He created the Heavens and the Earth. (Now) THIS is probably

MOST like the covering that Gabriel spoke of... to Mary. ... This same kind of overshadowing that created Heaven and Earth will cause Mary to conceive a child. ... It brought about conception within Mary's womb.

Does this mean that Gabriel has now made everything "perfectly clear" to Mary? Of course not. Neither God nor Gabriel demands of Mary that she must understand everything. What is required of her is only this: that she believes and willingly submits.

Luke 1:36-37

While Mary didn't ask for confirmation through a miraculous sign... the angel nonetheless provided something to build her confidence and sustain hope through the difficult days to come. ... He sealed the announcement with more good news: God had given Zacharias and Elizabeth a miraculous pregnancy as well.

Gabriel (in informing Mary about Elizabeth's pregnancy) is hinting that she pay her cousin a visit. ... By doing this... she will see for herself that it is our "Out of the Question" circumstances that give God the opportunity to show us that He can do the impossible any time... any day... in any way He chooses.

If God could make a dead womb spring to life... He could certainly make a virgin's womb spring to life. ...What was the difference to a God who had Himself conceived the whole wonderful process of conception and birth? ... The God who can create a hundred billion galaxies... the God who can pack all of the details needed to create a lion or a lamb in the "code of life"... can do whatever He wills.

Mary gave in at once! ... She presented her body to be a living sacrifice... holy and acceptable unto God for this great work of bringing this Son into this world.

Luke 1:38

Mary responded without hesitation. ... She submitted... presenting herself as **the Lord's servant**. She believed the angel's words and agreed to bear the child... even under humanly impossible circumstances... even with difficult social consequences. A young unmarried girl who became pregnant risked disaster. She risked losing Joseph... her family... and her reputation. ... She would have to face the wagging tongues of all her neighbors.

And her story about being made pregnant by the Holy Spirit risked her being considered **crazy** as well. Still Mary said, despite the risks, "**May everything you have said come true.**" She took the risk of faith. She knew that God was asking her to serve Him.

Mary responded with submission and obedience. She identified herself as δούλη (*doulē*, bondservant). In everyday speech... this word describes one of humble station who addresses a superior in recognition of their position. As God's handmaid... Mary accepts openly what God asks of her. ... She unreservedly embraces the purpose of God... without regard to its cost to her personally.

In view of the events recorded in Matt. 1:18-19 it was not easy. (It **did** cost her tremendously. Joseph was ready to put her away – quietly.) She had to know... but she made a complete surrender. She placed herself... body and soul... at the disposal of the God for His Own purposes.

Have you ever said (and can you now say) *“I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said”*? These are words that bring God’s blessing. This is the way Jesus taught us to pray: *“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*—*“Father, let your will be done right here, just as it is in heaven itself.”*

Is your life submitted to God like Mary’s was? You can say: *“May it be to me as you have said”* through angry... clenched lips... but that was not Mary’s tone. ... It is also possible to say it in a funeral-tone of resignation and defeat that goes best with the sickly-sweet smell of flowers. Or you can say it with joy and expectancy: *“May it be to me as you have said! Conquer me, Lord! I am yours!”* Do you need to say it now?

The angel was revealing to Mary the future. God has done the same for us too. We know in the future there will be an event that we call the Rapture of the church where Christians will disappear from this planet. This could happen today as indicated by warning signs found in Scripture.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

The Rapture will be followed by a horrible period of judgment and calamity known as the Tribulation period. A description of this period is found in the book of Revelation. Once the Tribulation begins... marked by the signing of a treaty with Israel and the Anti-Christ... it will last for seven years and be characterized by nuclear and biological world wars that will devastate the

population... famine... pestilence... utter terror... loss of freedom... government domination... freakish natural disasters... and intense suffering.

At the end of those seven years... Jesus Christ...with the saints of God... will return to this earth. He will rescue the Jewish people... destroy the Satanic world leader known as the Anti-Christ... and will defeat the armies of the world that have gathered at a place in Israel called Megiddo or Armageddon. The world thinks that Armageddon is the end of the world. The Bible shows us that it is the stage which will lead to the Millennial Reign of the Lord Jesus Christ which will last 1000 wonderful years.

God has revealed in His Word many other prophecies which will be fulfilled in the future. Ezekiel prophesied the rebirth of the nation of Israel which was fulfilled in 1948. He also prophesied the rise of Russia and Muslim nations that will attack Israel one day and be defeated by God. One of these is Persia or Iran which is a nation that is right now causing great concern as it seeks to attain nuclear weapons and wipe Israel off the map.

Right before our eyes... we are watching the stage being set for the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38 and 39. There is nothing that would prohibit the fulfillment of these chapters in our life time. It could happen before we end today's service.

Why has the Lord revealed some of the future? One answer is the fact that we no longer walk in darkness. We walk in the light. We may not know the exact time certain events will take place... but we know they will happen because we accept the Bible as God's Word and that it is true

Today... will you say with joy and expectancy: "*May it be to me as you have said! Lord! I am yours!*"

... Do you need to say it now?