

Matthew 1:18-25

Advent 4; December 21 & 22, 2014

He comes to those who believe.

I looked through some of my Spam email this week, and I saw that I could have made somewhere between 10 – 20 million dollars a day, if I wanted to enter into a business agreement with different people throughout the world. All I needed to give them was: 1. Full name: 2. Address: 3. Country: 4. Private cell phone: 5. Occupation: 6. Age. The people who had left this money died from either a brief illness or a plane crash and everything else in between. Maybe you have received the same offer as well. Are you skeptical?

But what about those moments when you hear something that is just too good to be true? Something that seems just unbelievable, but then, you find out that it is really true. For example, you are shopping for Christmas. You see an entry box in the mall to win a free car. You throw your name in never expecting to win. But two months from now you get a call stating that you have won. You had even forgotten that you had entered. You're skeptical at first, but then you find out that it is true. You really did win. Do you believe the impossible?

Every year around this time, you hear the story of Jesus' birth. For some, you can't even count how many times you have heard it. In some ways, it is like your favorite movie. You can almost say the lines along with the actors. There are no surprises. You know how the story is going to turn out – Jesus is born in a stable in Bethlehem. Yet, if you step back from the account that you know so well, there really are a lot of details that seem impossible. God tells us that the small baby lying in a manger is the Son of God. God took on human flesh. Really? Then there is the part of the virgin birth. How can that be? That really is pretty much impossible. It has never happened in the world other than this one time. Angels appearing to shepherds? A star appearing in the sky to lead wise men to see Jesus? Angels appearing to Mary and Joseph?

The entire Christmas story, and the meaning behind it, is just filled with amazing claims and promises. There are things there that are just too good to be true. Yet, we can take comfort in the fact that Jesus comes to those who believe.

Nazareth never amounted to much of a community. It is thought that at the time of Jesus it may have had only 150-300 people. Some have speculated that it was so small that there was barely enough work in the town for a carpenter like Joseph. He may have had to go for some miles just to find work. This young carpenter, however, was happy because he was soon going to get married to a young lady named Mary. He was already engaged, and in their culture that meant that he was already legally bound to his fiancée.

But something happened to Joseph. Mary had begun to act strange. She went to see her older relative, Elizabeth. When she returned back to Nazareth, Joseph noticed something – Mary was pregnant. Mary tells him the whole story, about how the angel visited her, how God the Holy Spirit conceived the child within her, how he is supposed to be called "Jesus" because he will save his people from their sins.

You can just imagine Joseph's reaction – that's impossible! Remember that Joseph was a good man. He loved Mary. But there was only one conclusion he could draw – Mary had committed adultery. Any other conclusion would have been impossible to believe. It certainly wasn't the story that Mary had told him. **"Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."** He just couldn't believe the impossible. Think about it for a minute – would you have believed Mary if you were in his shoes? I think we would most likely side with Joseph and wouldn't want to believe the impossible.

Joseph really wrestled with this. He thought the whole situation out carefully. But God was going to change Joseph's mind. **"But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'"**

This baby was going to save the world from its sin. That just seemed too good to be true. It sounded impossible. But it wasn't. It was exactly what God had planned since the Garden of Eden. Matthew reminds us that this whole idea of the virgin birth of Jesus was not a new idea. **"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel'-which means, 'God with us.'"** God had already promised this over 750 years ago.

Joseph needed God's help to believe this. He couldn't believe such an impossible promise on his own. God had changed his heart and mind. **"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."** Joseph now believed the impossible.

God has also changed your heart so that you believe the impossible also. Every Christmas, you are put into the position of believing the impossible. He gives you promises that seem to be impossible: *"I promise to forgive all your sins."* *"I promise that the moment you die, I will take you to heaven."* *"I promise you that this body and blood was shed for you, for the forgiveness of your sins."* How can this be? It seems impossible!

We can take comfort that God does the same with us as he did with Joseph. He creates and strengthens our faith so that we can believe in the impossible. So, when we struggle skepticism, doubts, fears, worries, God helps us believe the impossible.

As we prepare to celebrate the "impossible" birth of our Savior this week, may the Lord help us to believe that he comes to those who believe. Let's get ready. Jesus is coming. Amen.