

## Three Marys – Christmas Eve 2020

Intro – Graham

There's a verse in Luke's account of the first Christmas that says -  
19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19 NIV).

When the whirlwind of activities had subsided, when the awestruck shepherds left, when the reality of having just given birth to a baby far from home set in, Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

I've often wondered what she thought about. I've often wondered what she learned from that night, what she stored away and how that shaped her life down the road.

Tonight, we going to imagine what she thought about. We're going to visit, as it were, Mary in the past, when she first found out she was pregnant; Mary in present, that is, that first Christmas Eve; and Mary in the future, the first Christmas after Jesus' death and resurrection. We're going to fix ourselves on that first Christmas eve and look back look forward and look within with Mary to see what we can learn from what Mary treasured in her heart.

(right into Mary past)

Mary past - Jodi

It was unlike anything I'd ever seen before.

There I was, kneading my family's bread, when out of nowhere, a brilliant light filled the room. An angel (!) appeared before me.

Before I could react, he spoke with a voice that was at once both commanding (terrifying?)... and reassuring. "Greetings, O favoured one" he said. "The Lord is with you."

I didn't know what to make of it, so I took a step back, wiping the flour off my hands.

"Do not be afraid," he continued, "for you, Mary, have found favour with God."

I don't know what happened, because every bone in my body wanted to run, but when he said 'Do not be afraid,' a feeling of calm confidence washed over me. I wanted to hear what he said to say. And he continued:

"Listen well, Mary, for you will conceive a child and give birth to a son and you will give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and He

will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

The Son of God? The Son of David? An eternal throne? This was the Messiah (!) he was talking about... but there's a problem.

"How will this be?" I stammered "Joseph and I are engaged but we've never even held hands!"

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby you will carry will be holy, for He is the Son of God."

This was all too much. The Son of God. The long awaited Saviour. These were earth-shattering promises, but through me? How? *(pause)*

As if to address the impossibility of it all, he continued *(serious)*: "If you don't believe it, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People thought that she would never have children, but she is now in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

I bowed my head and said "I am the servant of the Lord. May it be to me as you have said." And with that, he was gone. And I was alone, with my bread and my thoughts.

They came like a river, those thoughts. All at once – “Who am I that I should be worthy of such a privilege? I mean, yes, Joseph and I were both connected way, way back to David’s family, but we hadn’t seen anything good from the house of David in years. And yet God *had* promised a king on David’s throne, to rule with justice, to lead His people, to give them life... And I was to be his mother?? I’m just a kid. I can’t do this. And what will the people say? How will Joseph respond? How on **earth** will I, backwater Mary, raise up a Messiah to save His people?”

And then my thoughts were interrupted by the memory of the angel. “Not just **earth**, Mary, but all the power of Heaven itself is behind this business and nothing is impossible with God.”

Could I trust that? Of course! This is the LORD we’re talking about here – the maker of all things, who spoke all things into being by the power of His Word. The God gave children to Sarah and Rebekah and Aunt Lizzie when all the world said it would never happen. (*Determined*) If He said that I was to carry His Son, then He would make it happen and I could trust Him with that. “Nothing is impossible with God” I told myself. “So take a step of faith.”

*What child is this?*

*What child is this?*

Mary present - Jennifer

So much has happened since that angel appeared to me. First, I went off to see my aunt Elizabeth; partly to see if the news was true, but also to get away from the rumours about my baby. Joseph was not pleased when he found out I was pregnant but

then the Lord appeared to him in a dream, to tell him that this baby was indeed the Son of God. Just like the angel said to me, the Lord told Joseph: "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). So Joseph was on board, but the rumours persisted. So off I went to Aunt Lizzie's and sure enough, she was pregnant; the barren woman, carrying a child. Truly, nothing is impossible with God.

And it gets better. In my eighth month, it became clear that we had to travel to our home towns for a census. So off we went to our ancestral home, the town of Bethlehem, the city of David. I wasn't so sure, because, who wants to travel that far when you're that pregnant, but then I remembered – 'nothing is impossible with God; just take a step of faith.'

So in faith, we left, and when we arrived, we found no place to stay, but an innkeeper allowed us to stay in his shelter. I sensed that the time was coming, so I prepared a place for Him there, and sure enough, it was there that Jesus was born – my firstborn son, the Son of God. I wrapped Him in strips of cloth and laid him in the manger. I gazed into His eyes all that night; people usually look to see who the baby resembles; all I could think was that I was staring at the face of God.

And then these shepherds showed up. They had been out in the fields nearby, keeping their flocks by night, when suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone all around. I don't know if it was the same angel who came to me, but it might have been, because he told them what he told

me: "**Do not be afraid.** (*This is an echo of past Mary's 'fear not'*). I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

And then a great company of angels appeared with the first one, praising God and saying "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to all who delight in God's will."

With that, the angels left and the shepherds left their flocks to come here, telling everyone what they had seen, every detail, down to the last hallelujah. They were so excited to see my Son – the Lord who had come to bring peace between God and man. Even as they left, they were praising God for the privilege of seeing Jesus.

And I, I just wanted to sleep. But not Jesus. He just wriggled and squirmed. So as I held the Son of God, I sat and thought on the incredible things that had happened. Miraculous visitors, supernatural choirs, a holy baby born to a virgin girl – truly, nothing is impossible with God. I don't know what lies ahead, what it means to raise a Son like this. I don't know what lies in store for Joseph and Jesus and me, but what I've seen gives me strength. Nothing is impossible with God – you just gotta take a step of faith.

*The first noel*

*The first noel*

Mary future - Joyce

Today would have been His 34<sup>th</sup> birthday. 34 years. But then (*pause*) how do you count it when you've been raised from the dead? Start over? Just keep counting?

He would have been 34. My first born, Jesus.

I know now what that man – Simon? Simeon? (*said as if trying to remember his name*) – meant when he said to me at Jesus' dedication – “This child is appointed for the rise and fall of many in Israel and a sword will pierce your soul” (Luke 2:35). I know all too well. They nailed Him to the Cross and pierced my soul as they did.

And yet, there was this calm confidence in His eyes as He hung there; the same calm confidence I swear I saw in His eyes the night He was born. This is why He was born. To give *His* life to give *us* life. To forgive us all for rejecting God. And then to rise again, triumphant over death, forever. His whole life was leading to this. Impossible things! – healing the lame, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead, dying and rising to restore us to God.



And now He's gone, back into Heaven, to be with His Father, preparing a place for us, a place that He Himself secured. Oh, how many times I prepared a place for Him, and now He's doing it for me. An eternal home – a place of rest – in the presence of God. And He's doing that for all who would believe.

I don't know how I'll do it – this year without Him. I don't know what happens from here in purposes of God. But I know I'm not alone. He is 'Immanuel' – God with us. And He's never failed me yet. And as tough as it may get, as uncertain as the times may be, nothing is impossible for God. I've seen that with my own eyes. You just gotta take a step of faith.

Concluding devotional - Graham

I think it's really interesting to imagine what Mary was thinking that Christmas Eve, to imagine what she made of all of the spectacular things that she had witnessed. I mean, visited by an angel, pregnant as a virgin; I can't help but think that she took this as proof that nothing is impossible for God.

And then again through Jesus' life, the healings and miracles, more proof that nothing is impossible for God.

And then at Easter, Jesus' death and resurrection, more proof that nothing is impossible for God. And I'm sure she had great faith because of it. But I'm sure that it took practice. I'm sure she was a woman of great faith, but she didn't just wake up one day and go 'oh, I'm a person of great faith.' I'm sure she had to take God's faithfulness in the past, apply it to her reality in the present and let that nurture hope for the future, time and again.

Where are you tonight?

Maybe you're like Mary in the past, vaguely aware of God's trustworthiness, but not yet ready to really trust Him in the details of life. Let the miraculous birth of Jesus on Christmas Eve show you that nothing is impossible for God and take a step of faith.

Maybe you're like Mary in the present, overwhelmed by God's faithfulness, awestruck by the way that He could use someone like you, overjoyed that you took that step of faith.

Maybe you're like Mary in the future, learning all over again what it means to trust in the God who does impossible things. Before Easter I'm sure Mary thought she had it all figured out, but then after, Mary probably had to learn all over again what it means to take a step of faith.

Where are you at, tonight? Worn out and tired, anxious and worried, weighed down by lockdown or conflict or sin? Who are you looking to for comfort and help?

Let me say to you: nothing is impossible for God.

Just look at Christmas Eve – a baby born to a virgin girl, just as was prophesied hundreds of years earlier, a heavenly choir proclaiming His birth, a brilliant star hovering over the place that would bring kings from afar. Nothing is impossible for God.

Just look at Jesus' life – sight to the blind, strength for the weak, thousands fed on bread and fish. Nothing is impossible with God.

And look at Easter – the baby born to save His people from their sins, to bring us back to the God we too often choose to ignore, laying down His life then coming back from the dead three days later to intercede for us even now. Nothing is impossible with God.

Have you taken a step of faith? He's not asking you to do miracles – He alone can do those – He's simply inviting you to trust in Him, to follow Him and to lay your burdens, fears and sins on His capable shoulders. To believe in Him, that He is preparing an eternal place for you and to join Him in His mission of blessing the world in His name.

Nothing is impossible for God. You just gotta take a step of faith.

## BENEDICTION

May the news of Jesus' birth:

Jolt you out of the status quo as it did the shepherds

Pique your interest as it did the magi

Comfort you as it did Simeon and Anna

And move you to deeper faithfulness as it did Mary and Joseph.

And may the peace of Christ rule in your heart, always.