

The sermon text is Luke 1:26-38.

In the Name of Jesus Christ, whose kingdom and reign are without end,
Dear Fellow Subjects of our Advent King,

A journalist has stated: “A fact is like a cloth sack—it only stands when it is filled with something.” In view of our text, that raises a question. Can our ordinary lives, harried and rushed with pre-Christmas preparations, be filled with extraordinary meaning? The experience of Mary answers that question with a resounding “Yes!” These words of Scripture show us what happens when the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

The Ordinary Becomes Extraordinary

And the ordinary always becomes extraordinary **When God Conceives**. Just consider what Gabriel revealed to Mary in the message God sent him to deliver. Here she was, a young maiden engaged to be married. She and her fiancé, a man named Joseph, were looking ahead to the day when they would be joined as husband and wife. We can easily imagine that they had shared their dreams of what their life together would be like—their hopes of having children, of raising them up to know the Lord and of a long life together filled with his many blessings. All in all, there wasn't anything extraordinary about this couple from the very ordinary village of Nazareth in Galilee, but God chose to change all that with his message. He sent the angel, Gabriel, to announce to Mary that the long-awaited Messiah would soon be born. For a believer in the promises of the Lord that message was expected. The extraordinary news was that God had chosen her to bear his Son. Gabriel said to her, **“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”** (30-33).

Now none of you mothers would consider the birth of any one of your children to be ordinary, but by comparison to what the angel told Mary, I think you would agree that this announcement was truly extraordinary. More significant than the change in Mary's life from ordinary to extraordinary, was what God had conceived for the salvation of the world. God conceived Jesus Christ in the mystery of the incarnation—God's Son being born of a woman. It was and is just what we confess in the Creed, Jesus “was conceived by the Holy Spirit.” Jesus was “born of the virgin Mary.” Jesus is “fully human.” Jesus is true God!

With the same awe that filled the hearts of Bethlehem's shepherds and the wise men who later from the east to worship the newborn king, we view this holy Child with more than a reverent whisper. What God has conceived is truly extraordinary!

God also conceived this message of extraordinary good news and undeserved love and salvation through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul tells us, **“As it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’”** (1 Corinthians 2:9). And we love him only because of this extraordinary fact: God loved us first. There is nothing ordinary about anything that God conceives. Who but God could conceive of such a plan as revealed in the gospel? Who but our extraordinary God would send his perfect Son to die in order to save thoroughly corrupt people? Who but God could conceive of such an extraordinary exchange—his Son's perfect life for our sins? Who but God has the capacity for such extraordinary love? The apostle Paul also wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:8). When God conceives the ordinary becomes extraordinary, indeed!

This extraordinary message—the gospel—is God's means of bringing that extraordinary love to the hearts ordinary sinners, like you and me. This is the extraordinary means by which God has led us to faith in his Son. Through the gospel he gives us the gifts of unconditional forgiveness, an extraordinary new life that glows with his goodness and the absolute certainty salvation. This extraordinary message runs contrary to logic, and it is unique to Christianity. God suffers death so that sinful humankind might have life—**“the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God”** (1 Peter 3:18) wrote the inspired apostle Peter. Just try to figure that out on your own. It's impossible. We hear the gospel and by its own power, we believe. God conceived in the Holy Scriptures a precious record of his love in Jesus Christ, from the extraordinary promise made to Adam and Eve to the fulfilling proof in the virgin birth, perfect life and all-sufficient sacrifice of his Son to pay for our sins. As Christ's apostle wrote near the end of his Gospel, **“These [words] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”** (John 20:31).

What God conceives is so extraordinary that many, leaning on their flawed reasoning powers, just dismiss the gospel. It's too incredible, too unbelievable! Paul placed those holding such views into two groups. For the self-righteous, who cannot conceive of a god showing such mercy, bestowing such forgiveness and providing eternal life—and all these as gifts with not a string attached. Preposterous! What God then conceives is a stumbling block for those who would place their reliance on their own wisdom and experience to understand all things. To such people the sacrifice of God's one and only Son in order to save a sinful world, is utter foolishness. "Who willingly gives something of value for something that has none?" God's extraordinary plan is not ordinary enough for the unbeliever, but the ordinary becomes extraordinary in us **When We Believe**.

We, too, confess that we are tempted, like the rest of the world, to wallow in the ordinary. Mary's innocent question sometimes becomes our jaundiced and skeptical approach to God's activity. Instead of seeking answers for what God has conceived, the sinful mind looks within itself and simply says, "Impossible!"

We are inclined to define God's gifts according to our standards by foolishly attempting to contribute something toward our salvation, rather than simply acknowledging God's extraordinary and unilateral act of saving the world by sending his Son, just as he promised in his Word. We do that when we doubt, or take for granted, the real presence of his body and blood in the sacrament we celebrate today, and therefore fail to recognize our need of it. We do that when we doubt the power of baptism. How could one so little really believe? We easily underestimate the power of the gospel to change ordinary human hearts and lives without some effort on the part of the sinner being rescued. But the Bible tells us not to be ashamed of the Gospel as though it were made up of just ordinary words. Instead, it declares the good news that God conceived—the extraordinary message that enables us to marvel again and again at how the ordinary becomes extraordinary in the birth of our faith. As Christ's apostle teaches us, "**[The gospel] is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes**" (Romans 1:16).

During Advent the lessons from God's Word lead us to prepare for the coming Savior. His first coming was a rescue mission. Christmas shows us the extraordinary lengths that he traveled in order to redeem his people. Our response should be, "Wow!" rather than a doubting, "Why?" An accepting attitude doesn't question the gift, but gratefully says, "Thank you, Lord!" An accepting attitude hears the gospel and replies in the same fashion as did Mary. "**I am the Lord's servant. ... May your word to me be fulfilled.**"

But Advent's message also prompts us to share this extraordinary good news that is intended for all people. The coming Savior gives us the words that fill our lives with the meaning of his rescue mission and those extraordinary words also provide the motivation for us to speak about him to others. With an attitude of acceptance, we see that each of us is the object of God's extraordinarily wondrous plan, and our hearts, filled with the spirit of Christmas are moved to lead others from the ordinary to the extraordinary. Extraordinary are the results we should expect when we tell people about Jesus, who came into this world to save them and us from our sins.

Human beings have never had any trouble believing extraordinary things. Just consider how many believe in aliens from other worlds. Just consider how many believe that the world that we know of came about as a result of spontaneous generation—the big bang and the subsequent evolution of the species. What Hollywood splashes across the movie screen people believe, regardless of how extraordinary their fictional renderings may be. But no one can believe in the extraordinary events of that first Christmas. Only the Holy Spirit working through the extraordinary story of Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection has the power to create faith in the ordinary hearts of ordinary sinners for the extraordinary future that belongs to all who believe. God grant that your Christmas celebration is marked by the extraordinary. It always happens when God conceives and we believe. If you doubt that, just remember what Gabriel said to Mary, "**Nothing is impossible with God.**" Friends, we are some of the extraordinary proof that the angel's words are true. Amen.