

12.20.2023 Advent Midweek, 3
Revelation 21:1-6; Luke 1:26-38

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

“Ponder – nothing will be impossible”

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This week’s Advent theme is summarized by the word “ponder.” “To ponder” means to weigh some matter before making a decision. Mary pondered the angel Gabriel’s message by asking questions and dialoguing with God.

Gabriel’s announcement foreshadowed great change in Mary’s life forever, yet Mary could not have known how her son Jesus would also change the world forever. Mary’s pondering was an act of faith, that led to the fulfillment of God’s plans for the world through her.

Mary pondered by asking questions. In reply, Gabriel spoke words of reassurance: “*For nothing will be impossible with God.*” Mary responded, saying, “*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*” Mary responded with faith in God’s promise.

Have you ever had to ponder some heavy or difficult decision in your life? Perhaps you were asked, chosen, selected, or even elected to do a new task, a new job, or a new responsibility. Perhaps this new role outstripped your previous experience. Perhaps this new role caused you to respond, “How can this possibly be? I have not done this before.”

Mary admitted her own youth and inexperience; she was not only perplexed, but anxious, even frightened. Yet the angel Gabriel said to her, “*Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.*” In choosing Mary, God was declaring that Mary could fulfill God’s plans for her and the entire world.

So it is with each of us. Someone sees God’s possibility in us, yet we can be perplexed, feeling doubt and fear in the face of the unknown. Someone sees God’s possibility in us, yet we may be unable to see this possibility in ourselves. Where we feel only impossibility, God sends messengers who encourage us with the possibility of God’s overshadowing power.

God’s choosing of Mary was a forward-looking event. In Mary, God saw not only the future of Israel, but of the entire world. Mary would reveal the light of the world, the Messiah.

So it is with each of us. To be chosen is a forward-looking event. In Holy Baptism, each of us are chosen by God because God sees the impossible possibility of the future in each of us. Through our lives in this world, each of us are capable of bearing and revealing the light of the Savior. The infinite love of God dwells in you so that you might bear infinite love in your life. As

Mary pondered the infinite promise of God, so also, you carry Christ's infinite promise of possibility into the future.

Tonight's appointed text from Revelation seems like an impossible vision. We might ask: "A new heaven and a new earth? Ha! When will that happen? Our world is so badly divided and broken that a new one seems like an impossibility!" Yet this is precisely what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer: "*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" Every time we pray these words, we are envisioning God's ongoing and new work here on earth. To say, "Amen," means my life will be the vehicle of God's will here on earth.

Revelation doesn't end there; it also envisions a world where "*the sea will be no more.*" Since antiquity, the sea has formed a boundary separating people, nations, and cultures. I often ponder what the world would be like without borders and boundaries, a world in which neighboring nations could see in one another what God sees in them. Rather than fear or worry about one another, I envision new world where all people would believe nothing is impossible for God.

Like all of you, I have had experiences that have helped me envision a new heaven and earth. I remember my first trip to Japan as a missionary. I knew absolutely no one and had not yet learned Japanese. All I had was a letter from the church explaining what bus I was to take from the airport into Tokyo. The letter said I would be met by someone. As I got on the express bus from the airport, I had a sinking feeling of fear, asking myself, "How can this be? I know nothing about this land and its people. I am poorly equipped for this task!"

Years later, as was teaching a public lecture, titled *The Bible and Culture* at the seminary, a member of the class said to me, "Look at this blackboard! It's filled with Japanese! How do you do it each week?" Scratching my head, I still ponder, because I know that strength, wisdom, and insight are given as we walk, and as we work. Pondering leads to action, to God's work in us.

This is what pondering does in our lives: it makes us struggle with and live out the promises of God. This year Advent is painful for many who because of war, oppression, and poverty, cry out in pain and mourning, and I long to have God wipe away their tears. Yet I know from experience God's home is among us. We are God's people of many nations. With God nothing is impossible.

As Christmas approaches, ponder and pray, and believe in the promise that nothing will be impossible for God. Like Mary, ponder, pray, and ask questions. Trust and believe that through you, God is changing the world forever. Ponder and believe. Your life and work contain the new heaven and earth. Amen.