

DAY 1: THE SILENCE IS BROKEN (LUKE 1:26-29)

J. K. Rowling conceived Harry Potter one day in 1990; however, the idea lay dormant for the next seven years as she experienced multiple setbacks in her life that left her living in poverty. Against these difficult circumstances, Rowling wrote *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in 1997. Since then, she has become a multi-millionaire from the proceeds of her creative works. While she struggled in poverty, do you think she imagined that she would end up one of the most successful authors in history?

Read Luke 1:26-29. God had not interacted with His people in over 400 years. The prophets were silent; the Jewish people were anxious for relief from Roman oppression and the rules of their religious leaders. They longed for the promised Messiah to rescue them. While they waited, they continued their daily routines just as they had for centuries, always hoping and praying. Against these unexpected circumstances, God sent His messenger to begin the work of answering His people's cries. The insignificant village of Nazareth was God's chosen setting; a teenage girl His chosen recipient. The expected Messiah would not come to a palace, but to a tiny town through an ordinary girl whom God "highly favored." Why such humble beginnings for God's greatest gift?

Do you think God is silent today? Does He hear the cries of His people? Is His Word still important to people today? For the next four weeks, open your heart to hear God speak to you. Perhaps He will break through the ordinary and do something extraordinary.

DAY 2: GOOD NEWS (LUKE 1:30-33)

Trying out for a sport's team, a theatrical production, or a special organization is fun but stressful. Waiting for word of your acceptance is a nerve-wracking time. You probably imagine all of the worst possible outcomes during those anxious moments. What if you could just rest in the knowledge that God was working for your good in whatever the outcome?

Read Luke 1:30-33. Seeing Mary is "greatly troubled," the angel reassured her. Instead of bad news, the angel brought Mary truly good news. God favored in her and chose her for a very special task: to become the mother of His Son. Prophets and religious leaders had all been expecting this message; but God gave the news to a poor, common teenage girl instead of them. Never could Mary have dreamed that God would choose her for the greatest human role in history. The angel's words are clear: this child would be the long-anticipated Messiah. Even His name revealed His role: Jesus, the Lord saves.

What is your understanding of God? Many people envision Him like Santa: give Him a list, and He will supply all of their wants. When He doesn't respond immediately or as requested, do you believe that God even hears you? Unlike Santa, God is more interested in eternal riches than temporary trinkets. The Bible is full of stories of God working toward our ultimate good. Can you accept His answer even if it is not what you expect?

DAY 3: AN UN(EXPECTED) TASK (LUKE 1:34-35)

We've all heard stories of seemingly ordinary people who performed amazing feats of strength in emergency situations: a mom pulled a car off of a pinned child, a small child pulled a heavy piece of furniture off of another. These are called acts of hysterical strength, and scientists believe they're caused by a shot of adrenaline when a person's "fight or flight" instinct kicks in. People found within them the strength to do something incredible in a moment when their own strength was not enough.

Read Luke 1:34-35. Every Jewish woman expected to become a mother because they believed children were a blessing from God. What was unexpected for Mary? She was not married, and she was a virgin. How could she possibly become the mother of a son? It IS impossible according to human standards. Mary did not question the truth of the angel's message; she simply wondered how the message would be fulfilled. The angel reassured her that God would do a miraculous work within her through the power of the Holy Spirit if she would be a willing participant in God's marvelous action.

What would have happened if Mary had said she was too young or too poor? When have you shied away from opportunities to serve God because you thought there was not way God could use you? For the next four weeks, try saying "Yes" and allowing God to equip you for the task.

DAY 4: THE IMPOSSIBLE MADE POSSIBLE (LUKE 1:36-37)

Have you ever felt God calling you to do something? You probably wondered if you really heard Him or if you just imagined it. What would convince you to act upon that calling? You would probably feel more confident if you received some sort of confirmation from another person. Thankfully, God often provides that reassurance for us.

Read Luke 1:36-37. Mary didn't expect it, but God provided comfort and reassurance. Elizabeth's pregnancy confirmed that God was working in these events. He stepped into His story to fulfill His promises revealed by the prophets. Gabriel reassured Mary, and us, nothing is impossible with God. We can believe Him. His Word from beginning to end proves that He is faithful to do what He has promised. God can bring life to a barren womb and to one not yet open. He can even bring life to a heart that is broken.

Do you wonder if the problems in your life are too big for God to heal? Do you feel that you are too far away from God for Him to answer your prayers? Like Mary, you can trust His Word. He is the same today as He was yesterday and as He will be tomorrow. NOTHING is impossible with God.

DAY 5: SURRENDER TO GOD'S PLAN (LUKE 1:38)

Have you ever been asked to do something you felt completely ill-prepared to do? If so, you probably found yourself thinking of all of the reasons you could not do the task. You may have even walked away thinking the task was not worth the cost. But what if . . . ?

Read Luke 1:38. One verse summarized Mary's complete surrender to God's will. Instead of arguing or complaining, she humbly accepted her role. In biblical times, an unmarried pregnant girl caused a scandal, but a pregnant girl whose baby was not her fiancé's could be put to death! According to the Law, Joseph had every right to stone Mary for her betrayal. In Matthew 11:18-25, God invited Joseph to become a part of His great plan as well (see Is. 7:14). Disregarding the cost of public humiliation, Joseph willingly joined in without question. Who could have imagined that the God of the universe would choose to bring the salvation of the world, the Messiah, Immanuel, through such ordinary circumstances? The Jews received their long-awaited King via unexpected means, and Jesus's humble beginnings set the tone for His kingship.

In this holy season, how can you open your heart and mind to God's message? Will you let go of your expectations of how, when, and where God usually works, and look for Him to speak to you in new and unexpected ways?