

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

In 1976, as the country celebrated its bicentennial, two men battled for the highest office in the country: Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. Most pundits believed Ford had the decided advantage; after all, no incumbent since World War II had been defeated in a re-election bid. And yet . . . Carter won. A peanut farmer from a small Southern town became the President of the United States? Incredible!

Read Luke 1:26-29. God had not interacted with His people in over 400 years. The prophets were silent while Jewish religious leaders filled the void with rules. The Jews were anxious for relief from Roman oppression. They longed for the promised Messiah to rescue them. While they waited, they continued their daily routines—marrying, having children, working, and dying—just as they had for centuries, always hoping and praying. Against this backdrop, God sent His messenger, in the most unexpected circumstances, to begin the work of answering His people's cries. The insignificant village of Nazareth was God's chosen setting. The recipient of the message was even more unlikely: a teenage girl. The long-awaited Messiah was not coming to a palace, but to an obscure town through an ordinary girl whom God "highly favored." Why such humble beginnings for God's greatest gift?

In light of all of the pain and suffering you see in the world, do you wonder if God is listening? Is His Word still relevant 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. Are you willing?

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

A few years back, my doctor discovered an abnormality during a routine exam. While awaiting the results of tests, I went through every possible negative outcome for my young family. Every time the phone rang, I feared it was life-changing news. When the call did come, the results were far less scary than my expectation. Through this anxious time, I learned to wait and trust in God, who is in control.

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 the Son of the Most High. Prophets, rabbis, Sadducees, Pharisees 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.

Many people envision God like Santa: give him a list, and he will supply all of their wants. How do you perceive God? When He doesn't respond immediately or as requested, do you believe that God is at work? Unlike Santa, God is more interested in eternal riches than temporary trinkets. The Bible is replete with 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 a pinned child, a pilot pulled a helicopter off a trapped friend, and more. 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; 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's impossible according to human standards. Mary did not question the truth of the angel's message; she wondered how the message would be fulfilled. God chose Mary precisely because of who she was. 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 feel inadequate, ill-prepared, or unworthy? For the next four weeks, try saying "Yes" and allowing God to equip you for great works.

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

One day, I felt a strong calling to do something very specific for the Lord. I wrestled with submission, wondering if I had confused the Holy Spirit's nudging with my own desires. I went to lunch with a friend. In the course of our conversation, without any foreknowledge of my struggle, she spoke just the words I needed to hear to confirm God's call. Thankful, I moved forward in joyful obedience.

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 incompetent or ill-prepared to do? If so, you probably rationalized all of the reasons you could not do the task, or you complained about all of the inconveniences the task would create. You may have even walked away thinking the task was not worth the cost.

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 betrothed'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? Are you willing to 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?