

“How Can This Be?”

Luke 1:26-38

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Churches tend to fill up with people at this time of year. For some, the draw is the music; for some it is the story; for some it is the family tradition. But I have always believed that the church fills up at Christmas because we all long for an experience of mystery, sacred mystery. I don't mean the Agatha Christy type mystery where the brilliant detective Hercule Poirot sits back and draws upon his superior intelligence to solve a knotty unsolved murder. Neither do I mean the kind of mystery where Ferdinand Megellan sails around the world to prove the earth is not flat. I mean the kind of mystery where an ordinary human being, whose life is headed nowhere, whose life is in the pit, can be loved into a whole new beginning. We want to stand in that place, in that mystery. It's the mysterious quality of love's redeeming energy that draws us to church at Christmas time.

I believe we know the limitations of our rational minds and long to be immersed in a love story that carries us beyond intelligence, into sacred mystery. We want to be right there with Mary when she asks her utterly authentic question, “How can this be?” How can God love me this much?

Is this not the question that draws us away from the TV set, away from the computer screen, even away from the NFL playoffs, and into the mystery of Christmas? Mary asks, “How can this be?” I am a nobody, how can it be that God is treating me as a somebody? I am a below average student, how can it be that God regards me as summa cum laude? I have nothing to offer the world, how can it be that God values me just as I am?

The angel listens patiently to Mary as she rambles along. Then, when Mary has asked her question enough times, the angel responds with crystal clarity, “Mary, all things will be possible with God.”

So, right here in the Christmas story, we find the very essence of the good news Jesus Christ came to reveal: with God, all things will be possible. If you have tried and tried and tried to make one friend but keep coming up empty, God has good news for you; all things are in the realm of possibility. If you have studied and studied and studied and still can't decipher the poetry of Emily Dickinson, God has good news for you; Emily Dickinson isn't on the final exam. If you have looked for love in all the wrong places, God has good news for you; love will find you in the place where you are right now.

How can this be? Mary's question becomes my question. Mary's question becomes your question. How is it possible that God would notice me, that God would value me, that God would pick me up from the heap and set me on my feet and grant me yet one more new beginning? I tell you, it's a mystery! To some it sounds trite, to some it sounds corny, to some it sounds irrelevant. But to one who believes it is the one sacred mystery that draws us to church year after year on the Sunday before Christmas.

That is precisely what I was hoping to share with you all this morning, with the children and youth, with our newer members and with our seasoned members, with our visitors and our guests. May the God of peace dwell richly in all our hearts. In the greatest of hope, Amen!

