

Luke 1:26-38  
Nothing Is Impossible  
WRCoB 12.20.20

So here's a short story by Bret Harte  
Entitled, *The Luck of Roaring Camp*.

It takes place in an actual mining town in California  
During the gold rush of 1849.

Roaring Camp was the roughest, toughest  
Meanest mining town in the entire west.

It was an ugly and sinful place.

The miners destroyed everything around them  
In their greedy search for gold.

The camp was full of murderers and thieves  
And a whole lot of drinking, fighting and cussin' went on.

It was a terrible place to live.

Men inhabited the entire town  
That is, except for one woman

Her name was Cherokee Sal.

She died giving birth to a baby boy.

The miners named the baby Thomas Luck  
And they placed the little tike in an old wooden box  
With just some old rags under and over him.

But when they looked in at the baby  
It just didn't look right.

So they sent one of the men  
    Eighty miles across the mountains  
        To buy a proper cradle.

They put the rags back in and the baby on top of them.

But it still wasn't right.

So they sent another miner back those eighty miles  
    To buy a proper blanket.

They wrapped the baby in the new blanket  
    And laid him in the cradle.

And it looked real nice  
    Until someone noticed how dirty the floor looked.

So these hardened, coarse, rough, men  
    Got down on their knees  
        And scrubbed the floor.

Now it looked like a proper place for a baby  
    Until they noticed the walls . . .

So they washed down the walls  
    And hung curtains on the windows.

Now it was beginning to look better.

The men gave up their brawling  
    And their drinking and cussin'.

They stopped shooting their guns for fear  
Of waking little Thomas Luck.

Things were changing in Roaring Camp.

The miners took little Thomas  
To the entrance of the mine on nice days  
And took turns caring for him.

They noticed how ugly and unkempt  
The outside surroundings were.

No place for a baby!

So they picked up their trash and discarded equipment.

They planted flowers and grass and trees  
And even a vegetable garden.

It got real pretty there at Roaring Camp.

They would leave the mine  
And reach down and pinch the baby's cheek.

By doing so, they realized how dirty they were  
In comparison to little Tommy.

Soon, the small store in Roaring Camp  
Was all sold out of soap and shaving cream.

This little baby was changing the way things were.

Something the sheriff has been trying to do for years.

Little Thomas Luck had entered their lives  
And then entered their hearts  
And everything became different.

Now they lived to please him.

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This is an analogy, of course, to Jesus Christ  
And how his presence changes our lives too.

I quote from Janet Oke,

*Jesus . . . a simple name with so much power and meaning  
but on that night so long ago the tiny baby, wrapped by Mary  
in swaddling clothes, waving little arms, hungrily sucking a  
fist was like any other newborn baby.*

*He was helpless and dependent and Mary was his hope of  
survival, his nourishment, his very lifeline. God entrusted His  
most precious gift to a very human, very young, earthly  
mother.*

*Why? Because God so loved that he gave. He relinquished  
his hold on his son and placed him in fragile human arms.*

~~

The birth of Jesus Christ, Son of Man, Son of God  
Is, indeed, a paradox, pure and simple!

It's a paradox because we know it's impossible  
For a person to become God  
Or God to become a person!

But this is precisely Christianity's claim!

That God entered earthly existence  
In the form of a baby.

I mean, could anything be more outrageous?

Well yes, that he died on the cross as a propitiation  
For our sins.

Outrageous, yes, and yet . . .  
What if . . . what if it were true?

~~

The fourth century church father, St Augustine  
Wrote of this paradox:

*He so loved us that, for our sake He was made man in time  
although through him all time was made.*

*He was made man, who made man.*

*He was created of a mother whom he created.*

*He was carried by hands that he formed.*

*He cried in the manger in wordless infancy, He the Word  
without whom all human eloquence is mute.*

For most religions this is so blasphemous  
So irreverent, so sacrilegious  
That it falls on the ridiculous.

And yet . . . outrageous as it is, it is the core of our faith.

~~

We read the biblical narrative every year

Every year, we sing all the familiar carols.

And ever year, we celebrate this biggest holiday of the year

And yet, we, believers

Have become immune to the “shock and awe”

Of God coming to us in human form as a baby!

God becoming human?

Oh that . . . ho-hum, yes, that’s what we believe!

~~

The Messiah’s entrance into our world is counterintuitive

It goes against reason.

For one thing, if God should come into our world

We’d expect him to come

With a bit more pomp and circumstance.

One interesting view of why God chose

To enter our world the way he did

Comes from Theodotus of Ancyra, of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

*The Lord of all comes as a slave amidst poverty.*

*The hunter has no wish to startle his prey.*

*Choosing for his birthplace an unknown village*

*In a remote province, He is born of a poor maiden*

*And accepts all that poverty implies*

*For he hopes by stealth to ensnare and save us.*

*If he had been born to high rank and amidst luxury  
Unbelievers would have said  
The world had been transformed by wealth.*

*If he had chosen as his birthplace the great city of Rome  
They would have thought the transformation  
Had been brought about by civil power.*

*Suppose he had been the son of an emperor?*

*They would have said: "How useful it is to be powerful!"*

*Imagine him the son of a senator.*

*It would have been:*

*"Look what can be accomplished by legislation!"*

*But in fact, what did he do?*

*He chose surroundings that were poor and simple  
So ordinary as to be almost unnoticed*

*So that people would know it was the Godhead alone  
That had changed the world.*

*This was his reason for choosing his mother  
From among the poor of a very poor country  
And for becoming poor himself.*

Frederick Buechner perceives it this way.

*“It is impossible to conceive how different things would have turned out if that birth had not happened, whenever, wherever, however it did . . .*

*For millions of people who have lived since  
The birth of Jesus made possible  
Not just a new way of understanding life  
But a new way of living it.*

*It is a truth that, for twenty centuries, there have been untold numbers of men and women who in untold numbers of ways Have been so grasped by the child who was born, so caught up in the message he taught and the life he lived*

*That they have found themselves  
Profoundly changed by their relationship with him.”*

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Our Scripture Lesson today is the conversation,  
Between the angel Gabriel and the young girl Mary.

She could have been anywhere from 12 or 16-years-old.

She was engaged to a man named Joseph,  
Whose genealogy is traced to King David.

Joseph was a carpenter who lived in Nazareth.

Gabriel came to Mary and said,  
“Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you.”

The encounter terrified Mary.

Gabriel calmed her down and said, “Do not be afraid, Mary,  
For you have found favor with God.”

“You will conceive in your womb and bear a son  
And you shall call his name Jesus.”

But Mary interrupted the angel  
“But that’s impossible!”

And what was Gabriel’s response?

“Nothing is impossible with God!”

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And I suppose that’s the rub.

Her conception and the birth of a God/child  
Is so unrealistic, so unbelievable.

And yet, there is something about it all that grabs you.

I find myself sometimes, listening to the story of Christmas  
Or singing Christmas carols that are centuries old  
Or hearing a child tell the story of Christmas

I find myself strangely moved.

Sometimes to the point of holding back tears.

Two weeks ago,  
Zherina was in a Christmas play at her school  
And they sang "O Holy Night!"

I was a wreck.

Yes I was proud of Zherina and her classmates  
But it was more than that.

The story, in all its majesty and mystery, gripped me.

You just can't make this stuff up!

This story of Jesus changes everything  
From Roaring Camp, California  
To Richmond, Virginia  
To the unfolding drama of our future

The story of Jesus changes me.  
It changes everything.

And my prayer is that it changes you, too.

This little babe born in a manger . . .  
It just changes everything..