



Dear Friends,

I imagine Christmas will feel a little different for most people this year. Perhaps that is an understatement. Some will note the absence of family and friends and find it difficult. Others will find getting through the holiday nearly impossible. It is our first, and hopefully last, “Covid-19 Christmas.” I think of a dear friend and colleague whose entire family—mom, dad, wife, and kids—are suffering from various maladies, including Covid. My own mother-in-law had three trips to the ER this past week. Many are facing job stress, financial burdens, depression, loneliness, and other difficulties.

Face it, life is not easy. In fact, some might even feel at times that it is impossible.

If you feel that at times life is difficult or impossible, you’re in good company. Mary, mother of Jesus, could easily have felt the same way. She was young, poor, uneducated, and female, which meant that she was considered less of a citizen in the ancient world. Not only that, she and her husband would have been identified with the town they lived in, Nazareth, known for corruption and low morals.

If that were not impossible enough, she was a virgin, who was visited by the angel Gabriel and told that she would bear the long-awaited messiah, Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:31-35). Life would not get any easier for Mary as she would give birth to the Christ child in a stable and have to place Him in a feeding trough. She was later warned that life would continue to be hard, that a sword would pierce her soul (Luke 2:35).

We can learn a lot from Mary, including her initial encounter with the angel. You might not personally be aware of such an obvious encounter with an angel, but you are inhabited by the Holy Spirit of God if you are a Christian. Romans 8:9 says that you *“are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.”*

Mary was given the “impossible” message of a virgin birth to the Savior of the world. You have been given the “impossible” (at least by the world’s assessment) message that you have conquered sin and death (John 3:16-18).

Furthermore, Mary was told that she had the favor of God (Luke 1:30). You, too, have the favor of God. Ephesians 1:3 says, *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”* Note, it does not say, “almost” every, or “virtually” every, or 99.999% every, but EVERY every!

Just as Mary was told *“God is with you”* (Luke 2: 28), so we, too, are reminded by the Word of God, *“I will never leave you, nor forsake you”* (Hebrews 13:5).

So, what is our response to the reality that the King of kings, the Creator of the universe, journeys with us?

Perhaps it is fear, initially. Again, we are in good company. Mary was told to “fear not” (Luke 1:29) as were the shepherds in the fields. It is a normal reaction to the supernatural. In fact, Proverbs 9:10 says that the “fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” However, let’s not stay in fear. In the Bible we are admonished not to fear dozens of times.

