What is it that we know about Mary from Luke’s gospel? Here is a brief list: her father’s name was Eli, she had a sister named Salome, she had a relative named Elizabeth, she was young, she was poor, she was a devout believer in God, and she was very much in love.¹

That last one is a key to the story. Mary was a young teenager in love, maybe as young as 12 or 13.

When the story opens, Mary is pledged to Joseph. That meant that she had formally agreed to marry him but the wedding had not yet taken place. Between the pledge and the wedding feast was a period usually lasting six months to a year.²

During that period, the couple was considered to be married and were called husband and wife, but they did not live together and did not consummate their marriage. Following the custom of that day, Mary would live with her parents and Joseph with his. After the public wedding feast, Mary and Joseph would then live together as husband and wife.

So when Luke introduces her, Mary is a young teenager, living with her parents in the village of Nazareth, waiting with happy anticipation for the day of her wedding.
Like any teenager, she can hardly think of anything else. If we suppose that the wedding feast is still four or five months away, we can imagine that all her thoughts center on the same things brides think about today – the guest list, the decorations, the food, the music, what she will wear and so forth.

Mary no doubt had never been happier. This was the most exciting time of her life.

It is right at this point that God breaks in. God is about to ask an unknown teenage girl to take part in something that is so shocking as to be totally unbelievable. What God asks Mary to do will change her life forever.

If Mary agrees, then gone are the happy dreams of a beautiful wedding; gone are the days of sweet anticipation; gone are the carefully-thought out plans for the wedding feast; gone are her hopes for “the most beautiful wedding to the most wonderful man who ever lived”; and gone are all her girlish dreams of a quiet life for her and her husband.

She will be married, but not before rumors about her promiscuity would spread through the countryside. There will be a wedding feast, but not the way she planned. She will have a home, and it will be filled with children, but over her family will rest an uneasy cloud of dark suspicion.

It will all happen, but not the way she expected. Mary, did you know this?

Did Gabriel appear to Mary in the form of a man? Very possibly. In the daytime or at night? We don’t know. I think in the daytime, say as she went to the well for water. And what he said to Mary, in the language of today, “blew her mind”, suggesting to her the most preposterous thing imaginable. And the Bible tells us Mary’s only concern was a technical one: How can this happen?

The faith of this young girl is incredible. Mary said Yes. Yes to God, Yes to the impossible, Yes to the plan of God.
When the angel said, “Nothing is impossible with God”, Mary took a deep breath and said, “May your word to me be fulfilled.” And with those words Christmas came to the world.

Don’t underestimate what it cost Mary to say Yes to God. From that moment on, she faced the skepticism of her friends and the gossip of the neighborhood. Mary knew – or would soon realize – that saying Yes to God meant misunderstanding and even public shame. Gone was her pure reputation and gone were her dreams of a quiet, happy life in Nazareth. In the future, her life would at times be happy but it would never again be quiet.

Mary, did you know?

Since we know the end of the story we may tend to overlook the possibility of divorce. But Mary had no way of knowing how Joseph would respond to her pregnancy. Would he blow his top and walk out on her? Would he humiliate her publicly? Would he divorce her?

As the story turned out, Mary had every reason to worry about Joseph. He didn’t blow his top or try to humiliate her, but he did intend to divorce her. Only an angel’s intervention kept that from happening.

By saying Yes to God she risked losing the man she loved. Her whole future was on the line.

And all these things were just the beginning. Before it was over, she would experience heartache, opposition, slander, confusion, anguish, despair and loneliness. In the end she would face the greatest pain a mother can endure when she would watch her son die on a cross.

Mary, in her simple and unshakable faith, believed what Gabriel said, that nothing is impossible with God. This is good news for us, isn’t it? Some of us no doubt are carrying our own heavy burdens. Some of us may be looking at a lonely Christmas this year. Some of us are maybe facing a
financial crisis that looks hopeless. Some of us may be in a marriage that is impossible. Some of us might be estranged from members of our own family. Some of us may have children who are far away from God. And some of us may feel lonely and far away from God ourselves.

But thanks to God, our heavenly Father is an expert in hopelessness! Nothing is impossible with God!

Many of us are reading Jim Cymbala’s book, Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire. He describes a Sunday night early in his ministry. “I was so depressed by what I saw,” he writes, “and even more by what I felt in my spirit.” “That evening,” he goes on, “when I was at my lowest, confounded by obstacles, bewildered by the darkness that surrounded us, . . . I discovered an astonishing truth.”

Listen carefully to this truth that Jim Cymbala discovered: “God is attracted to weakness. He can’t resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need him. Our weakness, in fact, makes room for his [God’s] power.”

I invite you this morning to lay it all out before God. You have nothing to tell God that he has not heard before. You need not be ashamed or fearful. Just tell God what is on your heart. Confess that you are totally powerless without God’s Spirit in you. Step out on faith, just as Mary did. Nothing is impossible with God!

Mary did you know that your baby boy
Will one day walk on water?
Mary did you know that your baby boy
Will save our sons and daughters?

Did you know that your baby boy
Has come to make you new?
This child that you’ve delivered
Will soon deliver you.
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will calm a storm with his hand?

Did you know that your baby boy
Has walked where angels trod?
And when you kiss your little baby
You’ve kissed the face of God

Oh, Mary did you know

The blind will see, the deaf will hear,
The dead will live again. The lame will leap,
The dumb will speak the praises of the lamb

Mary did you know that your baby boy
Is Lord of all creation?
Mary did you know that your baby boy
Will one day rule the nations?

Did you know that your Baby Boy
Is Heaven's perfect Lamb?
This sleeping child you’re holding
Is the great I am.⁵

Let us pray:
Heavenly Father, we come to this table only because of the blood of Jesus our Saviour. We are not worthy, but at your divine invitation we humbly come to once again take bread and cup, body and blood, to remember the great sacrifice of Christ our Lord. Consecrate these elements to our use and us to your service. We pray this in the name of Christ Jesus our Saviour. Amen.
Holy God, we thank you that Jesus came to earth to live among us and to show us the way to your own heart. In gratitude we partake of this bread, the body of Christ, given for us. Amen.

Almighty Father, you told us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). Thank you for this cup as we partake, the blood of Christ, shed for us. Amen.

Let us pray:
We have come to the Lord’s table, and we have eaten the bread of heaven. God will transform us so that we can see with Jesus’ eyes, hear with Jesus’ ears, speak with Jesus’ mouth; so that we can be the body of Christ in the world, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom: Come Lord Jesus! Amen.
1. This list was compiled by the Rev. Dr. Ray Pritchard, “Mary: Believing the Impossible”, http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/mary-believing-the-impossible/.


3. Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: What Happens When God’s Spirit Invades the Heart of His People, by Jim Cymbala, with Dean Merrill (Zondervan, 1997).

4. Pages 18 and 19.
