

**The Improbable and the Miraculous**    Final Advent Days    December 17-December 23  
Tuesday, December 20, 2016    8:15 AM    Is 7:10-14;    **Lk 1:26-38**    (Responding to  
divine providence is very good and helpful, not only for ourselves but for the whole world in  
some way, even though we may not understand.)

**“But Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?’”**

It’s very interesting to compare today’s reading with yesterday’s reading, both from the Gospel of Luke, both about the angel Gabriel announcing something. In the case of yesterday’s reading it was an announcement to Zechariah that he and his wife in their old age would become parents, and today it’s the announcement to the Blessed Virgin that she would be the mother of God the Most High. Now in both cases the recipient, first Zechariah and then Mary, responded with disbelief: “How can this be?” But **the way Gabriel responded to the disbelief was very different.** In the case of Zechariah Gabriel rebuked him. He said, well, I was sent by God to give you this message, but since you didn’t believe it you will be silent and mute until it’s all accomplished. To Mary, on the other hand, Gabriel is very kind, explains to her that the power of the Holy Spirit would overshadow her. Now this difference reflects something that we need to be aware of, and that is that **what the angel told Zechariah was improbable but possible, but what the angel told Mary was impossible in the order of nature.** Now we might think in a sort of careless way that anything that’s unusual is a miracle, but that’s not true. The birth of John the Baptist, indeed **the conception of John the Baptist, was unusual, but it was not necessarily miraculous, whereas the birth of Jesus was truly the work of God, a miracle in the fullest sense of the word.**

Now in our lives we see both. **There are times when the improbable happens, which is really the work of divine providence, and it is calling us to cooperate** as Zechariah was called on to cooperate. In this case of course our free will is not constrained; we are free to come or go,

to receive or not receive. We cannot see the consequences of this, but we should realize that responding to God and **responding to divine providence is very good and helpful, not only for ourselves but for the whole world in some way, even though we may not understand.**

Now in the case of the truly miraculous, probably most of us never actually experienced one. But the whole point of the New Testament is that it is **Christ himself who is the miracle**, his conception, his life, his work, his ministry, all of this is **the miraculous sign of God at work**. And **it continues within his Church** in a sort of way, insofar as the good news continues to be preached, insofar as healing continues to take place, insofar as even that we promote the professions of healing, not technically miraculous, but using **the gifts of God and nature according to God's will and providence**. And there are many other ways.

So all these stories are about **how people are called and they respond**. It is meant to be a model for all of us that **we are all called in some way**, either in the order of nature however probable or improbable it may seem, or we may even be called beyond that to some extraordinary service of God. Indeed there are still people being called to martyrdom in our world of the twenty-first century, and we could call that extraordinary. But in every way we are all called **to somehow witness to the glory of God and to cooperate with the providence of God** in bringing about something better in this very war-torn and weary world.