

# "Wow"

Text: Luke 1:26-38

A great and mighty wonder, a full and holy cure  
The Virgin bears the Infant with virgin honor pure.

The Word becomes incarnate and yet remains on high  
And cherubim sing anthems to shepherds from the sky.

Repeat the hymn again: "To God on high be glory and peace on earth to men!"

Amen. (TLH 76)

Dear Fellow Christians:

Like it or not, you have to keep up with the ever-evolving English language or it will get away from you. Let it get away from you, and you can expect misunderstandings and, if you are affected by such things, embarrassment. The words stupid, sick, crazy, and dirty are all now used, so I am told, as both positive and negative adjectives and adverbs. You just have to figure it out by context. If a musician, for example, is described as "sick," it could mean he is ill, a pervert, or exceptionally good at what he does.

A word of advice to parents and other "old people" here. Kids alter their use of words on purpose, and for a reason. Trying to keep up after you are no longer a kid is always a losing proposition. If you do keep up and use words according to their cool new meaning, your kids will see you as trying too hard. The more likely scenario is that your use of words will be "so last week."

The one word expression that forms our sermon theme for this morning is another that requires context to understand. It is used, on the one hand, to express wonder or appreciation, as in: "*Wow! You found a can full of gold coins hidden in the wall of your house?*" or "*Wow! That was amazing!*" It is also used to express incredulity at how bad something is, as when people see a bratty kid melt down in the grocery store – "*Wow.*"

The truth that we will explore this morning on the basis of God's Word is the fact that the opposing uses of "wow" can actually be used to identify a problem that Christians need to address. The text on which we will base this morning's study is found in the Gospel of Luke, the first chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 1:26-38** *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a*

*man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup> And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy--the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> ¶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup> And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.*

These are God's Words. May God the Holy Spirit continue to fill you with wonder at the fact that he has given his own perfect, holy Son, but also his perfect holy words to guide and instruct us. Confident that he will work powerfully in each of us through these words again this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

As Christians, you and I never want to saddle God with our own limitations; that is, we never want to imagine that God can only do what man can do, or that he is only capable of what man believes to be possible. Several forces work against us here on a daily basis. The first and most powerful is our own personal experience. The second is our lack of understanding when it comes to God's truth and God's communication of that truth to us. The third is our natural skepticism. We'll examine all three in greater detail in an effort to better recognize the problem.

First let's look at how we tend to limit our God because of our own personal experience. Do you believe that man can fly? Not in an airplane or hang-glider or any such thing, just with the body with which we are born. No, of course not. Why? We might imagine that our rejection of the idea is based on logic, reason, or science, but that's really only secondary to the fact that we've never *seen* anyone fly. *In*

*our experience*, human beings can't fly because no human being has ever flown, and mankind has believed that to be true long before we understood the science behind wings and lift and feathers. And yet Elisha watched Elijah being taken bodily up to heaven, and the disciples watched Jesus bodily ascend from the face of the earth. The point is that our experience trumps our knowledge every time. Even if Elisha and those disciples outside of Bethany had possessed advanced degrees in astrophysics that assured them that human flight was impossible, they would nonetheless have believed what their own eyes told them. The point here is that we need to recognize just how powerful our personal experience can be, and to never allow it to limit God's power in our minds.

The second factor that causes us to limit the power of our God is our lack of understanding, both of our God and of the truths that he communicated to us in his Word. An example is how Nicodemus thought Jesus daft when Jesus spoke to him of "being born again" simply because he misunderstood what he was saying. What Nicodemus envisioned by those words was obviously much different than what Jesus was actually saying.

The third factor that causes us to limit the power of our God is our own natural skepticism and pride. No one wants to be thought of as ignorant or gullible, so man naturally rejects anything and everything that he cannot see or verify, and we are naturally suspicious (skeptical) of anything that defies or transcends the generally accepted bounds of possibility and reason. In other words, our need to be accepted makes us naturally want to reject what our society as a whole rejects.

So it is throughout the Bible we witness opposite reactions, even from believers, when confronted with divine truth that transcends the normal order of things. Both Abraham and Sarah reacted with something of a "Wow!" when the angel announced to them that they would have a child in their old age, but each meant something entirely different. While Abraham's reaction was "Wow – *that's great!*" Sarah's reaction was just plain "Wow" – as in, "*Uh huh, sure*" – with a little laugh of ridicule tossed in for good measure. When the spies were sent by Moses to reconnoiter the Promised Land, Joshua and Caleb reported back with something of a, "*Wow! The land that God is about to give us is incredible!*" The report of the other ten spies was, again, just plain "Wow. *God expects us to defeat them? Can't be done.*"

Which brings us finally to the Christmas story and the events surrounding our text for this morning. When Zechariah was told by the Angel Gabriel that not only were he and his elderly wife going to have a child, but that the boy was actually going to be the Great Forerunner of the promised

Messiah, his reaction was the very logical and reasonable, "Wow." Not "*Wow! That's great!*" More of a, "*Uh huh, sure.*" Gabriel rewarded his faithlessness by removing his ability to speak until the child was born. The object lesson should be obvious: "*You doubt God's Word because your eyes, experience and reason have told you such a thing is not possible? Very well, you will be able to do nothing but watch until your sight also tells you not only that God can be trusted, but that with God nothing is impossible.*"

Contrast this with Mary's reaction to some equally "impossible" news in our text. Where Zechariah and Elizabeth, though old, were told that they would have a child by natural means, and doubted, Mary was told that she would conceive as a virgin. *Her* reaction? "*Wow! Awesome! How?*" A careful reading of our text gives evidence of her faith, for Mary did not ask, "*How can this be?*" but "*How will this be?*" The fact that the ESV got the translation right here is reinforced by Mary's final words to the Angel: "***Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.***" In other words, "*I'm not sure I understand how that will work, but you said it, so I believe it.*"

Because of the sinful adoration of Mary by some Christians, there's a danger of over-reacting in the opposite extreme. In other words, because some give her too much credit, we often tend to give her too little. Yet just look at Mary's reactions here. Look, marvel, and seek to emulate – for here we see a shining example of just what we seek to learn this morning.

It begins with Mary's first reaction, which was one of utter humility. Note that Gabriel's first words weren't, "*You, as a virgin, are going to have a baby.*" What were they? "***Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!***" Note well the profound humility in Mary's initial response: "***But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.***" These first words give us a window into Mary's heart and character. In fact she seemed to be less startled by the news that she was going to have a baby than she was by the Angel's statement that she was "***highly favored***" by God himself, and that that same God was "***with her.***" The default attitude of most human beings is "*Of course God is with me,*" and "*It is only natural and right that God should favor me.*" This human arrogance is demonstrated most often in the negative – when bad things happen to those who then question God with a "*Why me?*" We could imagine God's reply, if he chose to verbalize it, to be "*Why not you? What have you ever done to deserve anything better from my hand?*"

Carry now this whole account of Mary into your own world, your own existence, your own relationship with, and reaction to, God. What do you learn, about your God and about yourself? More specifically, which "wow" is your typical reaction when faced with life's challenges and God's promises? Is yours most often the reaction of Zechariah or of Mary? "Wow. You really expect me to believe that?" or "Wow, that's awesome!" God has, for example, promised you that if you **"seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these other things will be added to you."** What is your reaction? God's promise: **"I am with you always."** Do you find that fanciful, or do you really believe it? From this morning's text: **"For nothing will be impossible with God."** "Wow! Yes!" or something less than that?

Understand this well. This is in no way an academic or unimportant exercise. The stakes here, the downside, is much greater than just causing yourself unnecessary anxiety or misery here on earth by doubting God's promises. The stakes are eternal. They are life or death, heaven or hell, because the gospel itself is the greatest of all of God's "impossible" promises. The very means that God has devised for our salvation flies in the face of all that we hold reasonable, logical, or rational. It makes no sense whatsoever that the holy Son of God would sacrifice himself for the sins of others. It is profoundly illogical that God the Father would pour out divine wrath upon the *only sinless man* ever to have lived and died. It flies in the face of our logic and experience that God would require *everything* from the man who had no sin, and yet *nothing* from those of us who do. And yet all of these are true. All of this is exactly what God did when he offered up his own dear Son as our substitute.

As Christians we know that Satan will continue his assault on the truth. The world will seek to sow doubts concerning morality, the inspiration of the Bible, the age of the universe, the sanctity of life, and the God-established roles of men and women. Our own sinful flesh will plead with us to flirt with sin, compromise the truth, and to slide into soul-destroying apathy.

As we prepare to celebrate our Savior's birth, we pray this morning that God the Holy Spirit would work and preserve in each of us not doubt or skepticism, but that sense of wonder and amazement that the birth of the Savior deserves. Starting there, with the virgin birth of the Son of God, then remind yourself that just as God kept his incredible promise to send his Son as our Savior, and did so in such an amazing way, so our God can also be trusted to keep every single one of his other promises to us. Doubt it not. Revel instead in the incomparable power and grace of your God,

and know that he can most certainly be trusted to do every single thing that he has promised.

And then pour through God's Word to find those incredible promises. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Samuel 7:6-11, 16** I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. <sup>7</sup> In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" <sup>8</sup> Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. <sup>9</sup> And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. <sup>10</sup> And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup> from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. <sup>16</sup> And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'"

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 16:25-27** Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup> but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-- <sup>27</sup> to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: [www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The Fourth Sunday in Advent – December 20, 2020**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 66 (Red Hymnal)

"Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The First Lesson:** (2 Samuel 7:6-11, 16) Note especially in our first reading the *direction*, for therein we learn one of the great lessons of Scripture. David wanted to demonstrate his gratitude to God by building a temple in his honor. Yet God refused the offer. His point, in part, was to teach David (and us) that it is not all about man doing for God, but God doing for man. David wanted to build a house for God, but God declared that he is the one that would build a "house" for David – a family line from which the Savior would be born and all the world blessed. So also man does not save himself; God does that.

## Psalm 100 (Supplement page 35)

**The Gospel Lesson:** (Romans 16:25-27) Our second reading this morning gives direction, purpose, and meaning to all that we say and do during the Christmas season. Without this direction, it would be very easy to allow Christmas to become for us what it has become for all those who do not know Jesus Christ – a rather hollow and sentimental time that actually has little lasting consequence or meaning. God did what he did in connection with Jesus Christ for one purpose: that sinners might be saved.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 65 (Stanzas 1-2, 5) (Red Hymnal)

"When Sinners See Their Lost Condition"

## The Sermon – Text: Luke 1:26-38 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

**"Wow"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 55 (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Thou Precious Ransom, Come"

## The Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 65 (Stanza 6) (Red Hymnal)

"When Sinners See Their Lost Condition"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance – Sunday (25) Average (30) Wednesday (18)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	–Christmas Eve Rehearsal
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	–Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	–Fellowship Hour
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	–Confirmation Class
<b>Thursday</b>	<b>-5:00 p.m.</b>	–Christmas Eve Service
<b>Friday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	–Christmas Day Service
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	–Sunday School (No Bible Class)
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	–Worship Service
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	–Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Emeritus John Klatt has accepted the vacancy calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich, beginning in early January. Living Savior of Eden Prairie has called Pastor Michael Eichstadt. Redeemer of Cheyenne has called Pastor David Ude. Teacher Paul Tiefel has accepted the call to Messiah of Hales Corners.

**Confirmation Class** – Parents and students please note that Confirmation Class for this Wednesday is scheduled for 6 p.m.

**Christmas Week Services** – Our Christmas Eve Service is scheduled for 5pm on Thursday, followed by our Christmas Day service at 10am Friday morning. Prof. Paul Naumann is scheduled to conduct the service on 12/27.

**Annual Voters Meeting** – Full minutes of the Annual Voters Meeting are available from Secretary Phil Pfennig. Six names were removed from our Pre-communicant Membership list, and two names removed from the list of Souls under Our Care. Keith Mantz and Gary Miller were re-elected to the Council for three-year terms. The Council members will hold the same offices as last year. The 2021 Budget was adopted with a 2.16% decrease from 2020. Copies are available from Treasurer Mantz. The FY22 CLC Cooperative Budget estimate was set at \$12,500, down from \$14,750 in FY21.

**Podcasts** – Podcasts of the Sunday sermons are now available on several podcast platforms. If you cannot find it on the platform you use, please let the Pastor know and that platform can probably be added to the list.