

“How can this be?” or “How will this be?” or “How shall this be?”

That is what Mary said in response to the angel Gabriel when she was told that she would have a baby. Can you imagine how surprised or even terrified you would be if you were to hear that kind of news?

We do not know much about Mary; I know Catholics treat Mary almost like God or the mother of God; but the Bible does not tell us much about her. What we know is that she was a just young woman in a small town. Not like those celebrity women you see on TV nowadays who would stand with smiley face with her fingers up like this —No, far from it. Nothing special, just a young woman who was a little shy especially in front of men—that is the kind of image I would picture of Mary.

So imagine what may have gone through Mary’s mind when she heard the news! No, it couldn’t be! How could that be? No, that was ridiculous!

Well, who would blame Mary? It couldn’t be true. That is what we first learned in our science classes in school; that’s what many liberals say today. No, it does not make any sense; it is just a fiction; it is just a story. Who knows what happened? That is what many people say and that’s why many young people do not come to church any more.

How can a virgin have a baby? How can this be? Sure, that is a right question to ask.

But to me, the importance is not in whether Mary was a virgin or not.

My interest is rather in the fact that God, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, the One who is bigger than we can ever imagine, was intending to come into the life of this unknown country girl.

I don't know about you. But to me, this is still too big. To me, it sounds like the whole universe is coming down. The president of the United States would never come to me; the governor of California will never come to me. I heard that when J. Alfred Smith, Sr., the pastor of 4000 member Allen Temple Church in Oakland, had his retirement party, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger was there; but I suspect that there was a reason, maybe a political reason, otherwise, he wouldn't come!

But God, King of the universe, comes down to personally meet with us? How can that be? How will that be? How shall this be?

No matter which culture you are in, we know that birds of a feather flock together. Many past human societies have listed equality either as a fundamental aspiration or as an achievement. But even in the most developed countries of 21st century, "equality" is still one of the biggest issues in every aspect of life: equality between men and women; equality of one race and another; equality between able and disabled; equality between gay and straight. These are all sticky issues to talk about in church.

But one of the stickiest issues is equality between social classes. Isn't it a shame that whenever we talk about where we live the first question we ask is "Is your neighborhood safe?"

I don't understand why certain places have to be safer than other places while we are under the same California law; I don't understand why certain schools should be better than others; I am not happy that housing prices are cheaper in certain places than others while the water they get in their houses are the same.

In this world the gap between poor and rich seems to be getting bigger than smaller.

Will there be any hope? Will there be any chance for us to live a life of the same quality, no matter who you are, where you live, and how much you make a month?

To me, Christmas is a shocking event.

God comes down to the earth leaving behind His heavenly throne; especially in the Gospel of Luke, God is described to have come down to those who are poor, those who are lowly, those who are not welcome.

God couldn't just stay where he was because He had to do something otherwise the world would just perish.

God wanted to show his love for all humanity the way we would understand. God humbled Himself to become one of us and identify with us; He wanted to know what it would be like being where you and I are.

God in Jesus wanted and still wants to see you and me where we are. He wanted and still wants to show us He cares for us. Jesus' heart is especially with those who are lonely, those who are widows and orphans, those who are naked, and those who are homeless.

People are cynical about Christianity; people are cynical about the Gospel; people are cynical about God.

There are many people who cannot wait till Christmas comes; but, for them, Christmas is just a holiday season; some people even say they were surprised that Christmas has to do with the Bible.

How can this be? Mary asked the angel. We would said the same thing if we were Mary.

But remember what the angel answered to her:

“Mary, God has a surprise for you: The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.... For nothing is impossible with God.”

Christmas is nothing but hope; it is about God coming into our life; it is about God’s power intervening in those who do not have hope.

God in Jesus comes to us to show his love;

God in Jesus comes to us to show we are worthy;

God in Jesus comes to us to say that we are somebody;

God in Jesus comes to us to say that life is worth living;

God in Jesus comes to us to say that those who believe in Him will have eternal life.

God in Jesus comes to us to say that those who trust in Him will have life of quality even in this world.

St. Paul says in his Romans text today, “*for ages and ages this message had been kept secret*”; but now, it is the good news we need to listen to and follow.

“How Can this be?” says the world. “No, it cannot be!”

There is nothing in our culture driven by money, success, power, and knowledge that can help us understand this kind of love, the love God wanted to show us. It is only through the Grace of God that we can see what God is doing.

The Gospel doesn’t make any sense! No, it cannot be, at least according to our way of life in this world.

We seem to prefer love that is given only to the deserving and those whom we think worthy,

But Jesus is clear; it is for the whole world, and it isn't for judgment but for life and salvation.

I don't know what each of you has in mind for this Christmas. Some of you may have many things planned; some of you may have a busy schedule; and some of you may want to have a just quiet time.

It doesn't matter how we plan to spend this precious time; but one thing we do not want to forget is this: the reason why we have this global celebration is because God wanted and still wants to favor us.

God who sent His Son through Mary's body still wants to overshadow us with his Spirit.

He wants to strengthen us;

He wants to renew us;

God wants us to be uplifted;

God wants us to know that things that we think are not possible are possible with Him.

So have hope and envision a new life in his love.

Amen.