

In the movie classic, *The Princess Bride*, Howard is sick and in bed, and his grandfather comes to read him a story. Howard doesn't want to hear a story, but his grandfather says, "My father read this story to me, and I read it to your father, and now I'm going to read it to you."

"Does it have any sports," Howard wants to know.

"Sports," the grandfather answers, "it has fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, giants, monsters, chases, escapes, true love, miracles."

And then he begins to read. He tells of the beautiful maiden who falls in love with a simple peasant boy, but when the boy goes off to fight in the war the maiden loses hope, and she is betrothed to the local prince. But before the marriage can take place, Princess Buttercup is kidnapped by an unlikely trio led by the shifty Vizinni. As they sail away they soon discover that they are being followed by another ship.

"Inconceivable," says Vizinni.

Both ships are sailing on the same sea in the same winds, but the second ship is steadily getting closer.

"Inconceivable," Vizinni says again.

They reach the Cliffs of Despair and the kidnapers with Princess Buttercup are carried up the sheer face on the back of Fezzik, the giant. But the mysterious pursuer climbs quickly and reaches the top before the rope can be cut.

"Inconceivable," says Vizinni.

I'll stop there. If you know *The Princess Bride*, you know what happens next. If you don't know the movie, I highly recommend it. It's a great watch for all ages.

Next Sunday will be my last day at St. James, and when I leave, the Parish will begin a very brief two-week period of transition.

Inconceivable.

In mid-January, Mark and Laura Hargreaves will complete their five thousand, five hundred mile journey from England and life at St. James will begin to change in what I believe will be exciting and promising ways.

Inconceivable.

The passage we heard from Luke's Gospel this morning follows right on the heels of the story of Mary's meeting with the angel, Gabriel. In that story Gabriel visits Mary in the tiny, out of the way village of Nazareth.

Inconceivable.

Mary is a young girl, a virgin, who is betrothed to a carpenter whose name is Joseph.

Inconceivable.

The angel tells Mary that she has found favor with God and that she will bear a son whose name will be Jesus. "He will be great," Gabriel says, "and he will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

"Inconceivable," said Mary, "I am a virgin."

And now in today's story, Mary has gone to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. Elizabeth was old, and she was thought to be barren, but in fulfillment of God's promise, she is now pregnant.

Inconceivable.

When Elizabeth hears Mary's greeting the baby leaps in her womb, and she exclaims, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." And then Mary sings the Magnificat,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name.

His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and has lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things, and has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Both of these women learned, as the angel Gabriel had told Mary, that "nothing will be impossible with God."

Conceivable, conceivable.

For nothing will be impossible with God.

It is the fourth Sunday of Advent, and we are almost there. It's almost time, but not yet, not yet. But even now the promises made by God before the world began are being fulfilled. Wherever there is heartache or uncertainty or anger or fear or brokenness, the promises are being fulfilled.

The way God keeps promises is always filled with mystery. By mystery I don't mean like a detective story with a puzzle that needs to be solved. I mean something that is beyond our understanding — something that reminds us that God is God and we are not.

The meeting between Mary and the angel Gabriel was filled with this kind of mystery. Elizabeth's pregnancy was filled with this kind of mystery. The stable in Bethlehem was filled with this kind of

mystery. The Cross where Jesus bought us life was a place of this mystery.

And soon this mystery will extend to St. James by-the-Sea in La Jolla, California.

So good people of St. James, whatever we do not yet know, and whatever mysterious ways of God we will never understand, by faith we do know this:

The promises of God are being fulfilled.

Let it be with us according to God's word, and nothing will be inconceivable — for nothing will be impossible with God.

We will become conceivable, and Jesus Christ will be born in us.

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