

**Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL**

Pastor Troy Schreiner      www.victorylutheran.org

**Worship Series: *Prepared to Answer***

**Service Theme: “*Do You Really Believe in Miracles?*”**

**Sermon Theme: *Do You Believe in Miracles? Yes!***

**October 8, 2023—Luke 1:26-38**

As the clock ticked down to zero, and the celebration began on the ice, announcer Al Michaels shouted one of the most iconic lines in sports broadcasting history: ***“Do you believe in miracles? Yes!”*** The United States Men’s Hockey team had just defeated the Soviet Union to advance to the gold medal game at the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, NY. The Soviets were the 4-time defending gold medal winners, comprised of some of the best professionals in the world, while the U.S. team was mostly amateurs, and had been destroyed by the Soviets 10-3 in a game just two weeks earlier, making it one of the greatest upsets in sports history. Because of that and Al Michaels’ quote, the game is referred to as “The Miracle on Ice.”

Obviously, Al Michaels didn’t believe the US had won because God was scoring goals and angels were making saves. Likewise, when a teenager willingly cleans their room and their parents sarcastically declare, “It’s a miracle!” they don’t actually think God was tidying up. Sometimes “miracle” is used in the sense of one dictionary definition: ***“An extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment.”***

No one would deny that that kind of miracle happens all the time. However, the other definition of miracle is what some people are skeptical of, the definition of miracle we’re using today: ***“An extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention into human affairs.”*** Does God intervene in the world, going outside the laws of nature to accomplish extraordinary things?

People’s responses to that question are interesting. A recent Barna survey found that 67% of US adults believe miracles are possible today, and only 15% denied the possibility of miracles. And 38% of

U.S. adults claim that they’ve experienced a legitimate miracle in their lives—which extrapolated over the population is nearly 100 million people! However, the same survey found that only half of US adults believe that the miracles recorded in the Bible really happened.

Isn’t that interesting? 2/3 believe that miracles can happen in their own lives, many honest people even claiming that they have. But only 1/2 believe in the miracles of the Bible. Why do you think that is? I think people like to believe in miracles today because it gives them hope, and a general belief in miracles doesn’t necessitate any implications for their life and worldview; maybe the miracles came from God, or Allah, or the gods, or mother earth, or good vibes, or whatever else they want to credit them to. But if someone believe that the Bible’s miracles are true, then they also have to acknowledge that the God of the Bible must be true. Which has massive implications for a person’s life and worldview! And so this morning, we want to be Prepared to Answer, so we can lead the skeptic and answer for ourselves, **Do You Believe in Miracles? Yes!**

That’s what a young peasant girl named Mary said. You’ve probably heard of her. The angel Gabriel came to her—if that wasn’t shocking enough—with an even more shocking message, ***“Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you...Do not be afraid, Mary; you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever.”***

Many people today argue that ancient people like Mary believed in miracles because they lived in a pre-scientific age. They didn’t know enough about how the world worked, so they believed in supernatural things like miracles. That idea became prevalent in the West in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries during the so-called “Age of Enlightenment.” During that time, scientists, philosophers, and intellectuals began mistrusting the Bible’s stories of miracles, teaching that ***“belief in miracles can’t be reconciled to a modern, rational view of the world.”*** And the idea stuck. Still today, of those who deny the reality

of miracles, 60% claim they don't believe because they contend that modern science has ruled out the possibility of miracles; or, they don't believe because they deny the existence of supernatural things.

But doesn't Mary's response show that she knew enough about science to be shocked by the angel's statement? She responds, "***How will this be, since I am a virgin?***" Without discussing the birds and the bees too much, Mary knew where babies come from. Therefore, she knew it would require a true miracle—God working outside of the laws of nature-- for the angel's announcement to be true! The Gospel writers repeatedly referred to Jesus' miracles as "***signs and wonders***" precisely because people knew enough about the laws of nature that they noticed and were shocked when those laws were upset.

And just like Mary understood, the angel promised that God would do a miracle. "***The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.***" Mary doesn't say, "That's scientifically impossible! I won't believe it." She trustingly declares her faith, "***I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.***"

How could Mary have such a faith in such a miraculous promise? Not because she didn't know any better, but because her worldview allowed for miracles. Really, that's what it comes down to. If your worldview allows for a God who is able to work outside of the laws of nature he created, then the thought of a miracle doesn't bother you. You can look at people's claims about miracles, discern the details and events and decide whether you think a miracle happened or not. But you're able to believe in and acknowledge the possibility of a miracle.

However, if you have a materialist worldview, which holds that nothing supernatural can happen outside of the general rules of nature and science, then your mind is already made up. No proof of a miracle is even possible. What I mean is, someone with a materialist worldview, even if they saw or experienced a miracle, would doubt their senses, downplay it, or try to explain it away through natural means. Because they're not able to believe in miracles, even if it requires them to believe the most ridiculous, far-fetched explanations.

Kind of like how some skeptics claim that Jesus didn't really miraculously rise from the dead, but the hundreds and hundreds of witnesses who all claimed they'd seen him risen were actually the victims of a mass hypnosis event. Does that really seem to fit with a modern, rational view of the world? No. But since their worldview doesn't allow for miracles, they must come up with some sort of explanation that excludes the miraculous. In this case, it's actually the materialist whose beliefs are constrained by their creed, not the Christian!

Which means, as a Christian dealing with a skeptic, the goal isn't to convince them of the reality of every miracle, but simply to get them to rethink their worldview. To bring them to wonder, "Why is it that I don't believe in miracles?" If it's because they think science has disproved miracles, then you can point out the inconsistency of that thinking. You can't use science to disprove miracles, because the two are completely different. By definition, science is the study and observation of natural causes and nothing more. Which, when you think about it, makes science completely incapable of determining the reality of a miracle, which by definition takes place outside of natural causes! It's comparing apples to artichokes. You can't insist that science proves no other causes could possibly exist.

If they don't believe in miracles because their assumption is that there can't be a God who does miracles, where's their scientific proof for that? Belief in the existence of God isn't a scientific endeavor, it's an article of faith. Therefore, you can't disprove the existence of a God capable of performing miracles through science either.

Which leads the skeptic back to the question of why? Why don't they believe in the possibility of miracles? Especially when just one example of a miracle brings that whole worldview crashing down, and there are literally millions of people throughout history that have claimed that miracles have happened to them. Are all of them legit miracles? Probably not. But to believe that not a single one of them was a real miracle? That takes a lot of belief.

Really, the existence of miracles shouldn't be hard for us to believe in. Because it's just that kind of world! Just look at the origins of everything in the world from our reading from Genesis—everything in creation miraculously produced by an all-powerful God who simply speaks and life springs into being. What's unbelievable about the thought of a God who can go outside of the laws of nature, when he's the one that made them in the first place? Should it really shock us that the God who miraculously created wheat and fish could also miraculously multiply some bread loaves and fish to feed 5,000+ people? Should it really shock us that the God who created water could miraculously turn it into wine if he wanted? Should it really surprise us that the God who brought forth life could also raise a dead person back to life? It's that kind of world, because he's that kind of God!

And Christianity is that kind of religion. Most other religions have stories of their founders doing miracles that were tacked on to their story centuries later. But if you removed the miracles, it wouldn't really change the overall teaching and point of the religion. However, if you take miracles out of Christianity, everything unravels. If the Son of God doesn't miraculously take on a human nature, born of a virgin so he can be the sinless Son of God and sinless Son of Man, he can't be our Savior. If Jesus isn't miraculously raised from the dead, he can't be our Savior. If the Holy Spirit doesn't miraculously work through God's Word and through God's Word connected with water in Baptism to transform stony hearts of unbelief into hearts of faith, then we're lost eternally! Miracles are required, otherwise we're lost!

And the miracles of Jesus are so much more than just cheap magic tricks. Jesus doesn't just perform his miracles so that people would "ooh" and "aah" at his power. Jesus' miracles are all intended to show us the ultimate miracle he came into the world to perform—the salvation of our souls! Through each of his miracles, Jesus reminds that he came to reverse the effects of sin. Healing people of diseases and disabilities. Calming raging storms. Raising the dead. All pointing ahead to the reality that through this miraculous Savior, and his miraculous work of salvation, all things will be made new. We are made new.

Just think of the implications of miracles in your life. You can have hope when facing a seemingly insurmountable challenge, because you have an all-powerful God capable of performing even the greatest miracle to get you through it. And you can have peace, even when that problem isn't miraculously resolved, because you know it's not that one was too much for God. Rather, in his perfect knowledge, he knows that going through that challenge is for your eternal good.

Friends in Christ, do you believe in miracles? I hope you can answer with a resounding, "Yes!" Because it's that kind of world. And he's that kind of God.