**Our Rules, God’s Promise**

Based on [Luke 1:26-38](http://www.esvbible.org/search/luke+1%3A26-38/)

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Advent Midweek 2

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Especially this verse... **And Mary said,** “**Behold, I am a servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word**.”

Christmas is coming, and along with it…all of the usual television programming. And I’m sure the lineup will include the classic movie, “Miracle on 34th street.”

Miracle on 34th street is a story about a nice old man who claims to be Santa Claus, and because of it, he is institutionalized as insane. But a young lawyer decides to defend him by arguing in court that he is actually the real thing...and in the end he wins the case

It’s a cute and heartwarming movie, but hardly realistic. Can you imagine, if a court acknowledged someone’s claim that they are Santa Clause, what would happen to the legal system? Every burglar in the world would use the “Santa Clause defence” and the legal system would be a joke.

Our society, like our legal system, is based on all sorts of expectations and rules. For instance, in a court of law, what does it mean to have an alibi? It means that you couldn’t have been there, because you were here instead. An alibi assumes that no one can be in two places at the same time...but is that really true? After all, there’s one glaring exception. We believe that Jesus himself can be at every church service in the world at the same time. The “alibi rule” doesn’t work in the case of a miracle.

Even the most undisciplined person lives his or her life according to certain expectation, certain iron clad rules that if they were ever proven untrue, it would turn our world upside-down. One such rule is brought to our minds today is the “Pregnancy rule” and it goes like this: if a woman is pregnant, she’s not a virgin. Now, sure, modern science has changed this a bit, with artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization, but the basic assumption is the same. An unplanned pregnancy happens in only one way, and if someone says she’s pregnant and she uses the “Virgin Mary defense”, it probably isn’t gonna work.

In the Gospel according to Luke, the angel Gabriel brings news to Mary, that the Holy Spirit will conceive in her womb a son, whether she likes it or not. And as wonderful as the news is, this could not be easy for Mary. Virgins just don’t conceive. And even though Mary believes that God can make an exception to the “pregnancy rule,” that doesn’t mean that the world is going to believe her.

But that’s what a miracle is, isn’t it?...an exception to the rules. A miracle isn’t just something that God *does*...after all, everything in the universe is God’s doing. The reason that, when you drop your pen, it falls to the floor, is not because of gravity. That’s OUR rule. The reason that it drops is because God says so, and he apparently tells it to drop every single time. But, there’s nothing saying He couldn’t say otherwise sometime, or reverse the rule altogether. God could make an exception, and make the pen float. Likewise, if God says that a virgin shall conceive, it is not impossible, because when you get down to it, what makes a baby come from a wife is the same thing that made a baby come from a virgin...not lovemaking, but God.

When Mary asked how God was going to give her a child, how God was going to break the rules, the angel responds saying...these aren’t God’s rules Mary, these are your rules and he can break them. The angel says, “**For nothing will be impossible with God**.”

How would you handle such news? Well, here’s how Mary could have handled it: She could have said, “God, that’s not right...you’ve gotta play by the rules.” Mary could’ve said, “God, I lived a chaste and upright life, I never knew a man, and so I don’t want an unplanned pregnancy. But now you’re giving me a child? Everyone’s going to think I’m a floozy. I lived my life right, I planned everything, I wasn’t lazy, I didn’t sacrifice my husband’s honour and my family name for a night of easy pleasure. I knew the rules lord and I played by them, expecting your support. Instead you are breaking the rules and giving me reproach. Lord, I played by the rules and you should too.

You see, Mary could have gotten upset with God, for now she would face the greatest shame that a woman in her station and in her culture could possibly face. Having a child, not only out of wedlock, but while being betrothed to another man...for a woman in the time and place she lived is a fate worse than death. Women in Mary’s day were stoned for adultery. A woman was shamed by her family and friends because she had destroyed the family name. Mary knows this could happen, or that she would have to face accusations. And it’s all because of what God did to her.

“It isn’t right!” “It isn’t fair!” This is what we would expect someone to say in that situation. Instead, Mary speaks the greatest words of faith ever recorded. “**Behold, I am a servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word**.” Her faith is in nothing else than what God told her. Not in her own heart or feelings, not in the rules that the world makes up, and not in her own conscience, for her conscience is a servant to the Word of God.

So you’re wondering, how can we have any certainty in this life? How can we have rest? How can we find peace if God can just break the rules at any moment? The answer is this: God can break the rules of this world, but He can’t break his promises to you.

You see the difference. He doesn’t promise that women won’t randomly get pregnant. We assume God promised this because that is our experience and because that’s what the doctors and scientists tell us. That a virgin cannot conceive, that’s not God’s rule, that’s our rule. God may usually carry out conception in that way, but he never promised it.

God can break our rules, but he cannot break his promises. God promised to send a king into the world, to reign over his people forever. He is Jesus, the son of the Most High God. And this Christmas we will celebrate his coming into our flesh to bear our sins and be our saviour. That’s God’s fixed and eternal promise, and you can rest assured upon His Word, because in the midst of unpredictability and false hopes of this world, God has guaranteed the means of your salvation in the reign of His Son Jesus Christ.

O come o come Emmanuel.