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First Baptist Church, Sanger, Texas
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How Can This Be?
Luke 1:34

What a blessing it is to be here with you this morning. Are you glad to be here in church? Well, fake it till you make it, if nothing else. Merry Christmas to you. Have you been blessed by the music? Anybody play cards here? Notice I didn't say, "Poker." Don't raise your hand on that one. You'll get us all in trouble. I've got a deck of cards here.

Very often in life when we try to understand life we take that which is complicated, that we don't understand. We take the things that we don't understand and we try to simplify them or understand them through analogy. You've heard the phrase before, "Play the hand you're dealt." You ever heard that phrase? Of course you have. You've heard that. We look at cards as a game of chance, very often, that you play. Life is not about chance, is it? It's not about chance. It's about choice. It's about the choices we make.

We say we are creatures of volition, that God gives us choice. People are making choices all the while. When you think about "playing the hand you're dealt," you take those cards of your life and you have them there and hold them there. As you look at them you go, "You know what? I don't like some of these cards." Some of these cards might have – this one right here would say "Worry." Anybody been dealt a hand that has "worry" in it? Anyone? You don't have to agree with that.

I've got another card here. Let's see, "Divorce." That's a tough card, isn't? Some of you have dealt with that. Some of you have dealt with it firsthand. Some of you have been the offshoot of that. "Abuse," that's another tough card.

You see, sometimes life deals us some pretty tough cards to look at. "Pain," anybody have any pain here? Maybe a pain that only you and God know about right now. Here's a really tough one called "Death." Maybe this is a Christmas season that you are dealing with death or the loss of a loved one who is not here.

We look at those cards and say, "You know what? I don't like those cards." In some card games you can discard cards, can't you? You can just discard them. You can distance yourself from them and say, "OK, if I could. You take these 4 cards. I would like to have more cards." Some of you have tried that with your worry. Some of you have tried that with your pain. You haven't been able to get rid of that, have you? It's still in your hand.

Now, there's some good cards, too, that you have in your hand. There's good cards like that "First Love." Remember that first love? That was probably your first kiss. Remember that? How about when you learned to tie your shoe? Was that a good card? How about grandchildren? That's a good card. That's a wonderful card. We have that card in our hand as will. Here's the greatest card of all, that's "Salvation."

We have all these cards that we have in our hands. We hold these and we look at them. We say, "Really, am I the sum of all my parts?" As you look at that, we look at them in a very subjective way. What we need to do is be able to look at the hand you've been dealt in an objective way and understand.

What if God was holding the hand? What if God put in another card?

I said cards is a *game of chance*. Life is a, if I can say, *game of choice*. In my hands I hold cards. In my life I hold experiences; experiences in life that are brought to me by you. Sometimes this card is put in my hand by you. Sometimes "Divorce." My parents divorced when I was 17. I didn't choose that, but it's a card I have in my hand. See what I mean?

Sometimes the card I have in my hand is the card that I put there. Sometimes it's not very smart. Sometimes, even, that card is one of sin. I look at that and I go, "I wish that I could get rid of that card." Yet it's still in my hand.

I said sometimes God brings along another card and it says, "It's not about your choice or my choice, but it's about the choice that God made." That's what He did with Mary and Joseph. Mary and Joseph had cards. We all have cards. There was a time that God came to them and said, "I've got one more card I want you to play. This is not by your choice. It's by My choice." Then they had to decide what they were going to do with that card.

When the angel came to Mary and told her what was going to take place, what did she say? "No way!" No, she didn't say that. She said, "*Be it done as you have said.*" (Luke 1:38) Wow! A teenage girl, virgin, going to have the Son of God. Wow! She had a choice then whether she would play that card in her hand or not. Whether she would allow it to be placed in her hand or not. She said, "Yes."

Joseph had a choice, too. Joseph had a choice, didn't he? He had a choice and he was about to play a different card. Joseph had a choice called, "Mary." In this card called "Mary," he said, "You are with child." She said, "I am with child." He had a choice. He said, "I'm going to put you away privately," until what happened? God sent an angel and said, "Wait a minute. *She is with child but she is of child of the Holy Spirit. His name will be Jesus because He will save His people from their sins.*" (Matthew 1:21) That's my whole deck.

See, what God does, God doesn't waste anything. God will come and bring—if you will let God have today as you have brought this hand. You have to play your hand, but stop trying to play it in the way you see best to play it.

Today we're going to see what God is trying to do when He brings you a whole other card. A new year is right around the corner. God has already been speaking to some of you about what He wants to do in your life and you're just disregarding God.

What is God doing when He comes and says, "I've got a new plan for you. Here's a card. Will you take it?" What is He doing? From the Word of God we will begin to see how you can handle that and what God is trying to do with you.

The title of this message this morning is called, "How Can This Be?" That's exactly what Mary said. "How can this be?" *Mary said to the angel, How can this be since I am a virgin?*" Luke 1:34.

God came and really messed up your plans and some of those cards you hold in your life right now you say, "My life is worth nothing. I am of no value because my life is so messed up, I have no value." God says, "No. I will take what you have. I will take those 'sum of your parts' the 'sum of your experiences' and I will do something new. I will do something that will blow your mind, if you will let Me." You're sitting there this morning going, "How can this be?"

Well, it can't be without God, can it? That's the good news.

"How can this be?" Mary says. This is what the angel responds in verse 37 to her and this is our response from God today. "Nothing will be impossible with God." He told Mary three things. He said, "Mary, you're going to get pregnant and its going to be of the Holy Spirit. Mary, you're a virgin." That's miracle one, miracle two; how about miracle three? "And He is Christ the Lord. He is God." That's miracle three. It was such a supernatural thing that God was doing in their life that He had to send an angel to help them to understand it; an angel to help them embrace it. Otherwise, I doubt that they would have believed it.

God is wanting to do something in your life that is so unimaginable that He wants to show you what He is doing. He has given us the example of Mary and Joseph. He has brought to us Christ, our Lord, to say, *"With man this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible."* Do you believe that? That's what He is saying to us today.

In your life you can make many plans, it says in Proverbs 19:21. *"You can make many plans, but the Lord's purpose will prevail."* In other words, God says, "You are going to plan and plan." Some of you are into 5 year plans. Some of you are into 1 year plans. Some of you are like me, just planning by the seat of your pants. God says, "You can do all of the planning you want." He says, "But it is My plans that will succeed." If you want to succeed in your life then you've got to turn yourself over to God's plan.

What is God doing when He comes and says, "I have a new plan for you. I have a new card for you. Will you accept it?"

The first thing God is doing, *He's trying to get your attention.* God is just trying to get your attention. He's doing it all of the time. He did that with Mary and Joseph. He sent them an angel. It was so unbelievable. He sent an angel to explain that so that they could receive it. I don't know if they ever really got their mind around it. It does say about Mary, later on when observing Jesus, it says, *"She pondered these things in her heart."* (Luke 2:19) In other words, if I can say it this way, she didn't just ponder, she was processing. "This is my boy? This is God."

For all of us, what God is doing in your life is just a process. You're saying, "I can't believe God is doing this." Sometimes we say, "OK, God. I'm going to put it on hold and I'm going to do my own thing." God, all the while, is saying, "I'm right here trying to get your attention." He doesn't necessarily send an angel to you. I've never seen an angel, never spoke to an angel. You know why? I don't need an angel to do that. If God wants to do that, that's God's business, not mine. I'm not running after chasing angels. We're not like Clarence getting his wings. Ringing a bell, something like that.

God Himself has come, Christ. God Himself has come into this world, took on flesh to speak to us. He speaks to us all the time through the Holy Spirit. God is speaking all the while. He speaks through the Word of God that you have there in your lap. He speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. When God speaks to us its *illumination.* He's trying to show you this new path. The *illumination* means "to show the light," doesn't it? When you illumine a path? That's what God is doing in your life. That's what God is doing right now. He says, "I have a new plan and here's the light to show you how it's going to happen." The *Light of the World* is going to do it through you.

You've got to give Him your attention. We're all the time making plans. Proverbs 16:25 says this. *"There is a path before each person that seems right but ends in death."* Have you ever had this sure fire idea that was going to work? Ever had one of those, and just fall flat? It was an unmitigated failure.

How many businessmen do you think go into business thinking, "OK, I'm going into this business to bankrupt"? Doesn't happen, does it? How many of us go into a marriage thinking, "OK, I'm going into this marriage so I can get a divorce"? Doesn't happen. We make all of these plans in our lives and we say, "OK, I'm going to do this. Here's this card. I'm going to play this card of my life. I'm going to do it and it's going to be great." All of a sudden it's failure. We can make all kinds of plans but we have no idea whether those plans will succeed or not because we cannot see into the future.

Do you know someone who can see into the future? God. When God looked at Mary and Joseph he said, "Here is My plan. It's been down through the ages" (before the foundation of the world Scripture tells us). There was this plan that Messiah was going to come. He gave it to this couple, Mary and Joseph. God could see the future. God could see into the future and where He saw us is where we are right now and where you are right now. You need a Savior. You need somebody to come and take your hand and say, "This is what I am doing. I'm trying to get your attention."

There's a second thing God is doing. *God is trying to show you He has a better plan.* Look what it says in Jeremiah 29:11, *"I know what I am planning for you," says the Lord. "I have good plans for you. Not plans to hurt you and I will give you hope and a good future."* Would you sign up for *"hope and a good future"* today? Of course you would. Yet, so often, our lives seem like they are absent of hope and good, don't they?

Do you know when you are following God's plan? When you follow God's plans you will discover that you have significance. Do you know when you are not following God's plan? Here are some good indicators.

One—you will have fatigue.

Two—you will have failure.

Three—you will have fear.

You want to know whether or not you are following God's plan? Just put that little template right there.

Is this wearing me out? God's not trying to wear you out. We're going to talk in just a moment about how it can be harder. He's not trying to wear you out. When you are truly doing something of God, guess who is enabling you with the power? God. That's what it says in Galatians 2:20. He says, *"I'm crucified but yet I live. The life I live is Christ through me."* The empowerment of God. Fatigue.

Fear. Anybody in fear? He said we don't know the future. We fear the future. God says, "I have a plan for you. A good plan. A plan to give you hope and goodness. Will you come join in My plan. I'm trying to get your attention right now, Mary and Joseph. I'm trying to get the attention of the world. The Christ child is coming. If you will receive Him and follow Him you can hope and a good future in your life." That's a good plan.

God's plan is bigger than your plan because our God is bigger than us. God has a big plan. Mary and Joseph had this plan. It was to get married and have little Marys and Josephs. He was going to be a carpenter. He was going to work hard and she was going to take care of the kids. Where they had a plan to have little Marys and Josephs, God had a plan about blessing the entire world and blessing even you

today with salvation. Do you see how God's plan is bigger? The reason our plans are so small is because our god is too small. Not literally, but in our minds and in our faith. God has a big plan for you.

God's plan is harder than your plan. Can you imagine that? God's plan is always going to stretch you. In that stretch, in that gap of where I can and God can, there's this gulf. God stretches me and what spans that gulf is called faith. God is asking you. He says, "Some of you are pretty good. Some of you are smart. Some of you are good looking. Some of you have a very healthy portfolio." He says, "This is as far as you can go here. I am out here, infinite God." He says, "There is an expanse between us." He says, "I will s-t-r-e-t-c-h you by faith to get you where you need to be." If you will let Him. It's harder.

Mary and Joseph, do you think they had a pretty hard life? If you are Mary, how do you go home and tell your parents that you are expecting and that you are a virgin? Literally, she could have been taken out and stoned for the condition she was in. If you are Joseph, think of the embarrassment. Do you think it was easy on him? While he was waiting for the child to be born, she went to be with her cousin Elizabeth for awhile. She came back. Do you know what? Maybe some of his guys—we call it "locker room talk." Maybe it was on the golf course, I don't know where it was being said. I guarantee you it was being said. "Joseph. Joseph, look. I know she says she's virgin, but come on. Joseph, I've known girls like Mary before. Go find another one." Can you imagine. This is some of the earthy stuff we don't talk about at Christmas.

In Christmas we have neatly wrapped up the Christ story in a nice little package. It looks wonderful with all these iconic things that we have up here. The truth of the matter is, Mary and Joseph were a couple who had to go face a very hard crowd. Sometimes you have to go face a very hard crowd. When God stretches you to that point of faith, you say, "Lord, they're going to say I'm crazy. They're going to say I'm nuts. They're going to say, 'Why are you starting this business? You know that you don't have the resource. Why are you doing this? Why this and that?'" You know. God's plan is harder than man's plan.

God's trying to get your attention. He's trying to show you that He's got a plan for you. He's got a big plan for your life. He's got a plan that is going to be difficult. If you are willing to be stretched by faith, if you are willing to grow and mature as a Christian, God will do this in you. This is His promise to you today.

This is His promise through Christ our Lord. The Messiah has come to us to give us an empowerment. To give us some power. That those things that seem impossible, as the angel said, "With man it may be impossible, with God it is possible." When is the last time you attempted the impossible for God?

You say, "I haven't even heard God speaking." Let me tell you why you are not hearing God speak. It's because you are not slowing down enough to listen. God is speaking all the while. All the while He is speaking. His plan is harder.

His plan is rewarding. That's the third thing about this plan. It's rewarding. It's hard, but there is a great payoff. There's a great payoff for Mary and Joseph. She was the mother of God. That's a great payoff. Their faithfulness where God stretched them from what they thought *was* to what *could be*, we still talk about it today.

The center of the story is Christ, make no mistake. When you look at the hand they had to play, they looked at it and said, "This is hard. We've got to do this?" God said, "This is rewarding." God's plan for you is very rewarding. Time and time again in the Scripture, as a matter of fact in the Old Testament you

see it, when the children of Israel are leaving Egypt and they are about to cross into the promise land, they are assembled to say, "This is a blessing and this is a curse." God says, "I'm giving you promises. If you will follow My promises you will be blessed. You will be rewarded."

Look what it says in 1Corinthians 2:9, *"No eye has seen nor ear heard nor mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him."* That's not only on the other side of eternity, but it's on this side of eternity, too. In John 10:10 it says, *"I've come to give you life and give it..."* To the what? *"...to the full."* Abounding. He wants to give you abundant life that abounds with great glory and reward from God.

Some of you just can't wait to get to Heaven because you're going to get to experience this and that. Jesus is with us now. He says, "I want to reward you now. If you are willing to be stretched by faith, it's going to be hard, but it's going to be a great reward. There's blessing for when you follow Me. There's a curse when you go against Me. There is a path that seems right to you, but in the end, it's going to lead to death. In the end it's going to lead to frustration. In the end it's going to lead to fear. In the end it's going to lead to fatigue. In the end you're just going to worn out and say, 'What is it all about, anyway?'" Have you ever been there? What's the point? The point is God. It's not about you. It's about God.

When you join in with God, He says, "I have a plan for you." He says, "You're not even able to imagine how great it's going to be."

Here's the third thing. When God brings to you something and you say, "How can this be?" This new card. He's not just trying to get your attention. He's not just trying to show you how big He is. He's also saying to you, *"Do you trust me?"*

Mary had a choice whether she would trust or not. Joseph had a choice whether he would trust or not, the message he was given. You're being given a choice right now whether you will trust this message you are being given. The Holy Spirit is speaking to you, "This is truth." You're saying, "I know it's true and I know, God what You want me to do." Or maybe you don't know exactly what God wants you to do right now. Maybe it's been awhile since you sought God. God says this, "If you seek Me, you will find Me. When you find Me you will join in a journey with Me, a dance with Me, that will bring you great glory and gain, for My namesake."

It says in Hebrews 11:6, *"Without faith it is impossible to please God."* This Christmas you may be a little discouraged by some of the cards you are holding. We know in Romans 8:28 God can take all of these things. God says, *"I can work all of these things out for those who love and are called according to My purpose."*

Do you love God? Do you really believe that you are called according to His purpose? Some of you may have come this morning and you know about God. You wouldn't be here otherwise unless you are trying to please someone else. You know about God, but you never really trusted God. You have all these cards in your hand. Some or good cards; some are bad cards. You're holding them and you say, "OK. I can play this one and boy, I wish I could get rid of that one." We know it says, "All things happened to us, working for our good if we love God and are fitting into His plan and are called according to His purpose."

What do your cards look like today? Is there another card God is asking you to add? Are you resisting? Are you like Mary saying, *"Let it be, as you have said."* The choice is yours. As I said, the sum of the hand is your choice, other choices, God's choice. When it comes down to it, it's all about my choice and

saying, "I'll give God the whole deck." Will you do that? That's why Christ came; to take all of who you are to give totally to Him and say, "You are Lord."

It doesn't mean the bad cards are going to go away. You may still have pain. You may still suffer loss. God's grace is sufficient. It is sufficient. Let's pray.

"Father, as we come to You now, we come to You because You are our hope. There is no other name given among men on this earth where we can be saved except for Your name, Jesus.

We come to You this morning proclaiming Your name. We come this morning standing in Your name. We come this morning, Lord, just allowing You to look into our lives, being vulnerable to You, totally. Knowing You can see already, God. What we are joining in is just to say, 'Look, Jesus; take, Jesus; mold me, Jesus, for Your glory.'

Father, as You have spoken to us by Your Spirit this morning, my prayer to You is that You will find us to be responsive. I thank You that 2,000 years ago Mary said, 'Yes.' I thank You that Joseph said, 'Yes,' to Your great plan.

Lord, for those in this room right now who are struggling with Your plan, I pray that they will trust You. You have proved time and time again that You are trustworthy, Lord. Yet, sometimes the stretching of our faith is so difficult.

Lord, today we ask for strength. Today we ask that You give us faith that we might respond in faith.

Father, others are trying to sort out all the cards. For them I pray wisdom. I pray, Lord, that they will see as You see. That You see them as beloved. That You see them as worthy of saving. Lord, that you see something that You want to do great in their life, Lord. That they will stop listening to all of the voices that are putting them down. Stop listening to this culture that tells them that there is no God. Lord, that they will stop listening to all that takes them away from You. That You would purify their life, God, to refine them in such a way that they will listen to Your Word. That they will listen to the Spirit.

Lord, certainly I pray for those that may not know you today. Lord, there's no arrogance in saying this. There's only adoration in saying that they need You. Lord, convince them today. Lord, may they add to their life salvation today.

This is our prayer, Jesus. It's all about You and not about us. We give You the glory. It's in Your name I pray. Amen."

We're having an altar call. I'm going to ask you to stand. I'll be here to receive you if you would like to take my hand in prayer and let's pray together. Maybe you would just like to come as a family and just pray. Maybe as a family you are struggling. You don't just have one hand to play, but you have 4 or 5, a whole deck. Your family is upside down. Maybe you need to pray together as a family.

Listen, friends. No one is perfect. You're not perfect. Give it up. Give it up and give it to God. Receive His message today. Receive His grace, His mercy today. Find His joy today. He's trying to get your attention. Are you listening? Let's stand please.