

Sermon preached by Phillip Jensen, Dean of Sydney at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral,
Sydney on Wednesday 13th December 2006. Reading: Luke 1:26-38
Topic: "Christmas Possibilities"

1 LORD KELVIN was one of the greatest scientists of the nineteenth century. He is chiefly remembered today for the Kelvin scale of absolute temperature a measurement that he invented. But he was critically important in the rise of modern physics exploring the mathematical analysis of electricity and developing our understanding thermodynamics. For over fifty years he was the professor of Natural Philosophy as they used to call it in the University of Glasgow. In his old age (he died in 1907) he was one the most pre-eminent scientists in the world. Lord Kelvin was a very keen Bible believing Christian man. A man with great personal humility and well known for his godly lifestyle. But Lord Kelvin is also remembered today for his **(a) blunders** Here are some of his more impressive statements: - Heavier-than-air flying machines are impossible. I have not the smallest molecule of faith in aerial navigation other than ballooning or of the expectation of good results from any of the trials we hear of ... I would not care to be a member of the Aeronautical Society. The radio has no future! Writing to Niagara Falls Power Company: "Trust you will avoid the gigantic mistake of alternating current."

But Lord Kelvin was not alone in making incredible wrong - even laughable blunders. And it was not because he was a Christian that he got things so wrong. He had many **(b) friends** when it comes to blunders. Napoleon, said about plans to make a steamboat: *You're planning to make a ship sail against wind and tide by lighting a fire below deck?? I don't have time to listen to that kind of nonsense!*" Eighteen months before the Wright brothers flew their aeroplane - the prestigious American Scientist Simon Newcomb said *Flight by machines heavier than air is unpractical and insignificant, if not utterly impossible.* In 1910 the Scientific American wrote *Airplanes suffers from so many technical faults that it is only a matter of time before any reasonable man realizes that they are useless!*" The French Marechal Ferdinand, Professor of Strategy, Professor Foch *Airplanes are interesting toys but of no military value.* Spanish Royal Commission, rejecting Christopher Columbus' proposal to sail west. *So many centuries after the Creation, it is unlikely that anyone could find hitherto unknown lands of any value.* And it is not only way back in history Sir Harold Spencer Jones, Astronomer Royal of Britain in 1957 said *Space travel is bunk.* Two weeks before the launch of Sputnik. What all these men have in common - and notice it was all men whose mistakes I have mentioned. What all these men have in common is that they said things were **(c) impossible and unbelievable** and then the unbelievable happened the very thing they said could not happen happened. In their minds there were strict limits on possibilities and they only believed in what was possible or that they believed would be possible. At Christmas time we read about

2 TWO IMPOSSIBILITIES -two things that are often considered impossible two things that that happened. Firstly there was a **(a) virgin birth** Something that we all know cannot happen because virgins cannot have babies, not just unbelievable to our modern understanding of biology, but unbelievable to Mary how can this be - since I am a virgin? She was not some poor simple superstitious county bumpkin who did not understand the impossibility of this. She did not believe in primitive myths about gods having sex with humans like poor misguided Dr Kubler-Ross did in 20th century. Mary knew it was impossible for a virgin to have a baby it was unbelievable to her as much as to us *How will this be?* she asked the angel *"since I am a virgin?"* secondly there was a **(b) divine birth** The second problem is even more unbelievable to some people because Mary was to give birth to God, she would give birth to the Son of God Messiah - but more actually God himself. That is why it is theologically accurate to call her the Mother of God, though it is not right to pray to her or to think of her as anything more than a human, a sinful and yet forgiven Christian woman. God can be so defined beyond creation as to make it impossible for him to become part of creation. Both Islam and modern Judaism define God in ways that make the birth of God impossible and therefore unbelievable even though Islam believes that Mary as a virgin gave birth to Jesus. They deny that it was God become flesh. They deny that it could be possible for a divine birth. Jesus was created by God in

Mary's womb like Adam was created by God without father or mother. That is for Islam, Judaism, Atheism, many, many people God being born as a baby is impossible by definition and there is

3 THE PROBLEM - What is unbelievable? What is impossible? That which our minds cannot imagine as happening. *There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.* William Shakespeare, "Hamlet", Act 1 scene 5 What you say is unbelievable or impossible tells us more about you and how small or closed your mind is than about reality. Mary says how can this be since I am a virgin the angel replies *Nothing is impossible with God.* If God the creator is at work there is nothing that he cannot do in our world. Certainly there is no reason why he cannot become a human since humans are made in his image. He who created the human womb can create a man in a virgin's womb. He who created humans in his own image can become a man. For Mary and for all the centuries down to our present generation we have said it is impossible for a virgin to have a baby, but now with modern biological technology, with IVF and with cloning, the impossible is becoming possible. That is what people have said God could not have done. We are beginning to think that humans can do! How is that for arrogant blasphemy. God you cannot, but we humans can.

4 WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES - each one of us has thought or said something only to find out later we were wrong, often having to eat humble pie - even sometimes apologises, sometimes trying something that previously we doubted could be true or would work here are **(a) some classics.** **Thomas Eddison** *Radio is just a fashion contrivance that will soon die out. It is obvious that there never will be invented a proper receiver!* **Winston Churchill** *I do not believe there is the slightest chance of war with Japan in our lifetime. The Japanese are our allies... Japan is at the other end of the world. She cannot menace our vital security in any way... War with Japan is not a possibility which any reasonable government need take into account.* **Decca Records Rejecting the Beatles in 1962** *We don't like their sound. Groups of guitars are on the way out.* **Thomas Watson chairman of IBM 1943** *I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.* and remember that other poor man named **(b)Thomas** who said *Unless I see in his hands the marks of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.* Then the Lord Jesus stood in front of him and said to Thomas *"put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve but believe"* and poor Thomas professed *"My Lord and my God"* and just like the virgin birth people say that you cannot raise a dead man.

5 CHRISTMAS is when we **(a) celebrate** an enormous moment in history when God became man to save us but it also reminds us that with God things that we view as impossibilities are **(b) impossibilities no more.** God cannot do lie or be untrue to himself but God can do anything he wishes to. God is open to our prayers, He cares for us so much he sent his son into the world to die for our salvation, so we need to be bold, we need to be confident, we need to approach the God of the impossible, the God who gave to the virgin a son, the God who gave to us the saviour. We need to approach this God, the one and only God and make our requests known to him. Do not be afraid - as if he could not answer our prayer, do not doubt his ability to do even more than we ask for. Are you sick, sick in mind sick in heart sick in body? Are you in trouble? -trouble with your finances or with your relationships. Are you lonely? -battling to find any meaningful friendships. Are you infertile? - wanting to have children, but never seeming to be able to fall pregnant. Are you depressed? -beaten by life and feeling so low with nobody to understand you.

This is a healing service, because we believe that God is the God of the possible, that nothing is impossible for God. There is not a problem too big for him to deal with, nor too small for him to be concerned over. He gave a virgin a baby, He gave the world his son, He is the God of the impossible. Bring your concerns to God whatever they are. Bring them to God in prayer. In a few moments Tom is going to invite us to raise our hands indicating that we would like some prayer support. Do not be disbelieving, but believing. God can do everything we ask for and more - throw yourself on his loving power.