

Timothy J. Grassi

4th Sunday of Advent (B) 2020

As a little girl climbed up into Santa's lap, Santa asked the usual, "And what would you like for Christmas?" The little girl just stared at Santa with her mouth open and horrified look on her face for a minute, and then she gasped: "Didn't you get my E-mail?" That had to have been the same sort of horrified look that Mary must have had on her face when the Angel of the Lord appeared to her and spoke to her about God's purpose for her life.

In the conversation that the Angel Gabriel and Mary had, St. Gabriel says: "The HS will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." The important word is *overshadow*. This word is rarely used in the Bible. One place we do find it, however, is in the Book of Exodus. There it describes a mysterious cloud that "*overshadowed*" or "*covered*" the tent in which Israel kept the ark of the covenant. St. Luke's choice of this rare word is not accidental. It has a deeply symbolic meaning. St. Luke compares Mary's body to the tent in which the ark was kept. He compares Mary's womb, in which Jesus will be housed, to the ark in which the tablets of the 10 Commandments were housed. Thus, when God's power overshadows Mary, the "Lord's presence" fills her. But the "Lord's presence" that fills Mary is infinitely richer than the "Lord's presence" that fills the tent. The "Lord's presence" in Mary is the flesh-and-blood presence of Jesus. So, when God's power overshadowed Mary, He became present to us in the most personal way imaginable. He became present to us in the flesh-and-blood presence of Jesus.

Returning to that discussion between St. Gabriel and Mary, immediately after reference to God's power overshadowing Mary, the next sentence says: "And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." This time the important words are, "*nothing will be impossible for God.*" The point is this, before God's power overshadowed Mary, the world had no hope. Sin and violence were everywhere; the human race had no hope of salvation since it was held in slavery by Satan. The power of God that overshadowed Mary changed all that, because "nothing will be impossible for God."

So, as we come to this 4th Sunday of Advent, we look in a special way to Mary as she carries Jesus in her womb. We can think of the whole of our lives as a somewhat longer *advent*, a time of waiting for that definitive moment when we

will at last find ourselves with God forever. Actually, every day of our lives we should be living beside Our Lady so as to be always seeking and finding Christ in this life and afterwards be with Him for all eternity. This is the best way for us to prepare these final days for Christmas. Mary teaches us to hope.

This demonic plague that we are living with may seem to have our world all messed up. Our families may be messed up. Our own lives may be messed up, but there is hope, because God's power, in the person of JC, has entered our world. This is what we prepare to celebrate in these final days before Christmas. This is what gives us joy beyond imagining, hope beyond dreaming. Let's not let this pandemic make us just sit at home and put on the COVID-19 pounds while we sit in front of the TV mastering the remote and being comfort seekers who are becoming more and more lukewarm in our faith. Let's not allow the Internet to dominate our imaginations. Let's not make our quest for material things make Amazon richer and richer while we paralyze ourselves and others with more "stuff." This will only lead to discouragement and sadness. Instead, let's spend the time with Mary over these remaining days of Advent. The power of God that overshadowed Mary gives us hope that "nothing will be impossible for God."