

December 21, 2014, Fourth Sunday of Advent, ^{Lk.1:26-38}, by r.j.tusky

“...the power of the Most High will...overshadow you.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, a year before Columbus discovered America, St. Ignatius of Loyola was born in Spain. Both of his parents had died before he was 16. Consequently, his young adult years were undisciplined and ... ‘wayward.’

Eventually, Ignatius turned from his life of sin and underwent a profound ‘conversion.’ He kept a journal of his experiences and thoughts. Later, he published it as a kind of roadmap for others in their search for Jesus. It’s called **The Spiritual Exercises**.

One such exercise is a guide for meditating on today’s Gospel, which I just read to you from St. Luke. It has three (3) steps:

1st step is to imagine what the world was like before ...Jesus was born.

For example, people were drifting from God, even back then! Evil was spreading like a giant, uncontrolled, carnivorous cancer. The world was in a hopeless situation and state of affairs.

2nd step is to imagine the angel Gabriel descending from heaven to announce to Mary that she was to be the mother of the Messiah, Jesus.

For example, we are to imagine ourselves... actually, physically descending from heaven with the angel. We see the planet Earth far, far away. It’s merely a tiny speck of light in the star-filled universe.

Now, as we draw closer, we see a place on the blue-marble-planet, Earth, called the ‘Holy Land.’ As we draw closer, we see the town of Nazareth. Next, we see Mary’s house in Nazareth. Finally, we see Mary inside her house, in her room, kneeling in prayer.

3rd step is to listen to the conversation that takes place between the angel and Mary. In doing so, we pay special attention to two sentences that capture our fascination, our interest.

The 1st sentence of special interest is:

**“The power of the Most High will overshadow you;
hence, the holy offspring to be born will be called ...Son of God.”**

The pivotal word here is: **“overshadow.”**

It is rarely used at all in the Bible.

One place that it is used, however, is in the Book of Exodus.

Ex.40:34 says, as soon as the cloud... **“overshadowed”** the tent in which Israel kept the Ark of the Covenant, **the Lord’s presence filled it.”**

St. Luke’s choice of the very, rare word, **“overshadow,”** talking about Mary, is **NOT** accidental; it is deeply symbolic! St. Luke compares Mary’s **body** to the **tent** in which the Ark of the Covenant was kept. Thus, when God’s power **“overshadows”** Mary, **“the Lord’s presence fills her.”**

BUT, and there’s that proverbial **BUT** in life! The Lord’s presence that fills Mary is infinitely richer than **the Lord’s presence** that fills the tent. The **“Lord’s presence”** that fills Mary is the flesh-&-blood presence of Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, himself!

The 2nd sentence of special interest is:

“Know that Elizabeth, your kinswoman, has conceived a son in her old age; she, who was thought to be sterile, is now in her 6th month, for nothing is impossible with God.”

The pivotal phrase here is: **“nothing is impossible with God.”**

And, **“Why, exactly, is that phrase so pivotal?”** you ask.

Well, ‘bout time, “I am glad you asked that question!”

Remember, before God’s power **overshadowed** Mary, the world had no hope. Sin and violence were everywhere, a virtual, uncontained cancer. Sin and death roamed the world like a mad dog.

Before God’s word **overshadowed** Mary, she had no hope for bearing a child. She was a virgin.

Before God’s power **overshadowed** Eliz, she had no hope of bearing a son. She was old/sterile.

And, finally, before God’s word **overshadowed** Mary, the human race had no hope of salvation. It was held in slavery to Satan. It was, basically, a Godless society, becoming a Godless planet!

And... the power of God that **overshadowed** Mary **changed** all that!

So-o, what’s all this mean to us, today, personally?

It means this:

Our world may be messed up.

Our family may be messed up.

Our lives may be messed up.

But...ah yes...**BUT!**—there is hope, because God’s power,
in the person of Jesus,
has entered our world!

And this is what we prepare to celebrate in these final days and hours before Christmas.

This is what gives us joy beyond imagining,
hope beyond dreaming.

So, we can say to one another ...what Mary would later say to her cousin, Elizabeth:

**“My heart praises the Lord;
My soul is glad because of God my Savior....
He has kept the promises he made to our ancestors....
He has remembered to show mercy to Abraham
And to **all** his descendants ...forever!”**

May our **overshadowing**-ever-loving-God, our Abba, bless you all...
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen