

I. It is a beautiful image. Isn't it?

A. A glorious angel appears to a young devout Jewish woman, living in a small simple village in one of the tiniest nations on earth. She is told that she will give birth to the savior of the world...and she humbly responds... "Let it be done to me according to your word."

1. Artists have depicted this scene innumerable times.
2. ...and it is always depicted as a scene of great calm and tranquility...
3. It is the perfect prelude to the celebration of Christmas.

B. Yet, the first words used to describe Mary at the angel's arrival are that she was "greatly troubled" not just "troubled" but "greatly troubled."

1. We almost miss those words as we jump to the good news uttered by the angel...
2. What troubles her?
 - a) *She is not shocked by the presence of the angel.*
 - b) *The scripture tells us that she is shocked by what the angel says to her. She seems to be shocked by his greeting.*
 - c) *Since the angel has not yet told her the purpose of her visit but has only greeted her, then Mary is shocked by the greeting used which is a royal and exalted greeting.*
 - d) *The angel addressed her as: "Full of Grace and blessed are you among women."*
 - e) *The possibility of pride seems to be what troubles her greatly.*
3. As the angel reassures her and she is told how the Lord is to work through her, she accepts his will in her life because it is for God and the good of others and not because she will be exalted.
 - a) *Certainly, there would be troubles ahead and, although she may not have know the details, she would certainly have known that the road would not be easy.*
 - b) *There would be reason to be "greatly troubled."*

- c) *She would be told when bringing the new born to the temple that a sword of sorrow would pierce her sweet soul.*
- d) *Herod would order all the first born to be killed.*
- e) *Joseph and Mary and their new born son would flee to Egypt.*
- f) *Even from the very start, they were not even permitted entrance into a simple inn in Bethlehem. The child being born in a stable.*
- g) *And, of course, as he grew there would be those who would plot to kill and, indeed would succeed in crucifying him.*
- h) *Still, through all of this and from the very start, what troubled her greatly was not these trials but the thought that she would ever put herself above her Lord.*
- i) *What made Mary great was her faith, hope, love, trust and courage.*

C. Yet, we are quite regularly tempted to place ourselves or things above God. We may wonder where God is in the course of human events and, yet, where are we in our relationship with Him?

1. The philosopher or scholar certainly asks the ancient question: "Why, if there is an all good God, is there evil in the world?"

2. Those of us who are just trying to get through life may ask it differently: "God, why are you doing this to me? Or, God does not answer my prayers."

3. Maybe we dare not say such words, but is this question reflected in the way we live our lives?

a) *Even if we say God is important in our lives, would others know it if you didn't tell them?*

b) *We think of this poor guy, Tim Tebow? He kneels down to say a prayer and pretty soon he is berated for being a subversive. For heaven's sake!*

c) *He could give a commercial saying how the center of his life is football or some brand of car or a video game but as soon as he says God is important to him...he is being rude and obnoxious.*

d) *Bad commentary on what is acceptable in our culture. Isn't it?*

4. The Christmas spirit of whom everyone speaks is not an ethereal ghost that appears once a year.

a) *The Christmas spirit is not just the superficial feel good sentiment that we are supposed to be a little nicer and more generous at this particular time of year.*

b) *No. The Christmas spirit is the person of Christ Himself.*

c) *And, yet, we cannot even follow the schedule of Christmas decorations our Church gives us and instead follow the schedule set by department stores.*

d) *The Christmas spirit does not arise from some nebulous concept of nicety. Christ is the one who rose from the dead and gave his life for us so that good is possible in this world.*

5. When we live our lives as if there is no God...

a) *When everything else takes precedence...*

b) *...we should be greatly troubled.*

c) *Normally, however, we do not recognize when this is happening. We simply move on without a second thought.*

d) *One of the most significant concerns that our Pope expresses in our modern society is not the failure to believe in the Catholic Church...nor the failure to believe in Christ...but what he calls practical atheism.*

(1) This is the living of lives which do not acknowledge the mere existence of God. Our words may acknowledge it, but our lives do not mirror our words.

(2) Perhaps, this is because we do not recognize God's influence in the world. World events seem to move forward and God seems to have no effect.

(3) We see evil and good happening both to the good and the bad.

(4) So, we, almost subconsciously, convince ourselves that there is no God even though we know enough to say it out loud.

II. But, maybe the problem is not God but us.

A. Perhaps many of you have heard the urban legend relayed about a seasoned old professor telling the children in his European classroom decades ago that he can prove to them that there is no God and one of his young students responds.

1. Sometimes the story is told as if the student responding is Albert Einstein as a young child.
2. Other times Einstein is portrayed as the professor himself.
3. Although the context of the story does not appear to have any basis in fact, the argument purported by the child is actually a paraphrase of the argument St. Thomas Aquinas posed centuries ago.

B. The urban legend goes like this:

1. The older teacher tells his young class that he can prove to them that there is no God or, if there is a God, that God is evil:

a) The teacher asks his students: "Did God create everything that exists?"

b) "Yes."

c) "If God created everything that exists, then he created evil."

d) "If God created evil, then he must be evil."

2. However, a young boy raises his hand and challenges his teacher asking:

a) "Does cold exist?"

b) The teacher replies, "Yes. Everyone knows that cold exists."

c) The student replies: "No. Cold does not exist, because it is simply the absence of heat."

d) The student then asks: "Does darkness exist?"

e) The professor replies: "Yes. Everyone knows that darkness exists."

f) The student replies: "No. According to the laws of physics, darkness does not exist, because it is simply the absence of light."

g) The student continues: "Also, too, then evil does not exist, because evil is the absence of good. Evil is what happens when man does not have God's love present in his heart."

C. St. Thomas Aquinas taught that being is good. What exists is good and God is pure being. Hence, evil destroys being. This is easily seen in the fact that death is one of the evil consequences of sin. The whole point is that evil destroys that which was created. Evil is that which denies the supremacy of God and hence it cannot be of God.¹

III. The greatest sign of the activity of God in our lives is the Father's sending of the His Son into the world and His continually sending of His Son onto this altar in the Eucharist.

A. We are given a gift. God gives us His love to be present in our heart.

B. But it is up to us to act rightly according to that gift and in seeking that gift with a worthy heart.

C. We are the only ones prevently the mystery of God's Grace from taking hold in the whole world...this is called sin: selfishness, selfabsorption, pride, laziness, despair, manipulation, lying, lust, bearing grudges, willingness to be offended, revenge, rage, bitterness, intemperance...

D. This is why the growth of the good in the world is delayed.

E. This is the reason Christ came...the forgiveness of sin and the gift of the glory of the Lord.

F. We show our belief in God by seeking his forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation and the Church he has given us. Indeed, Reconciliation is a profession of faith in the Spirit of Christmas.

¹ Summ Theologica, I. Q.49.