

## *Year B Advent IV*

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*These Teaching Tips are not Scripture commentaries, but rather brief pointers for avoiding unintended anti-Jewish bias and for highlighting positive observations about Judaism which might otherwise go unnoticed.*

### **On the Spirit ‘overshadowing’ Mary**

There are beautiful motifs from the Hebrew Scriptures that could be highlighted in preaching or teaching this Sunday’s readings.

*‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you . . . and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow’ (Luke 1:26-38).*

Raymond Brown (the esteemed 20<sup>th</sup> century Catholic New Testament scholar) notes that the verb ‘overshadow’ already had a significant range of meanings in the Old Testament, often referring to God’s presence in the sanctuary (hovering over the Ark of the Covenant), and it is also used in the Gospels in describing the Transfiguration, when the divine cloud covers Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

‘Overshadowing’ is a way in which God acts, mysteriously but truly, in a person’s life.

‘It is used in the image of God as a bird who shelters those he protects in the shadow of his wings. It also recalls the beginning of Genesis. ‘The breath of God—the Spirit—moved over the waters’ that covered the empty and unformed earth, like a brooding bird that brings forth life. The angel announces to Mary more than protective help; an intervention of both the Spirit and the creative power of the Most High will produce new life in her. What he has done in various ways from the beginning, the creator Spirit will do in Mary’s womb...’ (*Days of the Lord*, vol. 1, Liturgical Press, 1991, p. 151)

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In this way, the homilist/teacher illuminates not only the Gospel with its dependence on the Old Testament, but the beauty of the Jewish Scriptures.

To reinforce this point, you might quote a line from Catholic ecclesial statements, such as:

‘Actually, it is impossible to fully express the mystery of Christ without reference to the Old Testament. . . To deprive Christ of his relationship with the Old Testament is therefore to detach him from his roots and to empty his mystery of all meaning’ (John Paul II, Rome, 11 April 1997).

‘Without the Old Testament, the New Testament would be an incomprehensible book, a plant deprived of its roots and destined to dry up and wither’ (Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, 2001).

‘The writings of the New Testament acknowledge that the Jewish Scriptures have a permanent value as divine revelation. They have a positive outlook towards them and regard them as the foundation on which they themselves rest. Consequently, the Church has always held that the Jewish Scriptures form an integral part of the Christian Bible.’ (Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, 2001)