

The Rt Revd Stuart Robison, Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn
St Philip's O'Connor — 50th Anniversary of the Dedication of the Church Building

Advent 4 — 18 December 2011

2 Samuel 7.1-11, 16; Song of Mary, Romans 16.25-27; Luke 1.26-38

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I feel so very privileged to be here today—celebrating God's goodness to you and the wider community in Canberra; recipients of God's blessings poured out through you to them.

That God is at work and is building his church (Matthew 16:18) is very good news indeed.

One might be forgiven for allowing dismay to take a hold in the light of our uncertain global economic future, the state of this world in relation to climate change, and the ever-widening poverty gap.

Though you as the people of God have not been fazed by the enormity of these struggles: Through you, God is building his church and inequity and injustice and greed is being confronted and stared down.

The antidote to dismay (or one way of addressing dismay) is the need for a 'big' view of God.

It seems to me that you, at St. Philip's, have a big view of God.

More than 50 years ago team of pioneers secured land and eventually built and paid for this building.

Remarkable.

It required courage, faith, generosity and plain hard work.

As a result, hundreds—if not thousands—of people have heard about and experienced God's love for them in Christ.

Nothing it seems is impossible for God.

That was certainly David's experience in 2 Samuel 7 (our Old Testament reading).

We are reminded that the Lord who gave David rest from all his enemies was the very same Lord who took him from pasturing sheep to leading a nation; the very same Lord who declared that his kingdom would be established for all time.

And that brings us to our gospel reading (in Luke 1).

That prophetic word to David is fulfilled in Jesus and its fulfilment takes place in the context of nothing being impossible for God.

Indeed those are the very words the angel Gabriel shared with little Mary: Luke 1:37 (a verse worth memorising) "nothing will be impossible with God".

Now this is a very confronting passage for some.

And that is because it is soaked in supernaturalism.

Gabriel is a case in point.

He appears in the book of Daniel and then hundreds of years later here he is in Luke.

Gabriel, unfettered by time and space, is sent by God to greet Mary.

Angels, it appears, are a part of God's created order.

And Luke makes no apology for this. He simply records what took place.

Not only is it quite possible for God to create and then dispatch a celestial being to a young woman in a Palestinian backwater, it is also entirely possible for Him to 'overshadow' Mary and enable her, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to conceive and give birth to a son.

Nothing is impossible for God.

And this child—this heir to the throne of David—is in fact the very Son of God: God come among us in the person of Jesus.

Mary will bear the Messiah; the great and eternal King from Heaven.

As I said, this birth narrative is saturated in the supernatural.

And it doesn't end there.

When the angel appears to Joseph in a dream (in Matthew 1) he adds, "The child conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son; you are to give him the name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins".

Nothing is impossible with God.

The sinless Spirit-conceived Son of God will rescue people from all that stands between us and God; our sin . . . our self will—the symptoms of which include those I referenced earlier—social inequity, our world in turmoil . . . and every-day manifestations such as gossip and greed and betrayal...

And as God took the initiative and called David to serve him as king; and as he sent Gabriel to Mary; and as he became incarnate within the virgin; so too did he go to the cross and to death to put us right with himself.

Beloved, nothing is impossible with this God. Indeed death itself was no obstacle to God in Christ. Jesus overturned the power of the grave and invites all who will follow him to share that eternity with him.

Your forbears understood that.

The lay people and clergy and Episcopal leaders who saw this building grow from a vision to a reality knew that.

Their God—and ours—is not bound. We need a big view of God.

Like Mary, who had a big view of God, those who have gone before us responded to God's plans with what Paul refers to in (our epistle reading) Romans 16, as the obedience of faith. "Here I am", said Mary, "the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

"Come and see" is the invitation of St. Philip (and you remind people of that in your literature).

Come and see that nothing is impossible for God.

Come and see (again in the words of St Paul to the church in Rome, chapter 16) how the only wise God uses ordinary people just like us (and has done so for more than 50 years) to transform the nations through our glorious Lord and Saviour, even Jesus.

Amen.