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Gospel for 23 December: A Long Silence

Gospel during Advent for
December 23, and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 1:57-66*)

Now the time came for Elizabeth to be delivered, and she gave birth to a son. And her neighbors and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they would have named him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said, “Not so; he shall be called John.”

And they said to her, “None of your kindred is called by this name.” And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all marveled. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.

And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea; and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

Commentary

The birth of Saint John the Baptist brings joy into the lives of Zechariah

and Elizabeth and causes amazement in their relatives and neighbors.

The parents had often dreamt of that day, but over the years their hope had grown weak. Zechariah may even have felt abandoned by God after waiting such a long time. For many years he had prayed with faith for his family, for his people, for the arrival of the Messiah. But as his hope diminished, he was content to carry out the rituals of his priestly work, accompanied by prayers, fasting and sacrifices, but without much love.

The Lord left him mute during the entire time of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Nine months of silence, in order to reflect on his life, to contemplate God's action, to renew his love.

God gives him time to learn to trust and remain silent in the face of the mystery of God and to contemplate with humility his action, which

always surpasses what we can imagine. Zechariah experiences that nothing is impossible for God.

Today's gospel stops at the moment of naming the child. After Elizabeth asks for a name that is not part of the family's tradition, Zechariah confirms it by writing on a tablet: "His name is John."

Saint John the Baptist's birth is marked by awe, surprise, joy and gratitude. The people were overcome with a holy fear of God. "And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea; and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, 'What then will this child be?'"

We can ask ourselves what our own faith is like: Is it a tired faith, fulfilling acts of piety out of routine? Am I like Zechariah, tired of waiting and lacking in love? Do I feel a sense of wonder when I see the works of

God in my own life and in the lives of others? Am I open to God's surprises?

We too, like Zechariah, need a time of silence, to learn to contemplate the wonders of God and renew our love each day.

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