

Gospel for 19 December: He Was Left Mute

Gospel during Advent for
December 19, and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 1:5-25*)

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth; for he will be great before the Lord, and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink,

and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit,

even from his mother's womb.

And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God,

and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah,

to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,

and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,

to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be

silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.”

And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they wondered at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he made signs to them and remained dumb. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying, “Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.”

Commentary

God intervenes in human history and leads it to its fullness, carrying out the history of salvation. Today we read about the birth of John the Baptist, who will have the mission of announcing the arrival of the Messiah and making him known to the people.

Luke is very precise in giving the historical framework of the main events: “In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.” Herod reigned in Palestine from 37 to 4 BC. The priests exercised their Temple ministry in weekly shifts twice a year. Abijah's turn, as the book of Chronicles narrates (cf. *1 Chron* 24: 10), corresponded to the eighth turn.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were both “righteous before God, walking in all

the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” That is, they lived according to God’s will. They were childless and elderly, but God intervened and gave them a great gift: the birth of John the Baptist.

The announcement of the birth occurred while Zechariah was carrying out his priesthood in the Temple and offering incense to the Lord. An angel appeared to him and said. “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.”

The first thing the angel tells him is: do not be afraid. Angels are sent in the service of God to help men and women open themselves to the mystery of God. Zechariah listens to the angel, but does not believe him, so he asks: how can I be sure of this? Zechariah's faith is weak. So the angel tells him that he will remain

mute until the moment of John's birth. When John is born, Zechariah regains his speech and names his son as the angel had commanded him.

Zechariah's weak faith stands in contrast to the firm faith with which Mary and Joseph accepted the announcement of Jesus' birth. We need to beseech God, through the intercession of the angels, for the strong faith of Mary and Joseph, asking that we may learn to trust in God and discover Him in both the good things and the bad things that happen to us. We need to grow in our conviction that nothing happens by chance. As Saint Paul said, "for those who love God, all things work together for the good" (*Rom 8:28*). And thus our life will be filled with a joyful hope.

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