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Gospel for 24 December: The Great Hope

Gospel during Advent for
December 24, and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 1:67-79*)

And his father Zechariah was filled
with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied,
saying,

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

for he has visited and redeemed his
people,

and has raised up a horn of salvation
for us

in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy
prophets from of old,
that we should be saved from our
enemies,
and from the hand of all who hate us;
to perform the mercy promised to
our fathers,
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath which he swore to our
father Abraham, to grant us
that we, being delivered from the
hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before
him all the days of our life.
And you, child, will be called the
prophet of the Most High;

for you will go before the Lord to
prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his
people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
through the tender mercy of our God,
when the day shall dawn upon us
from on high
to give light to those who sit in
darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of
peace.”

Commentary

Advent ends today. During these weeks we have been preparing for the joyous celebration of our Lord's birth. In recent days, with the help of

the evangelist Saint Luke, we have been considering the final stages before this astounding event. We have met the main protagonists in the first Christmas: the archangel Gabriel, Zechariah and Elizabeth, their son John, Joseph, and in a very special way Mary, the Mother of the Messiah who is about to be born.

The last episode that Saint Luke narrates before the story of Jesus' birth features Zechariah, who, when he confirms the name requested by the angel, recovers his speech. Saint Ambrose remarked: "His tongue was loosed because, bound by unbelief, it was loosed by faith." And he intones the *Benedictus*, a solemn prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God that expressed the great hope of pious Israelites in God's ancient promises to his people. *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel*. With this expression, frequently found in the psalms, Zechariah, and we with him, gives

thanks to God for his infinite mercy poured out on his people, by sending us the salvation brought by Christ. The announcements of the ancient prophets are about to be fulfilled. Salvation is at hand.

It is easy to imagine Zechariah's holy pride, since his son was going to be the "prophet of the Most High." During his nine months of silence, he would have often remembered the archangel's words: "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" (*Lk* 1:16-17). He now proclaims with joy: "you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God."

Overflowing with joy at the imminent birth of the Son of God, today we see in Zechariah an

example of humility, joyful
conversion, firm hope in God and
renewed confidence in his word.

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