Weekdays of Advent: December 19th

Gospel text (*Lk* 1:5-25): In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years.

Once when he was serving as priest in his division's turn before God, according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him.

But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John... Then Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years..."

Two "announcements": Zechariah and Mary

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Today, Luke "prepares the terrain" to historically frame up the narrative of the incarnation of the Son of God. In addition first to a chronological aspect ("in the days of Herod"), his Gospel begins by recounting the origins of the Baptist, the immediate precursor of Jesus Christ. Both are conceived through divine intervention, after a special announcement whose presenter is the Archangel Gabriel.

The similarity between the two "Announcements" will help to bring out, by contrast, the fullness of grace in Mary and His divinity, in Jesus. Given the magnitude of the announcement and its circumstances, it is surprising that Zechariah demands a proof to the Archangel. Mary, instead, six months later, will not do it. Consequently, during the Visitation, Elizabeth —Zechariah's wife and mother of the yet unborn Baptist— will greet Mary with the first beatitude of the Gospel: "Blessed are you who believed" (Lk 1:45). Mary is the quintessential believer, the pure and perfect faithful.

—Although the Angel will not visibly manifest himself into my "home", God has a project for me. Mary,

help me listen to Him confidently.