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. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the holy Spirit even from his mother's womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord".

Then 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 said to him in reply, "I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time."

Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the

sanctuary. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute. Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home.

After this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying, “So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others.”

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son”

Fr. Ignasi FUSTER i Camp
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Today, the angel Gabriel announces to the priest Zechariah the “supernatural” birth of John the Baptist, who will prepare the way for the Messiah's mission. God, in his loving providence, prepares the birth of Jesus with the birth of John the Baptist. Even though Elizabeth is barren, it doesn't matter. God wants to perform this miracle out of love for us, his creatures.

But Zechariah doesn't manifest the supernatural vision of faith at the opportune moment: “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years” (Lk 1:18). He has an excessively human perspective. He lacks the trusting docility to God's plans, which are always greater than our own: in this case, nothing less than the Incarnation of the Son of God for the salvation of humankind! The angel finds Zechariah “absentminded,” slow to grasp the things of God, as if he were “out of touch.”

With Christmas just a few days away, it is fitting that the Angel of the Lord find us prepared, like Mary. It is necessary to strive to maintain God's presence throughout the day, to intensify our love for Jesus Christ in our prayer time, and to receive Holy Communion with great devotion: for Jesus is born and comes to us! And may we not lack supernatural vision in all the tasks of our lives. We must bring a supernatural perspective to our professional work, our studies, our apostolates, and even to the setbacks of the day. Nothing escapes divine providence! With the certainty and joy of knowing that we collaborate with the angels and with the Lord in God's loving and saving plans.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “For he who holds, without pride and boasting, the true glory from him who created it, he shall receive from Him the greater glory, looking forward to the time when he shall become like Him who died for him.” (Saint Irenaeus)

- “From barrenness the Lord is capable of reopening a new lineage, a new life: this is today’s message. When humanity is exhausted, it can no longer go onward, grace comes and the Son comes, and salvation comes.” (Francis)

- “‘There was a man sent from God, whose name was John’ (Jn 1:6). John was ‘filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb’ (Lk 1:15:41) by Christ himself, whom the Virgin Mary had just conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary's visitation to Elizabeth thus became a visit from God to his people.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, № 717)