

New beginning

"Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered."

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In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen.

When the angel of God, Gabriel, appeared to Saint Zachariah the priest at the right hand of the Altar of incense, announcing the birth of John the Baptist, the angel said to Zachariah that he would be silent until the day when Saint John would be born because he did not believe the angel's words, which would be accomplished in its time.

Zachariah, the priest, spent months silent; he did not talk according to what the angel said. As if it is a punishment, but Zachariah the priest took it as a blessing. He was silent for long months, and when he talked, he uttered wonders and praises. He was full of the Holy Spirit.

On many occasions, our Lord allows for a person to be silent. This silence may cause inside a person severe pressure like a fierce volcano leading to complaints, anger, and tightness. Though it can lead to the opposite, when our Lord allows for a person a situation like sickness or another matter that makes a person silent, what do we do? We go inside.

Zachariah couldn't go to the Altar to serve because he couldn't talk. He stays at home as if he is in prison. But he wasn't in prison. It may seem that he's not serving or practicing priesthood. No, No, No, the situation which my Lord allows me to be in is with His permission. There must be an outpouring of goodness out of the situation.

The Christian person is prudent, a human who understands what God wants from him/her and what to do, what to accomplish in our lives. What is God's purpose in our life, and the person will turn to be a better person. The one who sits and complains about his/her situation or condition goes from worse to worse.

Acceptance of the matter from our Lord cancels the negative part of it. In our church's history, numerous fathers, without counting hundreds of thousands, went out to the desert and followed with all their hearts and accepted poverty to live as a poor. Hence when they accepted poverty, very severe poverty, even they left behind great wealth like Arsanius wise, at one stage he was begging, and he said, "Thank you, Lord, that I took a charity," he was very rich (in spirit).

When they accepted poverty, which is very depressing to the person in need, it is very oppressing to the soul, but they accepted it. Then it became harmless. They accepted celibacy, which is a struggle against nature, but when they adopted it with great acceptance, it became for them another heaven. Despite the struggle, it became heaven for them.

This is why I am saying, when he was told to stay and be silent for months, that matter was changed to a blessing.

As for Saint Elizabeth, this is another lesson, after that age, and after the loss of hope to have a child, God gave her one. It is said that she hid herself for five months. This is the

behaviour of saints. For normal people, if someone got something, he makes a big noise about it, "hurry up and see."

Come and see what the saints kept their secrets with God. When a person gets grace or a gift, he/she will hide it. She hid herself until the time she couldn't hide herself anymore because righteousness cannot be hidden for long. You should let your light shine among people. The way of life, the principle for Christian life is that a person would have his/her own secrets between him/her and God.

No one knows about it. No one knows about it, but if we become outward talk, talk, talk, nothing will be kept inside. The baby inside her, in her own room, doesn't need to utter any word to the outside.

As for Saint Zachariah, quiet, silent, and worshiping, not able to go to the Altar, but (he worshiped in) the Altar was inside him. He couldn't serve the outward service at the Altar, but the Altar was inside him. This is why I'm saying he could not perform the outward priesthood, but he was serving the priesthood, the inner service. This is why I am saying that this Gospel has a lot of delightful, beautiful lessons so that the person can learn and can live the Word.

Zechariah heard from the Archangel the good news: "you will be given a son and his name will be John." He was silent, not talking, but when Saint Elizabeth was asked to name the child after his father Zechariah, she said to them that his name will be John. They told her that there is no one in the family called John. She said yes, but his name is John. How did she ever know when Zachariah doesn't talk? When Zachariah was asked what he wants to call the child, he asked for a board and wrote his name is John. Who gave him this name? He said it is named by God. When God gives him his name, it is different from people giving him a name called from God, not called from people. What's the meaning of the name John? He said, "God is Gracious."

God is Gracious was his name; God is kind and loving, but John's look was that of a man of the desert. He appeared rough, and his words were hard and piercing. God is kind and gracious, yet John is a man of the desert—rough, with tough words.

The axe, placed at the root of the tree, signifies that every tree failing to bear fruit will be cut down, sons of vipers. How do you engage with those who feel good about themselves while discussing the nearness of the kingdom of God, using tough and piercing language? His name is John.

Tough words lead men to repentance. We are not afraid to do so, for as the popular saying goes, "he who makes you weep"—when it comes from God, it pierces the hearts of sinners. You may ask, how does this work? We assert that God is kind because He desires the sinner to turn away from the path of sin.

Out of God's mercy and love, you'll find that commandments stand before us, and words enter like a sword into the heart, piercing and convicting us, for man has not repented.

John was filled with the Spirit from the time he was in his mother's womb. The praise song declares that Lord Jesus, to him, is glory, having baptised John in his mother's womb. The Spirit within John the Baptist is described in the Book as the spirit of Elijah and his power.

When you study Elijah's life, you discover that he was like John the Baptist; the same spirit, a spirit without laxity, without mixing truth and falsehood, light and darkness.

During Elijah's time, people deviated to worship foreign gods and idols. Due to Jezebel, Ahab's wife, Elijah prayed, and the heavens closed. He proclaimed there would be no dew or rain until he decreed it. People were in famine until the matter was resolved with the sacrifice. He told them, "If the Lord is God, worship Him, and if Baal is god, worship him."

He stood up, presented the sacrifice, killed all the prophets of Baal, and risked his life for his firm stance. We need the spirit of Elijah because laxity has increased, and the mix-up between the world and the church has become excessive. Everything and anything goes. This doesn't work. We need the spirit of Elijah to establish and declare the truth.

People (going their own way) may say, "It doesn't matter what's wrong; it's alright"; that doesn't work with the Spirit of God that we call upon (in the third hour prayer): "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." All and any wicked ways are not acceptable (in our lives as Christians).

Saint John the Baptist preached, saying: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight." (Saint Luke 3:4) The way of the Lord is in your heart and in your life; in your house while you are alone, while you are in, or while you are out; it should be a straight path.

"Make His paths straight," be warned of any way that is not going to take you anywhere. Watch for any deviousness, lies, not being straight, not telling the truth; all these are not ours. But we swallow them (treat them in our lives as normal); they become part of us because of our negligence, they become part of our daily life.

Someone may say, "I'm just exaggerating a bit"; let us call everything by its true name; we should say that we are telling lies. This is the truth, in order for a person to find the way, the straight way, the correct way.

Someone who is "playing up" may be said to be "smart," and "their eyes are open"; the devil gives evil things attractive names. The person who is playing around is called that their eyes are open, and righteousness is given a bad name like "narrow-mindedness."

But the Holy Spirit, which dwells in us and was with John the Baptist since he was in the womb of his mother, preaches through John the Baptist: "Bear fruits worthy of repentance, ... the ax is laid to the root of the tree, ... every tree which doesn't bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" Saint Luke 3:8-9.

This is addressed to me; the words of the Bible are not for preaching. The word of the gospel is like going to receive advice from a physician for treatment leading to healing. The same as when we ask for advice from other professionals.

When we go to the Word of God in the Bible, it is for our soul's salvation through obeying the commandments and following the Way. "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." (Saint John 6:63) If you neglect the Word, you neglect your eternal life.

Keep the commandments, someone may say: but the commandments are difficult. But this is beneficial for salvation; without it, you are not going to inherit heaven, eternity. We

must submit to God's commandments, just as we submit to the directions of anyone we seek professional advice from, be it a physician, an engineer, or an accountant.

"Seek God, and when you find Him, call upon Him when He draws near to you. Let the ungodly man abandon his ways, and the lawless man his counsels; and let him return to the Lord" Prophet Isaiah 55:6-7. When you hear the commandment of the Lord in the Gospel, submit and obey.

Commandments should be obeyed for life, as without works, faith is dead. Translate faith and commandment to life. This is what brings people to heaven; do not break the commandments. Even if there is difficulty and struggle with a lot of afflictions, put up with it to reach the kingdom of heaven.

To our Lord's glory. Amen.