Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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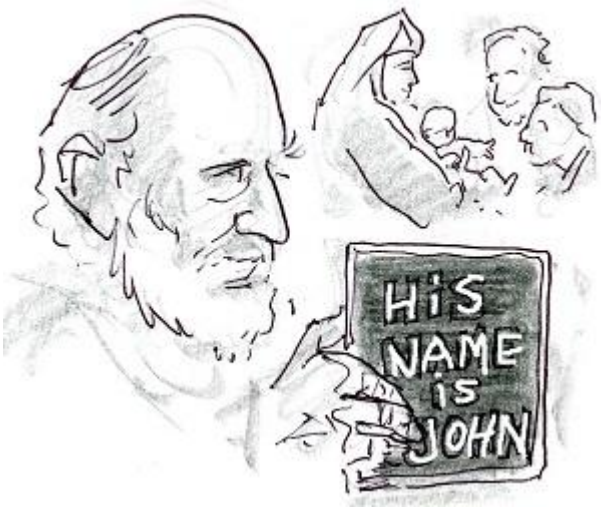

“Do not be afraid, for your prayer has been heard” (Luke 1:13).

Jgs 13:2-7, 24-25A; Lk 1:5-25

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth follows the pattern of miraculous conceptions and births, including that of Samson (first reading), that reveal God's grace guiding the genealogy of Israel from Abraham to Jesus. The elderly couple are perfect in the law, but sterile when the Angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah while on duty in the

temple and tells him that he and his wife will conceive and give birth to a son, the future John the Baptist.

Zechariah is struck dumb for doubting the angel. He remains mute until the boy is born, when his speech returns and he names the child and then proclaims the canticle known as the *Benedictus,* from the opening words, "Blessed be God."

Because God created by Word, to be rendered mute is a profound limitation in the Bible. Zechariah remains mute for the full time of Elizabeth's pregnancy, his silent retreat to ponder the mystery that is taking place. His canticle is like a dam bursting and a river of praise flowing into the desert of their lifelong deprivation as sterile and childless. Zechariah is one of many voices in the Christmas story to exemplify the meaning of the "joy of the gospel."

Without faith, our souls remain mute, and our consciousness is filled with silence. Only when we hear and accept God's Word do we come alive with the voice of praise and gratitude that is the essence of life itself. God calls. We respond. Word engages word. We enter the song that is the life of God shared with us, and we join the choir that is the community of faith.

It is this community, filled with the joy of the Gospel, that raises its voices to praise God at Christmas. Tune up both your faith and your voice to share in the reception of this unfathomable gift of divine love.