

'AN UNFOLDING SPIRITUALITY OF LIFE-GIVING' - 24 June 2018

A spirituality gained from God's revelation to Mary (the mother of Jesus) and to Zechariah, Elizabeth and their son John the Baptist.

Today we go to a birthday celebration.

As we come to Mass today,

we celebrate the Birthday of St John the Baptist - 24 June 2018.

We have a wonderful opportunity to learn from God's Word.

Today's Gospel Reading is Luke 1:57-66, 80.

Let us prepare the way first by recapping the story in earlier verses.

WHO WERE ZECHARIAH AND ELIZABETH?

WERE THEY GOOD PEOPLE?

Earlier in the Gospel we are told,

*"Both of them were righteous before God,
living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord.
But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren,
and both were getting on in years."*

WHO WAS GOD'S MESSENGER TO ZECHARIAH?

We are told that the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah.

WOULD WE BE TERRIFIED OR SCARED?

WHEN DOES GOD NEED TO COMFORT US IN OUR PRAYER OF LISTENING?

*"When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified;
and fear overwhelmed him.
But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah,
for your prayer has been heard.
Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.'"*

The angel reveals how special John will be 1:14-17.

ZECHARIAH – GOOD AND HOLY AND YET HE DOES NOT BELIEVE GOD'S PLAN

Zechariah doubts in 1:18:

*"Zechariah said to the angel, 'How will I know that this is so?
For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.' "*

The angel replied in 1:19-20,

*"I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God,
and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.
But now, because you did not believe my words,
which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute,
unable to speak, until the day these things occur."*

Zechariah completed his rostered time of service in the sanctuary, still unable to speak in 1:23.

In Luke 1:24 we hear,

*“after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived,
and for five months she remained in seclusion.”*

WHAT WAS ELIZABETH THINKING? In 1:25 she said,

*“This is what the Lord has done for me
when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace
I have endured among my people.”*

Elizabeth has been under incredible social and cultural pressure.

WHAT SIMILAR BURDENS DO WE UNJUSTLY PUT ON OTHERS?
HOW CAN WE LIFT THOSE BURDENS?

In the sixth month the next stage of God’s plan is revealed.

In contrast to Zechariah who didn’t believe,

Mary believed what the angel Gabriel revealed about her giving birth to Jesus.

In Luke 1:38 Mary replied:

*“Here am I, the servant of the Lord;
let it be with me according to your word.
Then the angel departed from her.”*

The contrast between the faith of Zechariah (John’s father)
and Mary (the mother of Jesus)
is astounding.

When God reveals to us the next part of God’s plan
for you, for me, for our community,

IS OUR RESPONSE MORE LIKE ZECHARIAH OR MARY?

DO WE BELIEVE OR NOT?

AND HOW DO WE PREPARE?

The angel said to Mary,

*“The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;
therefore the child to be born will be holy;
he will be called Son of God.
And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son;
and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.
For nothing will be impossible with God.”*

Let us not miss that last sentence.

You may like to say it briefly several times slowly and deliberately,

In keeping with your breathing. Prayerfully.

For nothing will be impossible with God (pause)

For nothing will be impossible with God (pause)
For nothing will be impossible with God (pause)
For nothing will be impossible with God.

Zechariah did not believe that *“nothing will be impossible with God”*.
Mary did believe that *“nothing will be impossible with God”*.

MARY AND ELIZABETH

Mary doesn't stay excluded from the world.

WHAT DID SHE DO?

In Luke 1:39-41 we hear,

“In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit”

The baby in Elizabeth's womb, in her sixth month of pregnancy leapt in her mother's womb.

Baby John, still in her mother's womb, is able to respond joyfully.

Elizabeth responds in belief.

And she becomes filled with the Holy Spirit.

This is one of the important passages in a Christian spirituality of pregnancy.

This is not a flying visit. In Luke 1/56 we hear

“And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home.”

TODAY'S GOSPEL PASSAGE

“Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, ‘No; he is to be called John.’ They said to her, ‘None of your relatives has this name.’ Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, ‘His name is John.’ And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, ‘What then will this child become?’ For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

*The child grew and became strong in spirit,
and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel."*

Zechariah was now filled with the Holy Spirit,
after being faithful to God's request to name the boy John.
Now both parents are filled with the Holy Spirit.
Elizabeth (in her sixth month of pregnancy)
And Zechariah (on the eighth day after John's birth).
This is also important in a spirituality of parenthood.
The excitement is not only for the birth of the prophet John the Baptist
and what was foretold about his mission of preparing the way for Jesus.
We feel the excitement of Elizabeth as mother and believer.
And we finally feel the excitement of Zechariah as father and believer.

Such is Zechariah's movement in the Holy Spirit, that he shared a prophecy
about the Saviour to come, recorded in Luke 1:68-79.

God is preparing us for the next part of God's will.

HOW DO WE RESPOND?

HOW DO YOU RESPOND?

ST. JOSEPH'S PRIMARY YEAR 6 – FRIDAY'S SCHOOL MASS

Let us learn from those at last Friday's Masses.
At the Year 6 St Joseph's Class Mass,
the children prayed for their coming School trip to Canberra.
They prayed not only for themselves
and the staff and parents accompanying them,
but also for their families staying home, and remembered their brothers and sisters.
They prayed for their much younger school buddies
and for the Year 5s who take a leadership role while they are away.

They shared that in preparing for something important
they need to recognize how people have gifted them
and given them opportunities.
And recognizing the effect of their action on others.
And bringing all this to prayer.

ST. JOHN FISHER COLLEGE

One of the pastoral care houses of the College, McAuley House
celebrated their annual house Mass.
Near the end of Mass each Year 12 student came forward
and thanked God for something or someone in their lives.
They also gave witness as college leaders to the younger years from Year 7 up,
of being prepared to thank God in our lives.

BAPTISM

Let us conclude with Josh and Kelcey coming forward as parents.

They will speak of their daughter's baptism and their faith.
The Godparents will share their insights into their special spiritual role.
And our community will pray joyfully together for them.

The children at today's Mass are invited to sit later around the baptismal font
so that they feel a part of God's love poured out on Zahli during the baptism.
And in preparation, we pray for another six children who will be baptized later in the morning.

Let us BELIEVE wholeheartedly like Mary that,
 "nothing will be impossible with God"
Let our response be the like Mary's,
 "Here am I, the servant of the Lord;
 let it be with me according to your word"

Let us give thanks to God.

Amen.

Fr Gerry

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/062418-day-mass.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook24062018>]

GOSPEL OF LUKE HOMILY: 'AN UNFOLDING SPIRITUALITY OF LIFE-GIVING'

SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



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