

Friday of the 4th Week of Advent

“I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me.”

These are the words of the Lord that come to us through the prophet Malachi. Words that have been linked to another great prophet, the last great prophet before the Lord Jesus, St. John the Baptist. The Father sent him into the world to prepare the way of the Son, and today we hear the story John’s birth.

Previously we had seen how the Archangel Gabriel appeared in the temple to John’s father, Zechariah, when he was there doing his duty as a minister of the Lord. Gabriel told Zechariah that his wife, Elizabeth, who was already thought too old to bear children, would conceive and bear a son, a son who would “prepare a people fit for the Lord.” This was tremendous news, but Zechariah had a hard time accepting it. We see this clearly in the name God promised for the child. The angel said: “You shall name him John.” Now, there was a great tradition in that day – as there is still now – to name the first born son after his father. So, when Zechariah heard the name “John”, it must have thrown him off a little. He was already having a hard time believing. So, the angel told him he would be struck mute until he could believe. Zechariah went from that point all the way to the Gospel of today not speaking. When Elizabeth gave birth, everyone was already calling the

boy Zechariah, following the tradition. But Elizabeth – seemingly out of nowhere – told them clearly: “He will be called John.” Their friends and relatives all tried to convince her to change her mind. They tried reasoning with Zechariah to help. They even brought him a tablet to set Elizabeth straight by writing down the name of the child. In that moment, Zechariah saw that the promise of the Lord had been truly fulfilled. With his statement of faith, “John is his name,” his lips were opened and he gave praise to the Lord for his faithfulness.

You see, it was not only John the Baptist who had been sent to prepare the Lord’s way. Zechariah and Elizabeth, too, were sent to turn people’s hearts to the Lord. We are just a couple of days away from the start of the Christmas Season, and we should rejoice because we have been sent to prepare his way as well. My brothers and sisters, celebrate Christmas like messengers of the Lord. Like Pope Francis keeps reminding us: “All the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples... each of us should find ways to communicate Jesus wherever we are” (E.G., 120,121). Let the Lord send you, let him teach you to communicate Jesus this Christmas, and to prepare his way in the hearts of those around you.

“Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior” (Ps).