

*The time came for Elizabeth to give birth and she bore a son. And her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her and they rejoiced with her. St Luke 1:57-58.*

Zechariah's response to the angel is at first incredulity. He asks for a sign that what is promised can be true, and that he and Elizabeth will indeed be parents in their old age. As the story continues we see him being struck dumb - he is only able to speak after Elizabeth gives birth in order to name their child 'John' and we see something of their uncontained joy in having a child. However, the joy of Elizabeth and Zechariah and their neighbours is but an echo of the joy that we have been building towards in our reflections on the Patriarchs and Prophets: this is part of God's great fulfilment of his promises and purposes, for, as the Advent carol puts it 'Love the Lord on his way'.

In many of our churches yesterday was kept as Gaudete (joy) Sunday. The rose coloured candle was lit on the Advent wreath - a break from penitential purple as a reminder that the spirit of joy surges through our veins when we think of the Baptist and his message of 'the one who is to come'. Think about how you will keep that spirit alive in the coming days.