



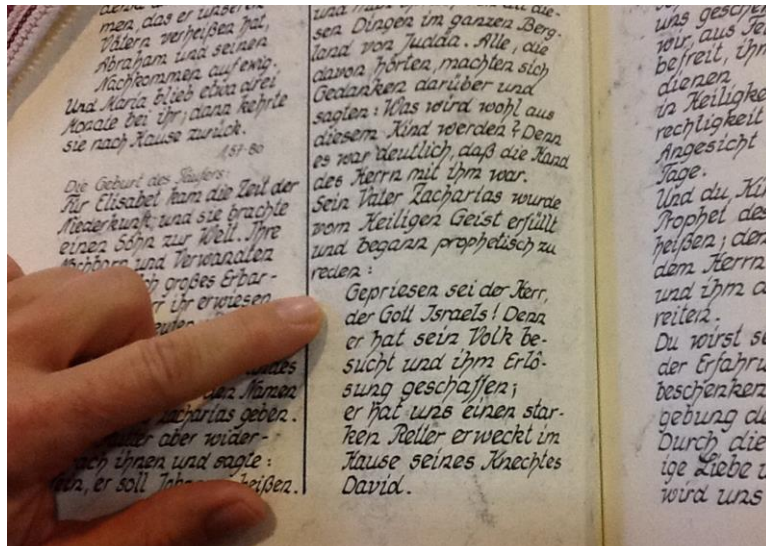
SIEBENQUELL

---

**John Shea on Lk 1, 67-79**

# **The Interiority that leads to the Land of Wonder**

---



And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people  
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;  
to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might  
serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in  
darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

---

When I sing the song of Zachary  
I remember  
how silence was imposed upon him,  
forcing an inner journey  
that slowly wrung from him  
exalted praise for promise-keeping.

The angel Gabriel appeared to Zachary  
as he performed his priestly duties  
in the Holy of Holies.  
Bursting with good news,  
the angel told him  
his prayers had been answered:  
his wife, Elisabeth, would bear a son.  
The angel went on and on about the boy  
until it became clear,  
even to the frightened Zachary,  
that his priestly loins  
would produce a prophet.

But years of unanswered prayers  
make a man suspicious.  
So Zachary told the angel  
he was unconvinced.  
Biological laws do not bend,  
and he and Elisabeth were beyond child-bearing.  
»How will I know that this is so?«

Angels do not take it well  
when their messages are questioned.  
Gabriel reminded Zachary  
that angels belong to a higher order  
whose ways the children of earth  
can never completely comprehend.  
So the best preparation  
to celebrate the birth of his son  
was muteness,  
a discipline that would bring him  
to deeper understanding.

So the sentence of silence began,  
and it is those nine months of speechlessness  
that I ponder  
as I prepare to sing the canticle  
that finally flowed from his heart  
when John was born.

---

At first. Zachary goes home into  
a frantic world of signs,  
his eyes pleading for someone to interpret his hands  
or to wait upon his slow scratches of writing.  
But soon he calms,  
and does no more than watch Elisabeth  
become heavy with what he cannot understand.  
In this space of silent contemplation,  
beyond the mind's addiction to evidence,  
he hears whispered words  
coming from deep within him.  
He descends after them  
until the faint sounds sharpen.

Then, like a long withheld fulfilment,  
like a promise being kept in a way never expected,  
the dawn from on high breaks through his darkness.  
The tender mercy of God cradles him,  
the way of peace opens before him.

He eats the fruit of silence  
and his soul begins to compose.  
His mouth opens in a laugh  
that cannot be heard.  
He and Elisabeth are  
symbiotically pregnant,  
a child growing inside her,  
a song growing inside him.  
Both will be born together.

Excerpt from: *Canticle: Biblical Songs Illuminated*, G.E. Mullan und John Shea, World Library Publications, 2009.

**John Shea**

*Vallendar, December 21, 2016*