Going against the Grain

Two men, centuries apart, yet with one common mission. Both Elijah and John the Baptist of our readings prepare and presage the coming of the Lord.

Malachi foretells in the Old Testament that before the Messiah comes, Elijah would return first, preparing the way of the Lord, "to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children" and vice versa (Mal 3:24). Elijah had survived the famine in Israel (1 Kgs 17); won against the 450 priests of Baal and eliminated all of them; and ran away from the harassment and fury of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel for the defeat of their priests (1 Kgs 19). The prophet then sought refuge in a cave, giving up on everything, only to have his resolve rekindled by God's consoling presence in the tiny whisper of a wind. Elijah "walked with God," as the Bible puts it, taken by a flaming charriot to the heavens (2 Kgs 2).

It is Jesus who tells us the return of Elijah in the person of John. In Matthew 11:14, after pointing out that there is no other living person comparable to John the Baptist, Jesus speaks of John thus: "if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, the one who is to come." John's uniqueness is manifest even at the early stage of his life: his parents, rather than name him after his father as was the custom, heeded the angel's words and called this miracle baby "John." The neighbors wonder among themselves, "What then will this child be?" Someone ominous? We know later that this boy would be the prophet foretold by Isaiah, the one crying out in the desert, making straight the paths for the Lord. It is not an easy task telling the people to go back to God. It cost John his head when he spoke out against the illicit relationship of Herod Antipas and Herodias (Mt 14:1-12). John's life foreshadowed the Messiah's own life.

Two young women of Jesuit Volunteer Philippines, Inc., risked their lives in their mission area in Pangantucan, Bukidnon. As volunteer teachers at Pangantucan Community High School, they committed a year of their lives in simplicity, solidarity, justice, spirituality, and service. Genifer "Gen" Bucky, 24, was a 2015 graduate of Ateneo de Zamboanga University (ADZU) and had already taught at her alma mater; while Ann Kathleen "Kath" Gatdula, 30, was a 2010 BS Legal Management graduate of Ateneo de Manila University, becoming a practicing lawyer in 2015. They abandoned their jobs to be with the young people in Pangantucan, assisting in the integration of Agriculture into the curriculum and studying the development of the school farm.

Gen, unfortunately, did not survive the attack. Kath, on the other hand, was able to recover, yet her sufferings bear witness to the commitment she has taken: to follow the Lord through service.

In a letter to the ADZU Junior High School principal Fr. Arnel T. Ong, SJ, Gen wrote: "Naniwala po akong dinadala tayo ng Diyos kung saan man tayo, hindi para iwan Niya tayo kundi para magsilbi tayong instrumento na maghatid at magpakita ng kanyang pagamahal." These are two women who also decided to go against the grain, to cry the Good News with their lives, that God's graciousness may be felt among us.

Br. Hansel Mapayo, SSP
THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Antiphon
[cf. Is 9:6; Ps 72 (71):17]
(Recited when there is no opening song)

A child shall be born for us,
and he will be called God, the Almighty; every tribe of the earth shall be blest in him.

Greeting
(The sign of the cross is made here)

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Introduction
(The priest may address the assembly using these or other similar words)

P — Today’s Gospel tells the birth and the naming of John. Relatives and neighbors assume that the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth will be named after the father. Instead, in obedience to God’s will, the child is given the name “Yohanan” or John, which means “the Lord is gracious.” As we come closer toward celebrating the birth of the Savior, may we experience the Lord’s graciousness in our lives.

Penitential Act

P — Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries. (Pause)

P — You were sent to heal the contrite of heart: Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.

P — You came to call sinners: Christ, have mercy.
All — Christ, have mercy.

P — You are seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us: Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.

P — May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
All — Amen.

Gloria

All — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father. Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect

P — Let us pray. (Pause)

Almighty and everlasting God, as the nativity of your Son according to flesh draws near, grant us humble prayer, that we may know the mercy of the Word incarnate, who took flesh of the Virgin Mary and came to dwell among us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading [Mal 3:1-4, 23-24] (Sir)

Malachi tells us that the prophet Elijah will be sent before the day of the Lord comes. Elijah’s coming signals the restoration of communication between God and his people. This reading forms the backdrop for the birth of John who comes in the spirit of the prophet Elijah.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Malachi

THUS says the Lord God: Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me; and suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner’s fire, or like the fuller’s lye. He will sit refining and purifying silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold or like silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord. Then the sacrifice of Judah and Jerusalem will please the Lord, as in the days of old, as in years gone by.

Lo, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with doom.

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Respousorial Psalm (Ps 25)
R — Lift up your heads and see; your redemption is near at hand.

sr. m.c.a. parco, fsp

Lift up your heads and see;

A7

Em

your re-demp-tion is

near at hand...

A7 D

1. 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. (R)

2. Good and upright is the Lord; thus he shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice; he teaches the humble his way. (R)

3. All the paths of the Lord are kindness and constancy toward those who keep his covenant and his decrees. The friendship of the Lord is with those who fear him and his covenant, for their instruction. (R)
Alleluia (Stand)

All — Alleluia, alleluia. O King of all nations and keystone of the Church: come and save man, whom you formed from the dust! Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel (Lk 1:57-66)

P — A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke
All — Glory to you, O Lord.

WHEN the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, “No. He will be called John.” But they answered her, “There is no one among your relatives who has this name.” So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, “John is his name,” and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, “What, then, will this child be? For surely the hand of the Lord was with him.”

— The Gospel of the Lord.
All — Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily (Sit)

Prayer of the Faithful (Stand)

P — Zechariah called his son “John,” meaning “God is gracious.” Trusting in God’s graciousness and generosity, we pray:
R — Lord, be gracious to us.
C — That Church and government leaders may show God’s graciousness by their loving and persevering service to God’s people, we pray: (R)

C — That we may come to appreciate our Christian names and dignity and live up to our baptismal promises, we pray: (R)
C — That we may become a united and caring community where sorrow is halved and joy is multiplied, we pray: (R)
C — That families who gather together at Christmas and the New Year may renew their love, solidarity, and support for one another, we pray: (R)
C — That the Lord may grant to the souls of our brothers and sisters the reward of eternal life, we pray: (R)
C — Let us pray for the urgent concerns of our community and our personal intentions (pause), we pray: (R)

P — Loving Father, watch over your people. May we strive to please you at all times.
This we ask through Jesus your Son who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Presentation of the Gifts (Stand)

P — Pray, brethren...
All — May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings

P — Lord God, let the sacrifice you have given as the full expression of the Church’s worship establish us firmly in your peace, that we may celebrate with untroubled hearts the coming birth of our savior, who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

Preface (Advent II)

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.
P — Lift up your hearts.
All — We lift them up to the Lord.
P — Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All — It is right and just.

P — It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.

For all the oracles of the prophets foretold him, the Virgin Mother longed for him with love beyond all telling, John the Baptist sang of his coming and proclaimed his presence when he came.

It is by his gift that already we rejoice at the mystery of his Nativity, so that he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise.

And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim:
All — Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (Kneel)

Acclamation (Stand)

All — We proclaim your Death, O Lord and profess your Resurrection, until you come again.

The Communion Rite

The Lord’s Prayer

All — Our Father...
P — Deliver us, Lord...
All — For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Invitation to Peace

Invitation to Communion
(Kneel)
P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.
All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon
(Rv 3:20)

Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if anyone hears my voice and opens the door to me, I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me.

Prayer after Communion
(Stand)

P — Let us pray. (Pause)

Grant pardon and peace, O Lord, to those you have fed with heavenly gifts, so that, at the coming of your beloved Son, we may hasten to greet him with lamps alight in our hands.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Prayer over the People

P — Bow down for the blessing. (Pause)

Hasten to the aid of your faithful people who call upon you, O Lord, we pray, and graciously give strength in their human weakness, so that, being dedicated to you in complete sincerity, they may find gladness in your remedies both now and in the life to come.

Through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

P — And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, (†) and the Holy Spirit, come upon you and remain with you for ever.
All — Amen.

Dismissal

P — Go in peace.
All — Thanks be to God.