Speechless

(Biblical references: Luke 1:5-25; 57-79; *5:18-20; 68; Isaiah 12; 52:15; 56:1-2)*

(Zechariah the priest, reflecting on his experience of silence awaiting the birth of his son, John.)

I was startled, astounded, frightened.
Relieved I was kneeling, for I may have fallen completely at the sight of such a glorious creature.
Was it the smoke of the incense, my fatigue, or the Presence of Yahweh?

"How will I know…?"
An innocent enough question I thought, unaware that a long silence would blanket my life.
With many months to ruminate; I realized my disenchanted heart had failed to believe.

I didn't think I was so jaded. I served Yahweh faithfully.
But I was going through the motions, following a ritual, completing an assignment.

Plodding across the stony ground, up two steps,
carefully removing the incense from the wooden case,
measuring out a precise amount, dutifully adding the tiniest spark from my torch.

I thought my heart was in it, however in the ensuing silence, I realized joy had left me.
Disappointment took its place.
Others in my life and lineage had families...
Amidst adventures and trials of life, *they* had retained their joy.

My disposition was marked by loneliness, wistfulness...
Routine became stoic, impatient, and my ongoing conversation with Yahweh trailed off… there was nothing to say, in response to His long silence.

I thought He didn't hear me.
And now this silence was mine, beginning as a feeling of punishment for my disbelief.
But I could see. Elizabeth's body changed; and as our child grew, I remembered the ancient writings:

"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. In that day you will say:
'Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done..."

Would my *joy* ever return?
I found myself praying Isaiah's words, hoping somehow, they could become mine.
It was a small shoot, out of a dry stump.
A sliver of hope, like the first beams of sunrise declaring the night is over, daybreak is ahead.

I saw my son. Elizabeth, murmuring softly, and sweetly singing as he nursed.
I found there were so many words welling up in me unspoken.
But I had time for them to fill my mind and heart.
Would I ever be able to express what happened to me in the silence?

That day my eyes brimming with tears, I wanted to shriek with laughter: “I have a son! This is a miracle!”
As they placed him in my arms, I looked at his tiny soft face.
His dark eyes silently gazed into mine as if to ask: “What do you want to say?”
What a strangely familiar sound clearing my throat: “His name is John.”

Yahweh had waited in silence, hundreds of years longer than my mere months.
He longed to speak to His people again.
This was not about my silence; it was not a punishment.

A few short months later, John’s cousin was born, Jesus.
The Father, Creator Yahweh, who formed planets and galaxies
Spoke through millennia and broke the silence with the sound of the Holy Baby’s first cry.
And once again, I was speechless.

Evan Crawford