Chapter 16

With Mary

Zachariah knew the doctrine and rite that ensured the life of the Further Mosque. Their mode of presence here seemed off-putting to most, a barrier between the self and its centre so dense doctrine and rite could not penetrate. The building’s inanimate matter seemed more solid than the centre and hearts took on the nature of the stone they turned towards as a value independent of God. This petrification was reversed in God’s annunciation to the Virgin and Zachariah’s barren wife as “places” dearer to Him than those the eyes and expectations of the majority fixed upon.

The majority were waiting for the three – the Anointed, Elijah and the apostle – each one of that multitude expecting and imagining them differently. They are referred to in the scriptures, but in ways that allow their persons and the time of and witness to their coming to be conceived and interpreted variously. Each was expected, on coming, to help banish suffering and attain happiness and to be against others experienced as hostile and as the very image of suffering and misfortune.

The question of the awaited three cannot be resolved without John. Why not? The pages of the Gospel and the Recitation bear witness to Zachariah and his son John, and to Mary and her son Jesus. The people waiting for answers to their questions about the three would ascend to the Mosque on Mount Sion to ask Zachariah, both prophet and priest, to give them news of their expectations from the Mystery. The Mystery, revealing Itself through an angel, ordered the prophet not to speak. The power of the Word, which is from the self’s inwardness and for its realization, had almost completely evaporated in their expectations and trust in transmitted knowledge.

And the people waited for Zachariah, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the mosque. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the mosque: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men. And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of
Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, how shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah.1

The Holy Spirit visited the Virgin as a Perfect Man, the apostle who realizes our potential and incarnates our confession of no god but God, Whose servant is the Praised.

[The prophet] said, “Lord, appoint to me some sign.” Said He, “Thy sign is that thou shalt not speak to men, though being without fault, three nights.” So he came forth unto his people from the mihrab, then he made signal to them, “Give you glory at dawn and evening.” “O John, take the Book forcefully”; and We gave him judgment, yet a little child, and a tenderness from Us, and purity; and he was mindful, and cherishing his parents, not arrogant, rebellious. “Peace be upon him, the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he is raised up alive!” And mention in the Book Mary when she withdrew from her people to an eastern place, and she took a veil apart from them; then We sent unto her Our Spirit that

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