

## Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist - June 24, 2018

### Our Lady of Perpetual Help

#### Scripture Reading: IS 49:1-6

Hear me, O coastlands, listen, O distant peoples. The LORD called me from birth, from my mother's womb he gave me my name. He made of me a sharp-edged sword and concealed me in the shadow of his arm. He made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me. You are my servant, he said to me, Israel, through whom I show my glory.

Though I thought I had toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly, spent my strength, yet my reward is with the LORD, my recompense is with my God. For now the LORD has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb, that Jacob may be brought back to him and Israel gathered to him; and I am made glorious in the sight of the LORD, and my God is now my strength! It is too little, he says, for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the survivors of Israel; I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

#### Responsorial Psalm: PS 139:1B-3, 13-14AB, 14C-15

**R. (14) I praise you, for I am wonderfully made.**

O LORD, you have probed me, you know me: you know when I sit and when I stand; you understand my thoughts from afar. My journeys and my rest you scrutinize, with all my ways you are familiar.

**R. I praise you, for I am wonderfully made.**

Truly you have formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made; wonderful are your works.

**R. I praise you, for I am wonderfully made.**

My soul also you knew full well; nor was my frame unknown to you When I was made in secret, when I was fashioned in the depths of the earth.

**R. I praise you, for I am wonderfully made.**

#### Scripture Reading: ACTS 13:22-26

In those days, Paul said: "God raised up David as king; of him God testified, I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will carry out my every wish. From this man's descendants God, according to his promise, has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus. John heralded his coming by proclaiming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel; and as John was completing his course, he would say, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. Behold, one is coming after me; I am not worthy to unfasten the sandals of his feet.'

"My brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those others among you who are God-fearing, to us this word of salvation has been sent."

#### Gospel: LK 1:57-66, 80

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 child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

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#### **INVITATION TO PRAY**

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presens of God..

#### **Proclaim the Scriptures out loud**

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a Word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

#### **INVITATION TO REFLECT**

The nativity of Saint John the Baptist and this Sunday's readings on which we meditate remind us that God calls each of us for a special purpose which only we can fulfill. In some cases, like John the Baptist, Isaiah, David, and the twelve disciples of Jesus, the call and task are extraordinary within the history of salvation. However, for most of us the call and task are more ordinary. Additionally, within the fulfilling of that calling these extraordinary lives convey a message, and provide an example which can be instructive to those of us who live ordinary lives of faith.

For many people John the Baptist is simply depicted as a hermit who found nourishment in a weird diet (locust and honey) and made an outlandish fashion statement with his camel's hair and leather clothing. Unfortunately, many people see him as an angry person, ranting "Repent" and condemning people to Hell—which really does not describe John the Baptist, but simply reflects the way some have interpreted the message "Repent," either reflecting their own attitude toward sinners, or that of non-Christians media as they tried to interpret that which they did not understand.

John's message was actually a message of hope; that mankind can in fact change the downward spiral of their lives (repent, or turn), and in turning to Christ can know God who "has come to his people to set them free, He [God] has raised up for us a mighty Savior," who would "set us free from the hands of our enemies [including Satan], free to worship him without fear, [making us] holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our lives" (Luke 1). This is not a message of damnation but of salvation.

His birth was miraculous in as much as his parents, like Abraham and Sarah of the Old Testament, conceived John when they were well past the age when people could normally have children. In addition, Zechariah, John's father, was struck dumb for months until John's birth, because he failed to believe the angel who told him that Elizabeth would conceive and give birth to a son. John the Baptist was unique in that he was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in the womb, and upon being in the presence of Mary the Mother of our Lord, and sensing his Lord's presence in the womb of Mary while he himself was yet within the womb of Elizabeth, he leaped for joy. His uniqueness portended our own experience upon becoming believers in Christ, we are filled with the Holy Spirit, experiencing the joy that comes from recognizing Jesus, and responding in kind.

His calling was to "go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins," until the "tender compassion of our God shall break upon us."<sup>1</sup> He fulfilled his calling marvelously and humbly, directing his disciples to leave him and follow Jesus the Lamb of God by stating, "He must increase but I must decrease." John's life also portends our mission—to be vanguards among those who do not yet know the Lord, living in such a way that they are made aware of the salvation that is available in Jesus, and doing so in such a way that Jesus increases in importance to them, rather than we ourselves.

Do you want a new sense of importance, an importance which will in turn motivate you and humble you? Then simply realize that like John the Baptist you have been called to be an ambassador for Jesus Christ, as St. Paul points out; "So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20), and as St. Peter points out, we are people with a mission; "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1Peter 2:9). What a calling! The world still needs people to follow John's example. Will you be one of them?

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**INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING**

1. What did God do when Isaiah was struggling with his calling and his seeming lack of results?
2. How would you define humility in light of John the Baptist's remarks?
3. What lessons on parenting can we learn from Zechariah and Elizabeth?
4. After meditating on the statement, "What, then, will this child be?" describe what you think God has planned for your future, even though you may not be a child. Can God have great plans for using us even as he did John?

**INVITATION TO ACT**

*Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.*

**CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY**

*Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.*