

Scripture Study

Nativity of John the Baptist – Cycles ABC



Opening prayer

Isaiah 49:1-6

(Ps 139:1b-3, 13-15)

Acts 13:22-26

Luke 1:57-66, 80

Overview of the Gospel:

- The beginning of the story of John the Baptist (whose birth we celebrate today) goes back to the first verses of Luke's Gospel (Luke 1:5-25). The angel Gabriel appears to the aged priest Zechariah and announces to him that his wife Elizabeth will have a son in their old age who will be the one to herald the coming of the long awaited Messiah.
- That the Messiah would have a forerunner that would prepare God's people to receive their Messiah was also prophesied in the Old Testament, most notably in Malachi 3, verses 1 and 23. (NAB).
- The angel tells Zechariah that the child will "be filled with the holy Spirit even from his mother's womb and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah and to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord." (Lk 1:15-17). Because Zechariah greets this good news with doubt, he is stricken speechless until the time the promised son will be born.
- This Sunday's Gospel picks up the story (after the events of the Annunciation and Visitation, Luke 1:26-56) when the time for the birth of John had arrived.

Questions:

- The 1st Reading is most often applied to the Messiah; however, the Church applies it in today's liturgy to John the Baptist. Considering the Gospel reading and what you know of John the Baptist, in what ways can you say it can also apply to the precursor of Jesus?
- How did John's birth fulfill the words of the angel in Luke 1:13-17?
- How did the neighbors and relatives respond to these events? How does this all begin to promote the Gospel?
- Toward the end of the Gospel reading, the people ask the question, "What, then, will this child be?" (verse 65). As Zechariah's neighbor, what would you think about his son? What would be your answer to this question?
- Time permitting, read Zechariah's Canticle found in verses 67-79. What, according to this canticle, is the purpose of salvation? How does it show God's unfolding plan from Old Testament days to the coming of the Messiah? Of the promises listed in this song, which one means the most to you? Why?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 523, 535, 717-720

Closing prayer

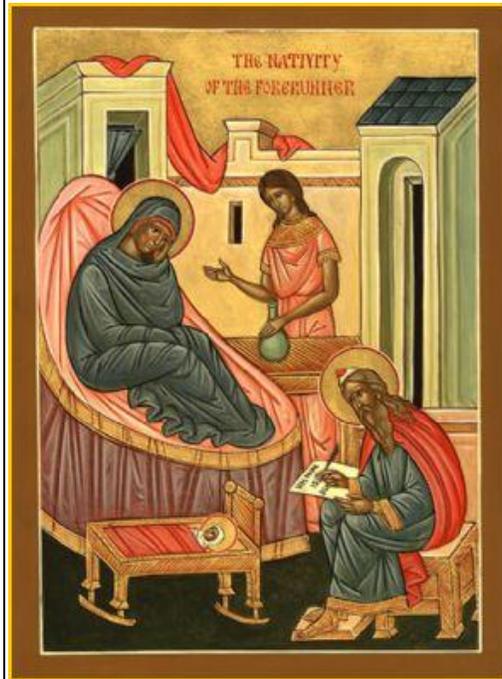
Rightly also, from that moment was his [Zechariah's] tongue loosed for that which unbelief had bound, faith set free. Let us then also believe, in order that our tongue, which has been bound by the chains of unbelief, may be loosed by the voice of reason. Let us write mysteries by the Spirit if we wish to speak. Let us write the forerunner of Christ, not on tables of stone, but on the fleshly tablets of the heart. For he who names John [the Baptist], prophesies Christ. --St. Ambrose

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"For the hand of the Lord was with him"

Scripture: *Luke 1:57-66,80*

Meditation: Birthdays are a special time to remember and give thanks for the blessings that have come our way. Are you grateful for the ways that God has worked in your life, even from your birth? In many churches of the East and West the birth of John the Baptist is remembered on this day. The friends of Zechariah and Elizabeth marveled at the wonderful way in which God blessed them with a child. This child was destined by God for an important mission. The last verses in the last book of the Old Testament, taken from the prophet Malachi, speak of the Lord's messenger, the prophet Elijah who will return to "turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6). We see the beginning of the fulfillment of this word when the Angel Gabriel announced to Zechariah the marvelous birth and mission of John the Baptist (Luke 1:17). When this newly born child was about to be named, as customary on the eighth day, his relatives quibbled over what name to give him. (Don't relatives today often do the same when the time comes for naming a newborn?) This child, however has been named from above! And Elizabeth is firm in her faith and determined to see that God be glorified through this child. The name John means "the Lord is gracious". In the birth of John and in the birth of Jesus the Messiah we see the grace of God



breaking forth into a world broken by sin and without hope. John's miraculous birth shows the mercy and favor of God in preparing his people for the coming of its Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist's life was fueled by one burning passion – to point others to Jesus Christ and to the coming of God's kingdom. Scripture tells us that John was filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15, 41) by Christ himself, whom Mary had just conceived by the Holy Spirit. When Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, John leapt in the womb of Elizabeth as they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41). The fire of the Spirit dwelt in John and made him the forerunner of the coming Messiah. John was led by the Spirit into the wilderness prior to his ministry where he was tested and grew in the word of God.

John's clothing was reminiscent of the prophet Elijah (see Kings 1:8). John broke the prophetic silence of the previous centuries when he began to speak the word of God to the people of Israel. His message was similar to the message of the Old Testament prophets who chided the people of God for their unfaithfulness and who tried to awaken true repentance in them. Among a people unconcerned with the things of God, it was his work to awaken their interest, unsettle them from their complacency, and arouse in them enough good will to recognize and receive Christ when he came.

What is the significance of John the Baptist and his message for our lives? When God acts to save us he graciously fills us with his Holy Spirit and makes our faith come "alive" to his promises. Each and every day the Lord is ready to renew us in faith, hope, and love. Like John the Baptist, the Lord invites each of us to make our life a free-will offering to God. God wants to fill us with his glory all the days of our lives, from birth through death. Renew the offering of your life to God and give him thanks for his mercy and favor towards you.

"Lord Jesus, you bring hope and salvation to a world lost in sin, despair, and suffering. Let your grace refresh and restore your people today in the hope and joy of your great victory over sin and death."

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