

Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist – B
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
24 June 2018

Isaiah 49:1-6
Psalm 139
Acts 13:22-26

Vigil: (See John 1:7; Luke 1:17) Luke 1:5-17
During the Day: (See Luke 1:76) Luke 1:57-66, 80

John the Baptist Always Points Us to Jesus Christ

This weekend we have the special occasion of celebrating the Solemnity of the Nativity (the Birth) of Saint John the Baptist – made even more special by celebrating the Baptisms of these beautiful children. We celebrate John the Baptist’s birth every year, but it’s not often that we get to celebrate it on a Sunday – only every five, six, or eleven years, depending on how the leap years align. There are only three holy people whose birth we celebrate as a Church: Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and John the Baptist.¹ Our celebration today is important, because it draws our attention to the significant role that John the Baptist has in our salvation.²

Today’s celebration also draws our attention to the calendar for another important reason: there are only 183 days remaining until Christmas. And if you happen to still have Christmas lights up on your house, you are no longer behind in taking them down from last year – you are now ahead in putting them up for next year!

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June 24th. Six months away from last Christmas. Six months away from next Christmas. In our celebration of his birth today, John the Baptist – the greatest of men; the last of the Prophets; the Forerunner and Precursor to Jesus Christ³ – today John the Baptist does what he always does: he points us to Jesus Christ.

From his conception, John the Baptist has helped people recognize that God is on His way to save us. Helped us realize that God *always* hears our prayers. Encouraged us to prepare ourselves to welcome the Lord into our hearts. Reminded us that we don’t have to wait until the

day after Thanksgiving to start preparing a way for the Lord. The joy that we feel at Christmas – the joy that God is with us⁴ – is a joy that God wants us to feel all year round.

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The circumstances around the birth of John the Baptist, however, illustrate a tension that all of us can feel sometimes. That is, the tension between our knowledge that God is with us, and the feeling that, sometimes it seems like He is *not* with us.

John's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, "were righteous in the eyes of God." They had observed all of God's commandments, done everything God asked of them, yet it seemed that their prayers had *not* been answered.⁵ They had prayed for many years to be blessed with a child, but maybe God was not listening.⁶

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We all know something about what that feels like, don't we? Whether we've prayed for a child or a spouse or a job; prayed for a cure for a sickness, a healing of a relationship, or a release from an addiction – we all know something about asking for God's blessing, and then hoping and waiting for His response. Hoping and waiting...which can turn into *wondering*. Wondering if God is really listening. Wondering if God is really with us.

It is precisely this situation that the angel Gabriel entered into when he appeared to Zechariah in the Temple.⁷ After many years of praying, hoping, waiting, and maybe even *wondering*, the angel Gabriel came with an important message: "Zechariah...your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John."⁸

And in that awesome moment, we learned that it wasn't only the prayers of Zechariah and Elizabeth that had been heard. The angel Gabriel revealed that the prayers of *all* people had

been heard.⁹ Not only would Zechariah and Elizabeth have joy and gladness, but *many* would rejoice at his birth.¹⁰

My friends, we are part of the many! We – all people everywhere – are invited to rejoice in the birth of John the Baptist, because it means that *God is with us*.¹¹ It means that God is *gracious*;¹² that God hears *our* prayers, and that He is *always* working for our good – even when we don't recognize it.

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But how do we experience that rejoicing? How do we tap into that joy? John the Baptist shows us the way – he *always* points the way to the Lord for us. Even as a baby in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth, John the Baptist leapt with joy at the presence of Jesus in the womb of Mary.¹³ It was *God's* joy that filled Mary and spread to John the Baptist and Elizabeth. Let us recognize that God knits that same joy into *our* hearts in our mother's womb. He made each of us wonderful, knows each of us more deeply than we know ourselves, and calls each of us to always stay close to Him.¹⁴

As we grow and experience difficulties, sin, and suffering in our lives, God remains close to us, but we might sometimes start to wonder or even doubt.¹⁵ John the Baptist shows us the way – he *always* points the way to the Lord for us: “Repent!” John the Baptist went around preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins.¹⁶ Preparing the way of the Lord includes making a good Confession. If you wonder about or doubt God's presence in your life, I encourage you to come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation – offered here at Holy Family six days a week: Monday through Saturday, or by appointment, if you contact one of us priests.

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Preparing the way of the Lord also means spending time with God. John the Baptist shows us the way. He “grew and became strong in spirit” by spending many years in the desert.¹⁷ Very few of us are called to a life of prayer in the desert – each of us is called to spend regular time in prayer with the Lord. If you’re having trouble recognizing God’s presence in your life, I encourage you to consider what Father Nagel has been recommending to all of us for many years: spending at least twenty minutes each day in prayer; and, furthermore, spending at least one hour each week in Adoration in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. If you have questions about how to pray, please contact one of us priests or talk with some of your many fellow parishioners who are already experiencing God’s Presence through their daily prayer life.

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John the Baptist was the answer to the prayers of Zechariah and Elizabeth. John the Baptist is the answer to *all* our prayers. He is evidence that God hears our prayers; that God is gracious; that God is with us. He *always* points the way to the Lord for us; and shows us how, through repentance and prayer, we are better able to recognize and rejoice in God’s presence in our lives. By his holy example, he shows us that we, too, can live our life in a manner that points the way to Jesus Christ for others.

¹ The Nativity of the Lord: December 25th

The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary: September 8th

² See *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 523, 719-720

³ Matthew 11:7-19; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 1:17, 76, 7:24-35; John 1:23; *CCC* 717-720

⁴ Matthew 1:23

⁵ Luke 1:6-7

⁶ Luke 1:13

⁷ Luke 1:19

⁸ Luke 1:13

⁹ Isaiah 49:1, 6

¹⁰ Luke 1:14, 58

¹¹ Isaiah 49:1, 6; Acts 13:26

¹² From *Strong’s Concordance* G2491: John (Greek: *Ἰωάννης*) = “God is a gracious giver”

From *Strong’s Concordance* H3110: John (Hebrew: *יְהוָה*) = “God has graced”

¹³ Luke 1:41, 44

¹⁴ Isaiah 49:1, 5; Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 71:5-6, 17; Psalm 139:1-2, 13-14

¹⁵ Jeremiah 1:6-10

¹⁶ Matthew 3:1-3; Mark 1:2-5; Luke 3:1-6

¹⁷ Luke 1:80