



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 24th June 2018 - The Feast of the Birth of John The Baptist

1 Relax & Remember

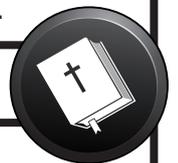
Set aside 10 -15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.



2 Read

Taken from the Gospel for 24th June 2018 (Luke 1: 57-66. 80): The Birth and Naming of John the Baptist

The time came for Elizabeth to have her child, and she gave birth to a son; and when her neighbours and relations heard that the Lord had shown her so great a kindness, they shared her joy. Now on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother spoke up. "No," she said, "he is to be called John." They said to her, "But no one in your family has that name", and made signs to his father to find out what he wanted him called. The father asked for a writing tablet and wrote, 'His name is John'. And they were all astonished. At that instant his power of speech returned and he spoke and praised God. All their neighbours were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judaea. All those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts. "What will this child turn out to be?" they wondered. And indeed the hand of the Lord was with him. The child grew up and his spirit matured. And he lived out in the wilderness until the day he appeared openly to Israel.



3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering this Gospel, continue by reading Fr Henry Wansbrough's reflection.

The birth-stories of John the Baptist and of Jesus are told in such a way as to bring out the parallelism between the two figures, and the special position of each. Of each the parents are models of the fidelity of Israel, and of trust in the Lord. An angel foretells the miraculous birth of each. The birth and naming of each is an occasion of great joy. Both are great, but Jesus is greater: the exalted position of John serves to exalt the position of Jesus even further. John will prepare the way: Zechariah doubts and is struck dumb: Mary humbly enquires and is blessed. John's name means 'God is gracious': Jesus' name means 'Saviour'. At the birth of John there is joy in the family: at the birth of Jesus the joy and singing comes from the angels. At the end of today's passage John goes out into the desert because it was from the desert that the Messiah was expected to come, and John will be the herald voice, crying in the desert in fulfilment of the prophet Isaiah, 'Make straight his paths'.

John the Baptist went into the desert and his spirit matured. What habits can you start or develop each day, or each week, to be strengthened in spirit?

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

4 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Then thank God for any insight you may have received. Conclude by asking God to bless you with one of the following spiritual gifts to help you act on any resolution you have made: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, or joy. Please remember to pray for the Church and particularly our school families. **Then conclude by requesting the prayers of Our Lady & St Joseph.**



WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 24th June 2018



First Reading: *Formed in the Womb to be God's Servant*

Isaiah 49:1-6

Islands, listen to me; pay attention, remotest peoples. The Lord called me before I was born; from my mother's womb he pronounced my name. He made my mouth a sharp sword, and hid me in the shadow of his hand. He made me into a sharpened arrow, and concealed me in his quiver. He said to me, "You are my servant (Israel) in whom I shall be glorified"; while I was thinking, "I have toiled in vain; I have exhausted myself for nothing"; and all the while my cause was with the Lord, my reward with my God. I was honoured in the eyes of the Lord; my God was my strength. And now the Lord has spoken, he who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, to gather Israel to him: "It is not enough for you to be my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back the survivors of Israel; I will make you the light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

The first reading from Isaiah, written in the dark days of the Babylonian Exile, introduces a Servant of the Lord, formed in the womb to be the Lord's Servant and to bring light both to Israel and to the nations. It is read on this feast of the birthday of John the Baptist because he too, as the story of the annunciation to Zachariah recounts, was chosen and given a task from his mother's womb. 'Chosen from his mother's womb' does not imply that some are not, but is a way of underlining the importance of the person's task in proclaiming the Good News. Paul uses the same expression of himself and his ministry in Galatians 1:15. In the original prophecy of Isaiah are we to understand the chosen one as an individual whose mission is to bring Israel back to the Lord, or is it the nation of Israel as a whole, destined to bring the gentile nations to the Lord? In the gospels, we recognise Jesus as the Chosen One; for example, the words of the Voice at the baptism of Jesus are the opening words of the first Song of the Servant in Isaiah ("the one in whom my soul delights"). The sayings of Jesus about service – the Son of Man has come not to be served but to serve – show that he too saw himself as this Servant of the Lord.

What does it mean to be chosen from our mother's womb?

Does everyone have a calling from God, or just a few chosen ones?

Second Reading: *The Mission of John the Baptist*

Acts 13:22-26

Paul said, "God made David the king of our ancestors, of whom he approved in these words, 'I have selected David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will carry out my whole purpose.' To keep his promise, God has raised up for Israel one of David's descendants, Jesus, as Saviour, whose coming was heralded by John when he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the whole people of Israel. Before John ended his career he said, 'I am not the one you imagine me to be; that one is coming after me and I am not fit to undo his sandal.' My brothers, sons of Abraham's race, and all you who fear God, this message of salvation is meant for you."

In this reading Paul is proclaiming the Good News to the Jews of Antioch, showing how John prepared for Jesus, the Saviour of David's line. John's task was to prepare a community of repentance. This was not merely a community of people who moped over their sins, but a community of those who were prepared to change their ways and take on the new way of life of the Kingship or Sovereignty of God, symbolised by the washing away of their old way of life in the Jordan river. As God's prophet John prepared the community for Jesus and pointed out Jesus himself as the Lamb of God. Not the least notable feature about John was his wonderful humility: he insisted that Jesus, who came after him, should pass before him, that Jesus should grow greater and he himself grow less. Jesus gave him the greatest of all recognitions: 'of all the children born to women there has never been a greater than John the Baptist' (Matthew 11:11). In his fearless proclamation of the message of morality to Herod and in his death as a witness, John showed himself a true precursor of Jesus.

What do you find the most striking element in John the Baptist's mission? John prepared people for the coming of Jesus. Is this a task for me too?

“A community of those ...
prepared to change their ways.”

The Wednesday Word: *Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God*
w: www.wednesdayword.org e: info@wednesdayword.org