

Sunday, June 24, 2018

The Nativity of Saint John the Baptist (Solemnity)

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Isaiah 49:1-6

2nd Reading: Acts 13:22-26

Responsorial: Psalm 139:1-3, 13-15

Gospel: Luke 1:57-66, 80

Being Filled with the Holy Spirit and the Joy of the Lord

All were amazed. (Luke 1:63)

What do you think is the most amazing thing about John the Baptist? His uncompromising zeal for the Lord? His clear, passionate preaching? Maybe his gift of self-denial, or the humility he displayed despite his fame.

How about this: that even as a fetus, John leapt for joy in the presence of Mary and Jesus. Imagine: Here was an unborn baby, barely aware of life outside of the womb, and yet the muffled, quiet sound of Mary's greeting filled him with the Holy Spirit and caused such a dramatic reaction.

This leap may remind us of Isaac's wife, Rebecca, who also felt an unusual amount of activity from the twins in her womb. Rebecca asked the Lord why this was happening, and he told her that something spiritual and prophetic was going on inside of her (Genesis 25:20-23). King David also leaped before the Ark of the Covenant. He loved God so much he could not contain himself (2 Samuel 6:14-15). The prophet Isaiah wrote that in the age to come, when the glory of the Lord is made manifest, the lame will leap for joy (Isaiah 35:4-6).

John's leaping shows us that there is a part of us that can recognize God, regardless of what we do or who we are. It's encoded into the way he made us. This ability to recognize the Lord is not limited to unborn babies or to great saints like John. It's in all of us, and it's something that the Holy Spirit wants to bring to life so that we too can recognize Jesus more deeply—and rejoice in his presence.

So on this great feast day, let's honor John the Baptist for all that he did for Jesus and for us. John truly is one of the greatest saints of the church. But let's never forget that the relationship between John and Jesus is something each one of us can experience. We can all leap for joy as we prepare this world for the coming of Christ the King!

"Come, Lord, and fill my heart with joy."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The first reading is the second of seven “Servant of the Lord” oracles in Isaiah, which speaks prophetically of the birth and mission of Christ. It begins with these words: *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.* The reading ends with these words: *For now the LORD has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb . . . 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.*
 - In what ways has Jesus fulfilled these prophetic words from the first reading?
 - In what ways do these words also apply to you?
2. In the responsorial psalm, the psalmist speaks of how the Lord *formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb.* He goes on to say that he has been *fearfully and wonderfully made.* It ends with these words: *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.* Similar to the first reading and the responsorial psalm, there are many other Scriptures that speak of how God has formed and called each of us beginning with conception in our mother's womb. For example, Jeremiah 1:5 says these words: *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you.*
 - How would you describe how these Scriptures relate to the pro-life teachings of the Church against abortion?
 - How do these and the other Scriptures affect your own beliefs?
3. The second reading opens with these words: *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.’”* Paul goes on to describe the witness of John the Baptist with these words: *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.”*
 - In the reading David is called “a man after God's heart; he will carry out my every wish.” In what ways could these words also be applied to John the Baptist?
 - What are the obstacles in your life that can keep you from being “a man (or woman) after God's heart,” even if in a less dramatic way than David and John the Baptist? What steps can you take to overcome these obstacles?
4. In the Gospel reading, which describes the birth of John the Baptist, all the people who witnessed it “were amazed.” The reading ends with these words: *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.*
 - Why do you think the circumstances surrounding John's birth caused such a stir among the people?
 - What effect do these circumstances have on you? How is it different than those described in the reading?
5. The meditation reminds us that the joy that John the Baptist experienced in the womb of Elizabeth: “John leapt for joy in the presence of the Virgin Mary because she was carrying the Son of God.” It goes on to say that “John's joy shows us that there is a part of us that can recognize God, regardless of what we do or who we are. It's encoded into the way he made us. This ability to recognize the Lord is not limited to unborn babies or to great saints like John. It's in all of us, and it's something that the Holy Spirit wants to bring to life so that we too can recognize Jesus more deeply—and rejoice in his presence.” The meditation ends with these words: “So on this great feast day, let's honor John the Baptist for all that he did for Jesus and for us. John truly is one of the greatest saints of the church. But let's never forget that the relationship between John and Jesus is something each one of us can experience. We can all leap for joy as we prepare this world for the coming of Christ the King!”
 - The meditation tells us that “the relationship between John and Jesus is something each one of us can experience.” In what ways has this been true in your own life? Can you give specific examples?
 - What steps can you take to open yourself more to the Lord so you can experience more deeply his great love and “leap for joy as we prepare this world for the coming of Christ the King!”?
6. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for a deeper knowledge and experience of “the joy of the Lord” in your life. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

As posted on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal National Service Committee's website: www.nsc-chariscenter.org

“Come, Lord, and fill my heart with joy.”

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org) and a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org). Maurice was also the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]