

Nativity of John the Baptist

HE IS THE GREATEST MAN WHO EVER LIVED

said Jesus about his cousin John...! Today the church takes an early break from the Trinity season to learn about and give thanks for the life of John the Baptist... And since Jesus said that to his disciples we better pay close attention!!

Today's Epistle and Gospel transport us immediately to a performance of the "Messiah" and we wonder if we missed the rest of the summer and fall and moved right into the Christmas season. Relax, be rest assured the "Messiah" is a year round story and Handel borrowed substantially from the prophecy of Isaiah and St. Luke recorded the birth of John in the same detailed manner that he recorded the birth of Jesus.

Who is this man John the Baptist? Where did he come from? What did he do? Why is he so important? You will leave here today with the answers to all these questions.

First he was not the founder of the Baptist Church... he was however the first to use water as the symbolism for the washing away sins and setting everything back in the right order.

Getting everything back in the right order is critical to have a good relationship with God. John was the last prophet. He is considered to be the link between and Old and New Testaments. He fulfilled what Isaiah spoke about in the Epistle reading for today. He was a voice crying out in the wilderness. The final hope for the Jews, to prepare them for the changes that were going to happen.

I would like you to take a moment and think about that same message. Think about the words of Isaiah and what John said as he introduced Jesus to the world. Consider about how you will, if you had the chance, introduce Jesus to people who have not yet recognized him.

John was born to Elisabeth and Zechariah... Elisabeth was the cousin of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They were both pregnant at the same time with Elisabeth being about 3 months ahead of St. Mary. That, of course would make John and Jesus cousin also. They grow up together in the Judean hill country.

Today's Gospel is a dramatic accounting of Zechariah realizing that his wife, Elisabeth, has just given birth to a child who would go on to do great things... We hear him speak the

Benedictus, the canticle of Morning Prayer and the companion to the Magnificat.

Zechariah gives thanks to God for having "VISITED AND REDEEMED HIS PEOPLE" ... providing a light for those who were in darkness.

What was John like? The person we would expect as a prophet... well groomed, polite, possibly an intellectual pillar of the community in a Brooks Brother suit... someone to whom you'd seek for financial advice?

Last Wednesday, on my way to church, I was behind an elderly truck. It is being driven by a middle- aged man, who could be also mistaken for John. This truck was being held together by many religious bumper stickers. One that caught my eye read, "IF I WAS YOU, I'D TURN BACK." This man who owns this was like John, anything but conventional.

The Gospel tells us that he was more than a bit unconventional... no regular job, he ran around the country side wearing animal skins and eating whatever he could find growing wild... his symbol, found in any number of stained-glass

windows, is a beehive because he regarded wild honey as fine dining. When he came home for dinner, you could almost hear his mother, Elisabeth saying, "Don't show up in those clothes at the dinner table and please stop talking about symbolic baths in the river... a little goes a long way... you're made your point. John, you make people uncomfortable.

But John could not nor would not be stopped. He was sent from God to tell the people about the impending arrival of Jesus, he attracted huge crowds. He baptized Jesus and told the world that Jesus would take away their sins. He got arrested, put in jail and then executed on an unusual request from Herod's stepdaughter Salome. Herod thought that he put the end to the last of God's messengers. He later became terrified when Jesus began His ministry. He cried, "But I stopped all of this!!!"

It hasn't stopped... John left us a message... **HERE IS THE LAMB OF GOD... THIS IS THE ONE WHO TAKES AWAY ALL OF YOUR SINS....** What are you doing with this information????

