

Reading for the Solemnity of the Nativity of St John the Baptist

Thursday June 23rd 2022

1st Reading: Isaiah 49:1-6

The Lord called me before I was born; in my mother's womb he named me

Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." But I said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God." And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honoured in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength — he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Responsorial: from Psalm 139

R./: I praise you, for I am wonderfully made

O Lord, you search me and you know me,
you know my resting and my rising,
you discern my purpose from afar.
You mark when I walk or lie down,
all my ways lie open to you. (R./)

For it was you who created my being,
knit me together in my mother's womb.
I thank you for the wonder of my being,
for the wonders of all your creation. (R./)

Already you knew my soul,
my body held no secret from you,
when I was being fashioned in secret
and moulded in the depths of the earth. (R./)

2nd Reading: Acts 13:22-26

As background to the Gospel, Paul mentions the Baptist as herald of Christ

In those days, Paul said: God made David king of our ancestors.. In his testimony about him he said, "I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes." Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised; before his coming John had already proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his work, he said, "What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but one is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of the sandals on his feet." "My brothers, you descendants of Abraham's family, and others who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent.

Gospel Luke 1:57-66, 80

Celebration and joy at the birth of John the Baptist

The time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, 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 he appeared publicly to Israel.

Short reflection on the readings for today

John the Baptist is the only saint, after Jesus himself, whose birth is celebrated with a solemn feast. We have it on June 24th, six months before celebrating the birth of Jesus on December 25th. Recalling Jesus' birth at Christmas coincides more or less with the winter solstice. Just as the light of the sun begins to make a comeback after darkness has reached its peak, we celebrate the birth of the light of the world. The birthday of John the Baptist, in contrast, is recalled just after the summer solstice. This too is symbolic, for as the light of the sun begins to decrease after reaching its peak, we celebrate the birth of the one who said of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

This question was asked by the neighbours and relations : "What will this child turn out to be?" could be asked of any of us. It is a question that could be asked about any of us at any stage of our lives, "What will we turn out to be?," or to put the question in terms of religious faith, "What does God want us to be?" "Is there a divine purpose for our lives?" The purpose of John's life and God's purposes for all of us have much in common. Our Maker wants all of us to do what John did, to point out the Saviour, to make way for Jesus, to lead others to him by what we say and do. John the Baptist, whose birth we now celebrate, has something to teach us about how to follow our God-given calling. He was a man of quiet, the desert, and a man of prayer. We all need to find our own desert place of prayer if we are to remain true to our calling to lead others to the Lord, if we are to turn out as God wants us to.