

# SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

June 23, 2018

*First Reading – Jeremiah 1:4-10*

*Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 71:1-2, 3-4a, 5-6ab and 17*

*Second Reading – 1 Peter 1:8-12*

*Gospel – Luke 1:5-17*

**My dear people of God: Today's Solemnity of the Birth of Saint John the Baptist is held in such a high esteem by the Church that, we are not celebrating the regular Mass of the twelfth Sunday of the Ordinary Time.**

**We will hear allusions to John the Baptist, and the ministry that he had, from our first reading, though we could also say that Jesus is more alluded to in the first reading. I am just happy to reflect on the reality that John was the precursor of Jesus and that he shared in his cousin's ministry.**

**Our first reading is the second song among the four (4) "SERVANT SONGS" which Isaiah wrote from chapters 42 to 53. This "servant" sets into motion God's plans for His people. Let us take a look at those four servant songs.**

**In the first song (chapter 42, verses 1-4) Isaiah speaks about the Servant. He says it in the third person singular. This servant is Yahweh's *chosen one with whom He is well pleased, upon Whom He has placed His spirit.***

*{Brothers and sisters, this sounds like what we heard from the account of Jesus' Baptism at the Jordan from John the Baptist (Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11; Luke 3: 21; and John 1: 32-34)}. Such Servant will "bring forth justice to the nations" (chapter 42, verse 1)}.*

In the second song (chapter 49, verses 1-6), Isaiah says it in the first person singular. The Servant speaks of His mission *“to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the survivors of Israel”* ...and He declares that the Lord has spoken to me making me *“a light to the nations, that you may be my salvation to the end of the earth”* .

{*Brothers and sisters, this sounds like the prophecy of Zechariah, John’s father during the child’s circumcision. (Luke 1: 79), and of Simeon’s blessing during the presentation of the baby Jesus in the temple(Luke 2:32)*}.

My dear people of God: let us remind ourselves that the second song is our first reading today. This song talks about the vocation of the Servant of Yahweh. If Jesus is the Servant of Yahweh; if John the Baptist shared in the ministry of Jesus; if we, as baptized Christians, are called to be missionary disciples, then the first reading is talking about us. Let us therefore interiorize the first reading because it talks about who we are, it talks about our vocation. And let me say this: our vocation defines us.

In the third song (chapter 50, verse 4-9) Isaiah again says it in the first person singular. The servant is given a *well-trained tongue to teach the weary and to rouse the people* (50:4). God has given him an ear to hear (50:5). He would meet violent opposition, but *“the Lord Yahweh will help me”* (50:7, 9). *He would set his face like flint* (50:7); *he is confident that he will triumph over his foes* (50:8-9).

In the fourth song (from chapter 52, verse 13 till chapter 53, verses 1 to 12), Isaiah says it in the third person singular again. The “Suffering Servant” suffers *in behalf of the people to redeem them from their sins and their suffering*. He would *be pierced for our transgressions* and *“by his wounds we are healed”* (53:5). *“He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he didn’t open his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter..., he didn’t open his mouth”* (53:7). *“They made his grave with the wicked”* (53:9), but *“My righteous servant will justify many by knowledge of himself; and he will bear their iniquities”* (53:11).

Brothers and sisters, you are very familiar with this fourth song because you hear it every Lent.

The servant has many identities. Who is this servant? You are the servants. We are the servants. It is by Yahweh's initiative that we serve. Yahweh has appointed us to be the agents of salvation to others.

Now, let us take a look at our second reading. We heard Paul from our second reading, talking about God raising up David as king. Paul professed that *God found David, the son of Jesse, a man according to His own heart, who shall do all His wishes.* David may have deflected from the right path countless times but, his public kingly life was uniformly good; and, after he fell, his repentance was remarkable. His reign, as king, was good, obedient to God's will, unlike Saul, who proved to be perverse.

David is commended for having promoted the worship of God among the people (1 Kings 14:8, 9; 15:3-5) and contrasted with Jeroboam and Abias.

God, according to His promise, raised up Israel, and gave it Jesus the Savior. And it was John who announced the coming of Jesus. The reference here made to the precursory ministry and testimony of John shows our Lord's coming forth to exercise His ministry. John's first preaching, as a preparation for the public ministry of Jesus, included the baptism of penance to all the people of Israel.

Paul strongly stresses the chief point of his discourse: Jesus was the promised Messiah, who was to redeem the world. And John fulfilled his role honestly; he said: *I am not He whom you think me to be. But behold, there comes one after me, whose shoes of His feet I am not worthy to loose.* (Matthew 3; Luke 3:15; John 1:27).

The expression *"children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you fear God"* would refer to native Jews and converts. To all people, the word of this salvation is sent.

How do we react to the two readings? Let our hearts exult in joy as we echo our wonderful response to all of the foregoing: *I praise you, for I am wonderfully made.*

Now, let us go to the gospel. When Elizabeth bore her son, her relatives saw clearly how the Lord had shown her great mercy.

The circumcision and naming of the child showed that Zechariah and Elizabeth were law-abiding Jews (Gen 21:4; Lev 12:3). Their relatives expected them to follow the customary naming of the boy after his father Zechariah or at least the grandfather. But Elizabeth rejected the relatives desire and went her own way. The name she chose was the very name the angel gave Zechariah in verse 13.

My dear people of God, we begin to realize that when God names a child, that child is significant in His plan.

Zechariah would have been a good name. Not only was it the name of the father, but it means *"the one whom Yahweh remembers."* God had certainly remembered Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age, and He remembered Israel by sending them the long hoped-for prophet, JOHN, the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

Zechariah praised God for what He did for him. Something different and surprising was happening: things worth remembering and considering. So they wondered, "What then is this child going to be?"

Zechariah recovered his speech. Just as the angel promised in Luke 1:20, the temporary situation of silence ended with the fulfillment of God's word. We can be sure of this: if we only believe; then God will fulfill His promises.

Brothers and sisters: Luke wants us today to consider the same question. What then are we going TO BE knowing that that the Lord's hand is with us, just as His hand was with John long before he was born. What can we do for the Lord as missionary disciples?

**May God bless us always.**