

Daily Prayer

The Birth of Saint John the Baptist

Wednesday, June 23, 2021

We enter into a time of quiet. We offer to God our selves and in the silence know that God embraces us as God's very own. We offer our hopes and our concerns through our prayers and in the silence listen for God. Today we hold in our prayers the ordinary moments in life—the trials and the joys—and remember the birth of Saint John the Baptist (June 24—transferred).

We begin by saying

You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way.

Luke 1.76

The First Reading

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

A voice says, 'Cry out!'

And I said, 'What shall I cry?'

All people are grass,

their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades,

when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;

surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades;

but the word of our God will stand for ever.

Get you up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good tidings;

lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,

lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah,

'Here is your God!'

See, the Lord GOD comes with might,

and his arm rules for him;

his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd;

he will gather the lambs in his arms,

and carry them in his bosom,

and gently lead the mother sheep.

Isaiah 40.1-11

The Psalm

Show us your mercy, O Lord, *
and grant us your salvation.

I will listen to what the Lord God is saying, *
for he is speaking peace to his faithful people
and to those who turn their hearts to him.

Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him, *
that his glory may dwell in our land.

Mercy and truth have met together; *
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth shall spring up from the earth, *
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

The Lord will indeed grant prosperity, *
and our land will yield its increase.

Righteousness shall go before him, *
and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

Psalm 85.7-13

The Gospel Reading

Now 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.

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favourably on his people and
redeemed them.

He has raised up a mighty saviour for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of
old,
that we would be saved from our enemies and from the
hand of all who hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our
enemies,
might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of
death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.'

The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

Luke 1.57-80

We continue with the reflection that follows. In silence, we ask what the reading has to say to us today. Is there something in the reflection that draws us more deeply into the reading? What does God have to say to us? What do we have to ask God?

The Reflection

Steven Mackison

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them.”

These were the first words Zechariah spoke after his long silence. When Zechariah acknowledged the name God had given his son, his tongue was loosed and the first words he spoke were words of praise. In other words, for Zechariah, his miraculous release from silence was not about himself, it was about God. Like father, like son.

Today we celebrate the Birth of St. John the Baptist who is reckoned the greatest among the prophets. But did you ever ask yourself why he's the greatest? I mean, does he seem like the most likely pick, to you? When compared to the prophets that preceded him: Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Elijah, this half-naked wild man, with the fad diet, who spends his time in the desert shouting at people and dunking them in water doesn't exactly seem like a first choice candidate. Well it doesn't matter what we think, because John happened to be God's pick. Moreover, what makes John the greatest prophet, what makes any prophet worth their salt, is not what personal qualities they possess, it is what they proclaim. That is to say, you define a prophet by the content of their prophecy, by the truthfulness of their account of the reality of God's presence in the midst of the community. And since John's proclamation was to prepare the way for God coming to us in the flesh, he gets to top the list.

As a focus for our meditation consider this as well. It's not only prophets that are judged by the merits of what they proclaim, we are too. Each of us is called to live the reality of the risen Christ in our lives. And John the Baptist proclaimed that by "preparing the way" for the kingdom of God made known to us in Jesus. This king and his kingdom would be unlike anything Israel had known and Zechariah, inspired by God, understood this. He realized that his son, John, was to prepare the way for this king, not by inciting the people to insurrection, not by raising an army that this king would lead to victory over the Romans, but—in his own words—"to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins"

John, the son of Zechariah, was preparing the way for a different kind of king who would inaugurate a different kind of reign. The children of Israel were expecting a king like David, but Jesus was utterly unlike his ancestor. Jesus did not hurl stones and slay giants as did David. Rather, he has stones thrown at him and is slain by the religious and political giants of his day. Jesus did not have a crown of gold and sit upon a throne at Jerusalem in glory. Rather, he wore a crown of thorns and hung upon a cross at Calvary, only later, through that suffering and death to be glorified. The kingdom that Jesus would proclaim, the king for whom John the Baptist would prepare the way is an alternative to the kingdoms the world knew then and has known since. It is not a kingdom of autonomy brought about by force, it is a kingdom of service coaxed into being through surrender. And we are called to proclaim that kingdom in our lives.

In a sense, we are called to continue to give voice to the prophesy of Zechariah:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of

their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

These are the hopes and dreams of a father whispered in the ear of his beloved, Zechariah and John, God and us. We respond to that whispered hope by following the example of John the Baptist—by preparing the way—so that those whose lives we touch may experience the love of God as we have.

When the time is right, we conclude our time of silence with the canticle

The Canticle ~ Bless the Lord

Blessed are you, the God of our ancestors, ♦
worthy to be praised and exalted for ever.

Blessed is your holy and glorious name, ♦
worthy to be praised and exalted for ever.

Blessed are you, in your holy and glorious temple, ♦
worthy to be praised and exalted for ever.

Blessed are you who look into the depths, ♦
worthy to be praised and exalted for ever.

Blessed are you, enthroned on the cherubim, ♦
worthy to be praised and exalted for ever.

Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom, ♦
worthy to be praised and exalted for ever.

Blessed are you in the heights of heaven, ♦
worthy to be praised and exalted for ever.

The Song of the Three 29-34

We continue in prayer for those people and situations that we hold up before God (The Intercessions) and continue with the concluding collect, the Lord's prayer and the closing sentences.

The Intercessions

Let us give thanks to God,
the God of all peoples of the earth.
For the colour and forms of your creation
and our place within it,
we bring our thanks, good Lord:
your mercy endures for ever.

For our daily food,
and for those whose work and skill
bring your good gifts to us,
we bring our thanks, good Lord:
your mercy endures for ever.

For the gifts and graces inspired in human minds and hearts;
for insight and imagination,
for the skills of research
which bring healing and fulfilment to the lives of many;
we bring our thanks, good Lord:
your mercy endures for ever.

For the light and shades of the changing seasons,
and their variety and dependability;
for new life and growth out of barrenness and decay;
we bring our thanks, good Lord:
your mercy endures for ever.

For new hope and strength in our communities,
especially in your Church and among all you call to serve you,
we bring our thanks, good Lord;
your mercy endures for ever.

For all in whose lives we see
goodness, kindness, gentleness, patience and humility,
and all the fruit of the Spirit,
we bring our thanks, good Lord:
your mercy endures for ever.

For the life we have been given,
and for all those whom you have given us to share it,
we bring our thanks, good Lord:
your mercy endures for ever.

Our prayers conclude

O God,
John the Baptist proclaimed that your kingdom was close at hand,
and called us to turn away from all that keeps us far from you.
Grant us your mercy,
that we may search our souls in honesty,
repent of all that holds us back from your love
and welcome that wonderful transformation that you prepare to
work in us,
that by the power of your Spirit we too might be heralds of your
kingdom
and live in the joy of your company,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

[let us pray as our Saviour taught us,]

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

We conclude

May God grant to the world justice, truth and peace.
Amen.

Credits:

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