

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

She who is barren bore. It is of God alone. 700 years after Isaiah spoke the promise, the one who would cry in the wilderness “Prepare the way of the Lord” was born. If you can hear it, he was the Elijah who was to come.

The miracle of his nativity gives theme to our celebration this day. The Prophet was not slow in rising to his calling. Indeed he leaped into it. John first preached from the mysterious pulpit of his mother’s womb. John teaches us that every baby in a mother’s womb has a soul, and so is prenatal faith – faith before birth - possible.

The speaking of the mother of God worked faith in John through the nurturing walls of the barren womb God chose for his conception and birth. In the presence of the Christ of God yet in Mary’s womb, John leapt in Elizabeth’s womb.

So faith, and preaching, is manifest in John even before his birth. His first sermon worked to point not to himself, but to the Christ, as would all of his preaching. He came not to be the Way but to prepare the way. And by that first kinetic homily did Elizabeth believe, and she was filled at Mary’s greeting and her infant son’s preaching with the Holy Spirit.

As in the watery safety of his mother’s womb that miraculously conceived, the Divinely named Prophet preached Christ, so soon from the watery banks of the Jordan would He preach Christ, the Christ who would sanctify all water on earth by His baptism at John’s hand. Zacharias’ tongue was bound. But not so John’s. His tongue was loosed and Divinely empowered to preach the coming Messiah.

To the sinful flesh John’s preaching was more off-putting than his diet or his dress. He welcomed visitors to his soggy, rocky pulpit by calling them a brood of vipers. Visitors to John’s mission site were met not by smiling greeters and visitor’s packets, but by his coarse rebuke “Repent!” John never dumbed his ministry down or blunted his God-given message to make crass unbelievers feel welcome. He was faithful to his Divine Call. He picked up Malachi’s mantle.

What John did was preach man’s sinfulness, and the only cure for that sinfulness, Christ. He faithfully preached the Word God gave him. He preached the sermon you need to hear. He preached that you, like all men, are a sinner. He preached that you must amend your ways, that you must put away the things of the flesh, that you must repent.

And for those who would not repent, He foretold the end of mercy in the fiery wrath to come. And as the last Prophet of the Old it was his to raise bony finger and cry out “Behold the Lamb of God”, as the New was ushered in by the Incarnation of God in his cousin, Mary’s Son.

Thanks be to God, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the Lamb that preceded and followed John, the Holy, Perfect, Sinless Lamb went as was promised by

the holy prophets, who have been since the world began. The Seed was bruised. John would be martyred. But it is not John's blood that avails your salvation. It is the Blood of Christ.

And it is Christ, your Lord, who brought with Him a better baptism than John's. For John baptized with water, but John's Lord baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And that baptism, the washing of regeneration, the washing that gives forgiveness of sins and faith and God's Spirit, that washing God makes yours.

In the waters of Holy Baptism, God does what John's baptism could never do: behold - the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world takes away your sins. His shed Blood finds its fruition in your salvation.

And the Spirit that descended as a Dove anointing the Christ, the Spirit that came upon Mary, the Spirit that filled Elizabeth when John leapt inside her, the Spirit by which John preached, the Spirit that filled Zacharias at John's birth, the same Spirit that lit in fiery tongues upon the Eleven - the Spirit of God - the same Spirit fills you.

And so are you born - born from above; forgiven, born sinless, pure and holy; born again of water and Word; born of the mysterious watery womb God has chosen for your miraculous birth - the baptismal font, the womb of the Church.

John's coarse life met a violent end as his preaching of the Divine Word collided with the edge of Herod's blade. An adulterous despot drunk on lust traded John's earthly life for the fleeting gratification of his sinful desires. John suffered and died for speaking the truth, adding his blood to the crimson jewels that mark the way of the martyrs.

But the faith God gave John in Elizabeth's womb sustained John unto the end. His head was Christ, from whom no one could separate him. And so does John now live, together with the angel that prophesied his birth, together with the Mother of God whose voice elicited his first sermon.

They live with all the martyrs in the eternal presence of the enthroned Lamb of God that John preached, praying "How long, O Lord?". The Lamb answers "Surely, I am coming quickly." And His Church answers "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

As John lives, as Mary lives, as the holy martyrs live, so too will you live, dear Christian, repentant sinner, sinner made saint by the Blood of the Lamb, temple of God's Spirit, child of God invited now to eat Christ's Body and drink His Blood.

For in the Holy Eucharist the Christ that promises "Surely, I am coming quickly" comes today. You eat and drink, your sins are forgiven, your faith is made strong, and you too will live, with John, and with the Christ he preached, forever.

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people.

Luke 1:57-79

The Feast of the Nativity of St. John, 2020 A.✠ D.

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