

June 24: Birth of Saint John the Baptist

Gospel for June 24th, feast of the Birth of Saint John the Baptist, and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk* 1:57-66.80)

Now the time came for Elizabeth to be delivered, and she gave birth to a son. And her neighbors and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they would have named him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said, “Not so; he shall be called John.” And

they said to her, “None of your kindred is called by this name.” And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all marveled. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea; and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Commentary

Among the Israelites, the act of naming a child was reserved for the child's father. Thus his paternity over the newborn was recognized. So it was up to Zechariah to determine what the baby's name would be, although since he had been left mute because of his disbelief, this wasn't easy for him to do.

Saint John the Baptist's parents realized how greatly God had blessed them by sending them a child when it seemed that there was no longer any hope. The extraordinary way in which their child came into the world made clear to them that their son was a gift from the Lord. The angel had told Zechariah that his son would bring great happiness not only to his parents, but to a multitude of people: "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth" (*Lk* 1:14). John, their long-

awaited son, had a far-reaching mission: "he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God" (*Lk* 1:16).

Elizabeth and Zechariah insist on giving their child the name the angel had indicated. We can see reflected here their desire to offer that child to God. They don't want to make use of his life for their own goals. Zechariah even renounces his right to name his son after him. The most important thing for Elizabeth and her husband is that their son fulfills the mission for which he has come into the world.

When Zechariah writes the words "His name is John," his tongue was loosed and he began to praise God. We see here the joy of a generous father, who places his child in God's hand and is happy about the mission he has received.

In Saint John the Baptist's parents we see a wonderful example for all parents. God is pleased when we rejoice in the gift of the children He sends. At the same time, He invites us to respect and love "the name" He himself has given them: that is, each one's own temperament and talents, and above all their personal vocation. Parents then assist the development of their children's personality and are a great help in their effort to embrace the mission God has given them.

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