

## THE NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

*Gospel Luke 1:57-66, 80*

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.

### REFLECTION :

### PREPARING THE WAY

We are all familiar with the notion that limitations come with advancing years and we can recall the gentle excuse for not knowing where we left our keys or on going upstairs forgetting why we went up - these were senior moments. But today we celebrate a married couple for whom God lifted these limitations, Zachariah and Elizabeth. Elizabeth was beyond child-bearing age and yet the Angel Gabriel appeared to her and announced that she would give birth to a son whom she and her husband were to name John.

This child would be filled with the Holy Spirit and would eventually inaugurate the process of 'preparing a people fit for the Lord'. He would be the Messiah's herald or precursor. No wonder in Luke's narrative, 'All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, what then will this child be, for surely the hand of the Lord was with him?'

The full implications of the role of John were not understood by John or his parents at this stage. Jesus assumed the role of a disciple of John and humbly submitted to John's baptism. John's ministry was a response to his community's belief that the coming of a Saviour was imminent and that he would alleviate the pain of injustice that had engulfed them. By John's preaching and lifestyle, he would devote himself to helping others for this long overdue event.

Were a reporter at that time being interviewed, he might well have judged John's life and ministry to have been a tragic failure. John would die, beheaded on Herod's orders, without having witnessed fully to what God had sent him to do.

After years spent in the desert, John appeared on the banks of the Jordan River to proclaim a baptism of conversion to prepare the way for the Saviour, Jesus Son of David.

During his days in prison, uncertain as to what his fate might be, John had doubts about his life's work. So, he sent messengers to Jesus to ask if he really was the Messiah they had been waiting for, fearing he might be mistaken in his mission. The reassurance he received from Jesus must have warmed his heart in his final days. By the signs Jesus worked in healing so many, he showed himself to be indeed the Promised One.

'What will this child turn out to be?' people asked when John was born. A similar question may have been asked about us. Like John we were known by God before we were born, known and loved in our mother's womb. Shortly after our birth another marvel gifted most of us through the sacrament of Baptism when we began to share in God's own life and love, destined to share in eternal life and

happiness. Now we are called to decrease so that Jesus may increase in us, to bear witness to him, by the way we live our lives. Like John, we too have moments when we wonder was it all worth it. Our celebration of John's birth can help us draw strength from his heroic courage and be inspired to continue his work, enabling Christ's light to shine out more brilliantly in our world.