

Nativity of St. John the Baptist “Do Our Lives Point to Jesus?”
Fr. Frank Schuster

There is a lot of playfulness at work in the Church’s liturgical calendar. Christmas morning comes at a time when each and every day that follows there is a little more light given to our world. At least for those of us who are in the northern hemisphere, each day gets a little bit longer. The feast of the Annunciation is celebrated on March 25th, exactly nine months before Christmas morning and the birth of Jesus, but also at a time when winter has ended and spring has begun. And now we have the feast of the nativity of St. John the Baptist as summer begins. As beautiful as the days are this time of year, for each and every day that follows, there will be a little less light. The days will become a little shorter. Theologians and mystics have noticed this pattern in our liturgical calendar and connect the nativity of St. John the Baptist to his words in the Gospel of John referring to Jesus that, “He must increase and I must decrease”.

St. John the Baptist is a remarkable figure in scripture because he represents a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament in the sense that he is the last of the great prophets. St. John the Baptist is in fact the greatest of the prophets for his ministry points directly to Jesus and prepares the way for him.

Our Gospel reading this Sunday recalls the Baptist’s nativity and underscores the great hope that Elizabeth and Zechariah have for their son John. And it is beautiful, when you think about it. The celebration of John’s nativity reminds us of the joy all parents have when they welcome new life into their family. Witnessing a child being born into the world is a kin to a miracle. And when parents are entrusted by God with this new life, parents understandably have high hopes for their child’s future. What will he or she be when my child grows up? Will he be happy? Will she find joy?

The Church's playfulness of placing the nativity of St. John the Baptist during this time of year offers us a few pearls of wisdom it seems to me. First, just as there is a little less light in the day each and every day following the birth of St. John the Baptist, each and every day following our birthday, we have a little less time in our pilgrimage through life as well. This feast day invites us to consider anew, in the limited time we have in this life, how shall we live it? Shall we live it for ourselves, for self-gratification? We know that this will only lead to sorrow and loneliness because who really wants to be around people who only live for themselves? So, shall we therefore live our life only for others? This is much better than living for ourselves, but we know that living for others is also not a sure bet in life because the people we serve can very well disappoint us in the end. And so who shall we live for in the precious time that we have? Again, the words of St. John the Baptist are insightful when he says, "Jesus must increase and I must decrease". The invitation of this feast day echoes the hope held in the hearts of Elizabeth and Zechariah for their son John. Their only hope for their son John is that he would live his life in service to the Lord. And indeed, St. John the Baptist's life was not about serving himself or trying to make people happy all the time. His life was about serving God.

And so, my friends, on this feast day of the nativity of St. John the Baptist, we are offered an opportunity to take a fresh look at our lives, do an inventory, and prayerfully consider: what are the areas of my life that need to decrease so that the Lord will increase? In the moments I spend by myself, can I do so for the Lord? In the moments I spend serving others, can I do so for the Lord? In the moments I have trouble loving the people around me or even myself, can I do it for the Lord? What are the ways I can tailor my life so that my life points less to "me" and more to Jesus? These are interesting questions because, liturgical calendars and fun facts aside, the only reason why we remember St. John the Baptist at all is because his life genuinely pointed to Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life.