

Solemnity of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist
June 24, 2018
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Reflection

This past week, the elementary schools within our parish began to graduate the grade six students. On Friday, I attended the ceremony for St. James school. They began the liturgy of the word with a lantern ceremony, reminding the students (and their guests) that they are the light of the world. I talked to them about the lantern. It is made of metal and glass; identical to the others stamped out by the thousand in a factory; made to provide light. Then I compared the lantern to the students. Their bodies are made of water and other elements mixed together according to design; similar with two legs, two arms and two eyes; but different with unique immortal souls. They were made to love and serve God. Therefore, they should "let their light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:16)." Jesus says that men do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but maybe we do. If you put a lantern outside, moths and bugs hover around it. If a Christian proclaims the Gospel, it's a sign of contradiction that leads to opposition; you can feel pestered, if not persecuted. The temptation is keep quiet. In his allegory of the cave, Plato speaks about a person accustomed to darkness and then exposed to the light. They would want to turn and flee; they "would find it painful to be so haled along, and would chafe at it (Republic, 515e).

Is 49:1-6
Ps 139
Acts 13:22-26
Lk 1:57-66, 80

Easier to cover the lamp with a bushel: "can't we all just get along." John the Baptist did the opposite.

Today is the solemnity of his birth. He would lead Israel to a baptism of repentance, preparing the way for Jesus who came to save the world. "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." John the Baptist wasn't the light, but he was the last of the sparks before the lantern flared and shone. "With a mouth like a sharp sword," he challenged Israel by prophesy and condemnation. And controversy began at his birth. "They were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, 'No; he is to be called John.'" The crowd protested and turned to the father. "He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.'" His parents swayed from convention to follow the command of the angel Gabriel. It given a year before in the first spoken words of the Gospel according to Luke: "Do not be afraid, Zechari'ah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John (Lk 1:13)." Words from on high shook the people like a tremor, like a wind that loosened boats from their moorings. Zechariah could suddenly speak, "Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about...'What then will this child become?'"

Like John the Baptist, we are created by God, "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb." We're also given a mission, a vocation, a task to fulfill within God's plan of salvation. "You descendants of Abraham's family, and others who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent."