**To Prepare His Ways**

Based on [Luke 1:57-80](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk1.57-80)

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The Nativity of St. John the Baptist

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Today’s Gospel is the Nativity or Birth narrative of St. John the Baptist. **We do not pray to saints, but we do honor them.** Everyone who dies in Christ is a saint, but Festival days are reserved for those faithful saints mentioned in the New Testament, and John is the best. Christ says, “Of those born of a woman, none is greater than John the Baptist”.

3 main Birth Narratives in the bible: Moses, Jesus, and John the Baptist. John was an ascetic. He took no strong drink or wine. **He lived in the wilderness wearing a coat of camel’s hair, and ate locusts and wild honey. The austere lifestyle was commanded to him by God, just as Samson was a Nazarite.** But it is also fitting for who he was, because someone who so earnestly knows of the judgment to come upon this world, the world holds very little persuasive power. What a great weight to bear knowing the depths of sin and the miserable existence of living this life is on its own merits. He was suspicious of comfort; the very thing our society lives for. Worldly peace and comfort---he did not trust them.

John the Baptist is someone you don’t invite to a cocktail party. Doesn’t seem like a guy who could have a laugh. **But that is the guy you need at a party if people are eating, drinking and being merry right before judgment comes.** And it appears that John believed Jesus would come immediately in Judgment.

Prophets only prophesy in part (1 Cor 13:9). Every indication is that John didn’t understand the full revelation of the Messiah. By this I mean that a**pparently he thought Jesus’ first coming was to be his last coming** (Cf: Luke 7:19-20)**.** He preached of Judgment day; his disciples fasted, he preached as though there may not be a tomorrow, because when the messiah comes he will separate the wheat and the chaff, and the wheat he will gather into the barn and the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. John, it seems, thought this would happen in his lifetime, and this was shown urgency and no nonsense way of preaching.

There’s an apocryphal saying of Martin Luther’s that if he knew the world would end tomorrow, he’d plant a tree today. Good for him, but I don’t think that’s most people. Most people would, in some fashion or another try to get ready. But there is no such earthly way of getting ready for when Christ comes again**. You don’t have to set your house in order because all your worldly possessions will be destroyed; you don’t have to make sure your family is provided for and will be looked after, because Jesus is coming to set all things right and make all things new.** Jesus says, that the Last Day will be like the days of Noah, people will be eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage…until the flood came and destroyed them all.” How do you prepare for a worldwide flood? Flood insurance? Install a few more sump pumps around the house? No, you listen to the guy whose sent by God to prepare for it and spent the last 120 years building an ark. How do you prepare for judgment day? Listen to the one who was sent by God to prepare for it…John the Baptist, whose job it was to point to Jesus Christ as the way to escape God’s wrath against sin.

At the birth of John, his Father preached a prophecy. It is called the Benedicamus “Blessed be” or simply the Song of Zechariah. The first part of the prophecy is blessing God for his mercy**. The latter part is him prophesying about his son, John. “You my child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.”**

Two things about John. He was sent to prepare the way of the Lord. Noah was sent to prepare an ark for the flood; John was sent to prepare hearts for the coming of Jesus Christ. And this is through the preaching of repentance.

What a great office and purpose for John, he has the most important, most real job of anyone on earth. Preparing hearts and minds for the coming of the Lord. **How do you do that? Well the first thing is to preach about things unseen, to preach what we can only know by faith. People are more concerned about having a nice looking lawn, than about having a kind heart.** They clean their houses but their minds are dusty and stale. They can talk on the phone for hours to family and friends, but they have trouble coming up with even a couple of words to say to God in prayer. When Christ comes he’s not going to judge your lawn, or your career, or your many friendships. He’s going to judge your heart and he’s searching it to find faith, and that is believing in things not seen.

The Pharisees were the perfect examples of those who were prepared for the judgment of fellow men, but not for the judgment of God. **They did a very good job of ordering their lives and living according to their traditions.** And there is nothing wrong with that, just as there is nothing wrong with a nice lawn, but the danger is that in cultivating your garden on earth, you neglect your soul. There is no substitute for cultivating the soul.

How do you prepare the soul? That’s the second thing about John. He was a prophet who had come “to give his people knowledge of salvation, by the forgiveness of their sins.” **Salvation comes through nothing else than the forgiveness of sins. John may not have known that Jesus’ first coming was not his last.** He may not have understood that the separation of the wheat and the chaff wasn’t to happen in his lifetime. But he did know that salvation doesn’t come by our own works and purity. He did not live his austere life in order to earn his own salvation. When Jesus came he knew that sorrow over one’s sins is not enough…sins must be forgiven and taken away.

So John’s best words are words we sing every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. When he saw Jesus coming he said “Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. “Agnus Dei.” And John came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Those who specialize in judging appearances, who compare their righteousness to others, will not stand in the Judgment.

John called sinners to repentance, and saw the urgency of it. We don’t know when Christ will come again, which is why we continue Johns preaching of a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**. Every morning, every day we must search our heart, and reflect upon our sin. Public outward sins are awful, but they are not the whole story. Anger, jealousy, bitterness, spite, lust, anxiety, frustration, carelessness, these things can be hidden under a pretty veneer.** And if you don’t search your heart, no other man can do it for you. Every day, recognize your failures of the heart and repent of them, and resolve to live in purity and holiness before God. And he will accomplish this in you, by the grace he has given you in your baptism. And he will take away your sins, and offer you and give you forgiveness in the body and blood once offered on the cross for the whole world, offered to you here under bread and wine. You are forgiven, delivered from the hands of your enemies to serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all your days.”

Please bow your heads in prayer: ““Create in me a clean heart, o God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation”