



June 24, 2012 Nativity of John the Baptist

"(Zechariah) asked for a tablet and wrote, 'John is his name,' and all were amazed."—Luke 1:63

Dear Friends;

This past week we officially began the season of summer with the summer solstice. In our culture of perpetual activity, summer beckons us to slow down, relax, renew and be re-created. June 23 was traditionally celebrated as Midsummer Eve in many in the northern hemisphere. We have come to the longest day of the year. The hot days and warm evenings invite us outside, enjoy nature and contemplate the deeper meaning of our lives.

Many places traditionally combined Midsummer celebrations with the Feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist. Ritual fires and water combine in symbols that represent St John. In French Canada this evening is celebrated with bonfires lining both banks of the St Lawrence River. In San Juan, Puerto Rico which is named for the Baptist, people take a dip in the Caribbean Sea between midnight and dawn.

From now on the days will begin to shorten on our journey toward winter. This summer Nativity celebration recalls the words of John in reference to his role in relation to that of Jesus, "... I must decrease." (John 3:30)

The events around John's birth are similar to those of patriarchs, judges and prophets of the Hebrew Testament. An older couple, Zechariah (meaning 'God has remembered') and Elizabeth (God is my fullness), are told that they will have a child. Their barrenness now becomes a sign that their fertility will produce someone of significance—John. His name means "Yahweh has shown favor."

John will grow up to be the fiery Prophet who will announce the coming of the Messiah. He goes out in the desert to say that God is starting over. The people of God will be remade. And to prepare for this he demands strict adherence to the Torah (Law). To inaugurate this new beginning he baptizes in the Jordan River where tradition said that the people of God first entered the land of the Promise.

Jesus will come to join John in this movement to renew restore the people of God. He then will take it in a direction John would not have expected. Rather than the fiery prophet of destruction, Jesus will be the suffering servant of God's compassionate and healing love. But as Fr. Richard Rohr OFM has often said, we first need John's severe call to leave behind our old ways before we can re-orient ourselves to Jesus' radical call to love. The fiery prophetic way of John clears the way to starting over.

So tonight celebrate John the Baptist. Light a fire, roast marsh mellows, take a swim, take time to look at the stars and reflect on the meaning of your life. Do you need a new direction? Do you need to start over? Do you need to decrease from the cycle of perpetual busyness so the Christ who is reflected in your family and friends can increase? Remember the favor that God has shown you and like John in the womb of Elizabeth leap for joy for Jesus is near. St John the Baptist pray for us!

Peace,

Fr. Ron