

Today is the feast of the birth of John the Baptist. His birth was a wake-up call for the world. When we reflect on his story, it is a wake-up call for us today.

John was born in very unusual circumstances. Luke's gospel tells us that everybody thought his parents were too old to have children, and so it was only through the passionate prayer of his mother Elizabeth and Zechariah his father, that their wish was granted to have a child.

His coming was foretold by the angel Gabriel to John's father, and when Zechariah doubted that it might be possible, he was struck dumb by the angel, unable to speak until the birth occurred and until he showed that he accepted God's will by naming the boy John instead of Zechariah as would have been the custom.

These miracles unnerved their neighbours, woke them up and caused them to exclaim. "What then will this child become?"

We associate John with Baptism, and Baptism is the time in our lives when our parents, family and friends look upon us as we are newly baptized and often say to themselves, "What then will become of this child?"

Our faith tells us to believe that we are called to a special role by God from the moment of our conception, that our life means something from that time onward, even as John the Baptist himself showed that life is there in the womb when he jumped for joy in the presence of Jesus for the first time even though both were only in the womb's of their mothers, Mary and Elizabeth.

Yes our faith says we are called by God to fulfill our lives by fulfilling His will and our Baptism calling is for each of us to be a prophet, as John was called to be a prophet.

If you think about a prophet's life, it is typically not a very glamorous or attractive one by human standards. It is a life based on service, a thought that doesn't seem to be so popular these days. A life based also on sacrifice, another word which is definitely not popular in these days.

Are we too busy trying to serve ourselves first that we forget God made us to serve others like John the Baptist did. Are we so anxious to get what we can for ourselves first that we turn our back on the sacrifice we are called to make at the very same time that we accept the sacrifices that others have made for us without a second thought.

We accept the sacrifice of Jesus when we come here today, we accept the strength we gain from his body and blood in the Eucharist, but do we accept his will for us in return for his sacrifice or does our human pride prevent us from trying to see what God calls us to because we want to decide for ourselves.

Although John the Baptist as a prophet had his followers to be sure, he was not a very popular man with anyone of wealth and authority because his call was to repent, to turn away – and that meant giving up much of the comfortable things they had accumulated. That meant serving others and sacrificing – ooooh - and no one wanted to hear that then any more than we do today.

But that was the message of John, to wake up the world and challenge us to change the way we live, this was the message that God willed him to deliver.

This is the first week of summer. Summer is a time when we typically look to relax and let things wind down. We put ourselves first and forget about all the things we are called on to do and just take it easy, stop worrying about serving and sacrificing, there's always time for that later.

That's why today is a wake-up call that we cannot ignore if we want to truly follow our Baptismal calling and repent against a selfish way of life which ignores the plight of others and demands us to speak up and act in the face of injustice. Could we spend some of our leisure time in the service of others this summer and be refreshed in our spirit as well as our bodies.

What if John had said, "I want to be rich and successful, or an educated scholar spending my life in the library stacks, or a flowery political orator gathering power or even a rebel to raise up an army against the Romans or any other one of a number of grand and glorious occupations by human standards. But none of those dreams that John might have had as a youth would come true because instead he accepted the role God had chosen for him from the beginning.

Is this what stops us from having the courage to respond to God's call, because we fear that our lives won't add up to our dreams.

Well, what did it cost John and what was his reward? Though he may have missed the glory of the world in one form in his day, remember that moment which came when the Saviour of the world knelt before him in the Jordan and asked for the gift of Baptism from his hands.

John knew then that this was the beginning of the salvation of all the world, and John knew then that his life had been fulfilled. John didn't know that he would be remembered for all time because of what he did. What a gift that would be for us – to truly know our life had meant something.

Can we accept today that we were formed in our Mother's womb's to be God's servant - that like John we are called through our Baptism to serve and sacrifice for others.

Where have we ignored the call while we followed our own desires, where have failed to make any meaningful sacrifice while we accumulate wealth and stuff for ourselves, how have we deadened our ears to the cries of justice around us by burying our senses in television, music, videos and so much mindless entertainment that there is no room for the quiet time we need to hear the Lord.

As a challenge this week, can we take the time we were going to spend on the very next frivolous and mindless thing we had planned, the things we do to fill up our life instead of trying to fulfill our lives.

Whether it was to listen to our latest “spotify” playlist or watch “The Walking Dead” or do pointless google searches that trap us in front of the screen for hours, and just give that time to God in quiet prayer and reflection, just as John spent his time in the wilderness learning true wisdom and finding a truly fulfilling life.

The birth of John the Baptist woke up a lot of people in his time and caused them to wonder what might be, how wonderful it would be if the celebration of his birth today could reawaken us as well and cause us to wonder what might be and act on God’s will as he did.