

We celebrate the Nativity of John the Baptist; what the Church has been doing since 4th century when it put this day on the Church Calendar. Why June 24? Because of Jesus. It's always, all about Jesus. If you recall, when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, the angel Gabriel told Mary, Elizabeth was already 6 months pregnant; 6 months before Dec. 25 is June 24. The birth of John, the only birth recorded in the New Testament other than Jesus. Even more, John is foretold to come by Isaiah to prepare the coming of the Christ. And John is the one of whom our Lord said: **Among those born of women, there is none greater.** This is why the Church throughout the world pauses to praise God for John, a "miracle baby." Elizabeth was incapable of having children, also she and Zacharias too old. Impossible birth.

In the coming together of these 2 pregnant women Mary and Elizabeth, we see the coming together of the old and the new. For Elizabeth – in her old age, priestly husband, prophetic son – is an icon of the old Israel. Whereas Mary – in her youth, virginity, divine Son – is an icon of the new, everlasting Israel of God. As Sarah was the alpha mother in Israel so Elizabeth is the omega. She will give birth to the last OT prophet.

The curtain's about to close, the entire history of God's people, promises being fulfilled, all the sacrifices, all the journeys, the Old Covenant. Israel, who had, in a sense, been journeying since the days of Abraham, would finally come to their destination at the river Jordan. There will stand John, to shepherd them across the baptismal river to rest within the promised land of the Christ's holy flesh. Because of all this the infant prophet leaps for joy. And well he should, and how much more should we glorify God on the day of His visitation?

Look at John, greatest born of human parents, enduring lies, hated, jailed for speaking the truth, no one to come to his aid, murdered due to an evil girl. Not unlike most all the prophets and apostles. How difficult to see God's promises fulfilled?

It's tough to believe that God's love for you is not proved in wealth and privilege, in success. It is one of Satan's most deadly lies, that God proves His work for you by your happiness and good things happening in your home, at work and bank account -to get you to doubt God's love and care when life is hard. That's how we act. Every visit to the doctor should be a clean bill of health and no one ever causes us problems.

God's love for you -proved in His promises fulfilled; from miracle births to Jesus on the cross. His greatness -in washing you, feeding you, forgiving you. His love is proved in the quiet things in which He has embedded in His

promise: words, bread, wine, water. His love seen in His work in you, in people He places in your life; love for you to know that there is so much more that awaits you, your flesh and the flesh of a dying loved one you've held will be perfected.

For there is a kingdom the world does not know. John sees, proclaims it. It is yours. A kingdom of grace, ruled thru forgiveness. For He loves you beyond all imagination. He names you, unites you to Himself, to the Father, and Spirit, unites you to saints beside you, to saints all over this world, to the saints at rest who sing with angels. What a blessed day it will be! But not yet. We must still endure. Our time has not yet come. We must go home to celebrations and struggles. We must get more bad news from doctors. We have things to still learn and He desires you to still work in His Kingdom.

John, prophets, apostles, martyrs endured to the end. Great stories of faith, great courage against the foe. Great confession of the faith they believed. But they were no different than you. They meant well but failed often like us. Their good works were often too focused upon themselves, like you. They would be enticed by the things of this world and fail. We know that well. As they did, we too, must live daily in repentance. No matter how His children despair and fear and complain along the way, the Lord will never leave you. Has He not promised? When has He ever failed you? He will provide. He will give strength you need along the way. He will see you through. And finally, at His appointed time, He called John home. This promise, also for you.

So today, the Mission continues; the Word spreads. Confessors mocked, Martyrs killed, the world hates the Truth. And some martyrs, bleed on the inside, your faith is ridiculed, God's truth persecuted, as friends, family turn their backs in love for themselves, for the world's lies that bring only misery.

What comfort, is there for modern martyrs, men, women of conviction and truth, in your hostile world? Just this: He is with you and it will not last. As Stephen, 1st Christian martyr knows, stones will hurt you, but they do not last. What can man do to me? Beyond the shallow mocking and persecution, comes salvation, honor, glory to be revealed.

Follow the example of faith of John, prophets, apostles, martyrs. Love what they believed. Receive what they taught with joy. They gave their lives in the service of Christ, died in a foreign land that foreign people like you might know Jesus. For blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Soon the angels will sing this also of you. In the meantime, come and eat what He gives: food for suffering saints, Himself, the bread of heaven, the forgiveness of sins. This will sustain, strengthen, and comfort you.