

In our hemisphere, the Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist occurs in the week of the Summer Solstice (it just happened three days ago). Now, let us have some fun with this cosmic event, as well as its sister event, the Winter Solstice.

Summer Solstice: this is the longest day of the year and every day after June 21st, will be just a little bit shorter in daylight until we reach the Winter Solstice which is the inverse of the Summer in that it is the shortest day of light and every day thereafter becomes a little bit brighter.

These cosmic events tie into two very important events in our faith calendar as well. John the Baptist's birth, his nativity, is celebrated today. He is the only saint whose feast celebrates his birth rather than death (when the saint is fully without sin in heaven with the Creator). This is so because John was cleansed of original sin while still in Elizabeth's womb and entered this crazy world a pure and holy man from his first cry and his first soiled diaper.

And a crazy world it is. Times then, as they are even so now, were difficult. People struggled. Governments did not act in the best interest of their people always. Violence was widespread, and a certain level of intolerance willed the hearts of many. As John grew up in this world things just seemed to get darker, but John was on a mission...a mission, from God (if only I had a pair of Blues Brothers sunglasses...).

This darkness continued until the second amazing birth previously mentioned occurs. The nativity, birth, of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His birth is found next to the Winter Solstice and after which light comes back into the world physically just as Christ brought spiritual light into the world for us all every day.

Thus, Christmas season has for its object the mystery of God-become-Man and today's feast is in honor of the John the Baptist. In a sense, then, we are celebrating Christ's incarnation today. The birth of Jesus is observed on December 25 at the time of the winter solstice, while the birth of His forerunner is observed six months earlier at the time of the summer solstice. Christmas is a "light" feast; the same is true today. The popular custom centering about "St. John's Fire" stems from soundest Christian dogma and could well be given renewed attention. St. John's Fire symbolizes Christ the Light; John was a lamp that burned and shone. We should also be such a light into the world today proclaiming the love and salvation

of Christ and living out His message of peace and love to all people, all the time, no matter where they may walk from or to.

So, John had a singular mission in life, to prepare us for the arrival of our Savior. After spending his early years in proper education of the faith, as we can assume from his devote parents, John spent much time in the desert preparing himself. The idea of camel's hair clothing, eating wild honey, and bugs are images that are quite unique to John. And by age 30 John was preaching along the Jordan, telling it like it is, and baptizing his flock. John did these baptisms, as they were a symbolic act signifying sincere repentance as well as a desire to be spiritually cleansed, in order to be ready to receive Christ. The rite of baptism was so strongly emphasized by John that people began to call him "the baptizer." They also started to question if he was not the messiah himself. To that later claim, John never allowed human ego and popularity to cloud his God-given mission. He would firmly reply that he is only the messenger here to prepare the way. So humble was he that at first, he refused to baptize Christ when asked by the Lord. First, Christ was without sin and thus to baptize Him would be pointless (but Christ wanted to connect with His people and asked John to perform the rite) and John felt unworthy to even untie his shoe.

In obedience, he acquiesced and baptized Him. And when He arose from the waters of the Jordan, "the heavens opened and the Spirit as a dove descended. And there came a voice from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son, in You, I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11).

"Humility remained incorruptible even when his fame spread to Jerusalem and members of the higher priesthood came to make inquiries and to hear him. "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," [- John was known to repeat over and over] as his theme." (Lives of the Saints, John J. Crawley & Co., Inc.) Even kings listened to John but never did John shy away from his "tell it like it is" message and that eventually would lead to his execution in a bizarre birthday wish of a king's daughter.

But John the Baptizer's life and message should resonate with us still today. A holy man that lived his life as God commanded. He lived simply, honestly, and his passion for Christ burned bright in him. People from all over were caught up in his burning passion and that very passion prepared the way for yet another light, the

lite of salvation in the birth, teaching, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Take some time to meditated on the life of St. John. Look deep into your own self and truly determine if you can model your life a bit more on how John lived his. Let us all strive to be holy people. Let us all work to be of little ego and humble at heart. Let us go into this crazy upside-down world we find ourselves in with the courage of our faith to guide our ways, actions, and words, just as John did.

There was a gape in the verses we read today that was the prophesy John's father Zachariah proclaimed at the naming of his son and is often one of the scripture passages still recited in the Devine Office's morning prayers which I enjoy every day, but today, said with the largest of smiles:

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people and set them free. He has raised up for us a mighty savior, born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets he promised of old that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us. He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hands of our enemies, free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.

You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

My dear family, in the prophetic words of John the Baptist, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

AMEN