

THE BIRTH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST **(SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10TH 2006)**

Dearly beloved:

On Sunday, December 10th, we commemorate the birth of St. John the Baptist. The Church observes the birth of St. John the Baptist as a hallowed event. We have no such commemoration for any other fathers; but it is significant that we celebrate the birthdays of St. John the Baptist and of Jesus Christ. As we all know, St. John the Baptist was a Prophet and he began his ministry around age 27, wearing a leather belt and a tunic of camel hair, living off locusts and wild honey, and preaching a message of repentance to the people of Jerusalem. He converted many, and prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ. After baptizing Jesus, he stepped away and told his disciples to follow Jesus Christ. St. John appears as the boundary between the two testaments, the old and the new. As a representative of the past, he was born of aged parents and declared to be a prophet while still in his mother's womb. These are divine happenings. Through his birth, preaching and baptizing, he bore witness to the coming birth, preaching and baptism of Christ, and by his own suffering, he showed that Christ also would suffer.

We actually commemorate the birth of St. John the Baptist on June 24th. So very correctly, after six months we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on December 25th. Similarly, we also commemorate the Annunciation of the Lord, to Mary on March 25th and after nine months, we celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25th. Both these days are fixed days. According to the Liturgical calendar, we once again commemorate both the birth of St. John the Baptist and Annunciation to St. Mary, as we approach the advent season of our Lord.

Today's Holy Gospel reading is a continuation of last Sunday's reading. The first sentence in today's reading is that "Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy, and they shared her joy". Elizabeth was surrounded by many people at the time of John's birth. It was quite unusual for someone at Elizabeth's age to have a child. But, what we see is that rather than ridiculing her, they shared her joy.

"Lord, you have been gracious and merciful towards your people. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may bear witness to the joy of the gospel to those around us".

Please read the following Bible verses, in preparation for this Sunday's commemoration.

Bible readings for Sunday

(Birth of St. John the Baptist)

Before Holy Qurbana:

Genesis	-	21: 1-21
Exodus	-	2: 1-10
I Samuel	-	1: 20-28; 2: 18-26
Psalms	-	127: 1-5
Isaiah	-	62: 1-12

Holy Qurbana:

General Epistles:	I John	-	3: 1-3
Epistles of St. Paul:	Ephesians	-	6: 1-4
	Colossians	-	3: 20-21
Holy Gospel:	St. Luke	-	1: 57-80

With prayers,
Thomas Alex