

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2018

## The Birth of John the Baptist

Trinity 4

White



### Collect

Almighty God, by whose providence your servant John the Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of your Son our Saviour by the preaching of repentance: lead us to repent according to his preaching and, after his example, constantly to speak the truth, boldly to rebuke vice, and patiently to suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen**

**Acts 13:14b-26** Revised Standard Version (RSV)

### Barnabas and Saul Commissioned

13<sup>14b</sup> And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. <sup>15</sup> After the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." <sup>16</sup> So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: "Men of Israel, and you that fear God, listen. <sup>17</sup> The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. <sup>18</sup> And for about forty years he bore with<sup>[a]</sup> them in the wilderness. <sup>19</sup> And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years. <sup>20</sup> And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. <sup>21</sup> Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. <sup>22</sup> And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king; of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my

will.’ <sup>23</sup> Of this man’s posterity God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised. <sup>24</sup> Before his coming John had preached a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. <sup>25</sup> And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’ <sup>26</sup> “Brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation.

**Footnotes:** a. other ancient authorities read *cared for* (Deuteronomy 1.31).

**COMMENT:** This passage compares closely with Jesus’ inaugural preaching at Nazareth (see Luke 4:16-30), which is similarly structured: synagogue instruction on the Sabbath contrasting public reactions. When entering a town, Paul’s first visit was to the synagogue. See Acts 9:20 (Damascus); 14:1 (Iconium); 17:1-2 (Thessalonica), 17:10 (Beroea), 17:17 (Athens); 18:4 (Corinth), 18:19 (Ephesus); 19:8 (Ephesus). To Luke, Jesus came first to Jews and then to Gentiles. If Paul was dressed as a Pharisee, this would catch the attention of the local synagogue leaders and it would be natural to ask him to speak. The speech is probably not verbatim but a summary of what Paul said to an audience of Jews and Gentiles familiar with Judaism, based on speeches Luke actually heard on such occasions. The seven nations were the inhabitants of Palestine before the Israelites arrived: the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Deuteronomy. 7:1; Joshua. 3:10; 24:11). Verse 24 is the reason for the inclusion of this passage in the lections for today.. John the Baptist is clearly viewed by the earliest Christians as being part of the schema or plan of salvation, but a prophet who clearly deferred to Jesus. The Jewish Historian writing in the second half of the first century mentions John the Baptist and his popularity. On visits to Jerusalem many members of the Synagogue will have heard about John the Baptist, and his murder by Herod. The noting of this martyr in the presentation of the Christian message, adds a further stamp of approval, to the qualification that Jesus was of the Davidic line (verse 23) and therefore standing in a line of Israel’s faith leaders stretching back to Moses.

## **Luke 1:57-66, 80** English Standard Version (ESV)

### **The Birth of John the Baptist**

**1** <sup>57</sup> Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. <sup>58</sup> And her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. <sup>59</sup> And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah

after his father, <sup>60</sup> but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.”  
<sup>61</sup> And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.”  
<sup>62</sup> And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. <sup>63</sup> And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.”  
And they all wondered. <sup>64</sup> And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. <sup>65</sup> And fear came on all their neighbours. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, <sup>66</sup> and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

<sup>80</sup> And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

**COMMENT:** Elizabeth is beyond child-bearing years; plus, she has been barren. At this stage in their lives their pregnancy is completely unexpected. The mysterious grace of this birth in their old age proclaims that this child and his life-project are the work of God. There is no human explanation for what is happening to them. There is a tradition in many families that the first born son takes on the name of his father. Here Zechariah breaks with what would have been a long held tradition in the family, having been bidden in a vision by the Archangel Gabriel (Luke 1:11). The Lord makes him unable to speak for the duration of the pregnancy. (Some wives might suggest that God should do that more regularly.) Zechariah is a man of faith, described in Luke’s Gospel as “righteous in the eyes of God.” Yet, his lack of faith in this particular offer from the Lord brings about this unusual chastisement. This old couple had become a family of three, and they recognised that this child would have a very special place in God’s plan. “You my child shall be called the prophet of the Most High.”

**Psalm 85: 8-14** *Ostende nobis, Domine* Grail Psalter

**℟ Let us see, O Lord, your mercy, and give us your saving help.**

<sup>8</sup> Let us see, O Lord, your mercy  
and give us your saving help. **℟**

<sup>9</sup> I will hear what the Lord God has to say,  
a voice that speaks of peace,  
peace for his people and his friends  
and those who turn to him in their hearts.

<sup>10</sup> His help is near for those who fear him  
and his glory will dwell in our land. **℟**

<sup>11</sup> Mercy and faithfulness have met;  
justice and peace have embraced.

<sup>12</sup> Faithfulness shall spring from the earth  
and justice look down from heaven.

**℟ Let us see, O Lord, your mercy, and give us your saving help.**

<sup>13</sup> The Lord will make us prosper  
and our earth shall yield its fruit.

<sup>14</sup> Justice shall march before him  
and peace shall follow his steps. **℟**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit,  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.**

**COMMENT:** With this beautiful lament the psalmist pleads for God's mercy and justice. In curious juxtaposition to the foregoing prophecy, it presents a very hopeful attitude. It voices sincere humility and asks for salvation on the basis of God's past graciousness.

### **Short Preface**

And now we give you thanks that your glory is revealed in St John the Baptist and all the saints. In their lives you have given us an example of faithfulness to Christ. In their holiness we find encouragement and hope. In our communion with them we share the unity of your kingdom.

### **Post Communion**

Merciful Lord, whose prophet John the Baptist proclaimed your Son as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world: grant that we who in this sacrament have known your forgiveness and your life-giving love may ever tell of your mercy and your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### **Blessing**

God give you grace to follow his saints in faith and hope and love; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen.**