

Wednesday June 24th, Feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the advice from the government and the medics about what we should be doing in this time of crisis.

And I trust everyone continues to pray for all our needs at this time.

So today we celebrate the Birthday of John the Baptist. John's birth was quite an event. Whilst praying in the Holy of Holies, the most sacred part of the Temple, a great honour for Zechariah, an angel appeared to him, saying, *'Don't be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You will call his name John.'* Back then, most first born sons were named after their fathers, so when Zechariah was told to name this special baby 'John,' that was unusual, but the angel went on to say, *'...he will be great before the Lord.'* His greatness, the angel said, would be because God had a special job for John. As the angel described how special the child would be, Zechariah had doubts, so the angel gave Zechariah a sign. Zechariah wouldn't be able to speak until the special baby was born. His silence would be a reminder of his doubt. When Elizabeth gave birth to, all of Zechariah's doubt was gone. When it was time to name the child, everyone expected the parents to name him Zechariah, so when they wrote that *'his name is John,'* everyone was very surprised. But they were even more surprised when Zechariah's tongue was loosed, and he was able to talk again. Zechariah said, *'And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways...'* John became the last and greatest of the prophets, and, as forerunner of the Saviour, he prepared for the coming of Christ. He was the greatest of the prophets because he could actually physically point to the Christ and say, *'Look, there is the Lamb of God.'* Today's feast dates from the fourth century and at one time was preceded by a day of fasting. St Augustine and some other theologians saw something symbolic in the fact that John was born in the summer when the days were getting shorter and Jesus in the winter when the days were getting longer, a reference to John saying *'I must diminish so that the Christ may increase.'* Today's Gospel gives us the story of John's birth, Luke 1:57-66,80, whilst the second reading today gives us a speech from Paul in the Acts of the Apostles where he makes reference to John, *'God has raised up Jesus... whose coming was heralded by John when he proclaimed a baptism of repentance... Brothers, this message of salvation is meant for you.'*

*Lord, holy Father,
in your Son's precursor, Saint John the Baptist,
we praise your great glory,
for you consecrated him for a singular honour*

*among those born of women.
His birth brought great rejoicing;
even in his womb he leapt for joy
at the coming of human salvation.
He alone of all the prophets
pointed out the Lamb of redemption.
And to make holy the flowing waters,
he baptised the very author of Baptism,
and was privileged to bear him supreme witness
by the shedding of his blood.
Finding joy in the nativity of St. John the Baptist,
may your Church know as the author of her rebirth
the Christ, whose coming John foretold,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.*

Let today's hymn celebrate the message of John the Baptist as we sing 'On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2_30G2fJmU

Looking up the Hebrew meaning of the names of the family of John the Baptist is rather lovely: John means 'Graced by God', Zechariah means 'Remembered by God' and Elizabeth means 'God is My Witness.' Don't forget that while we have been in lockdown we have not been able to have any baptisms, so let us look forward to when we can once again baptise our children, and adults, in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and pray,

*May God grant you always
A sunbeam to warm you
A moonbeam to charm you
A sheltering angel so nothing can harm you
Laughter to cheer you
Faithful friends near you
And whenever you pray, Heaven to hear you.*

And I think that's a lovely prayer poem, and not just for baptisms!

I'm sure you will have heard that it has been announced that Churches will be able to open for public services from the early July. As yet I've received no indication of how this is going to take place, and hopefully we will get some guidance from the diocese – which has been notably lacking over the last three months. I will keep you posted with anything I hear. Hopefully it is all a step in the right direction.

I've been having great fun recording my little one minute video prayers for the children here at St. Bernadette's and Holy Family. If you wish to take a look some of them are being put up on the faith page of St. Bernadette's school website, which also publishes this message. It's so good that faith is at the heart of our school, and is really carrying on the work of John the Baptist, pointing our young families to Christ. We are very blessed.

Over in Hong Kong my brother's school has now closed for the summer holidays. After a socially distanced graduation celebration, they concluded with an awards ceremony broadcast on the YouTube with cardboard cut-outs of the children – as you can see in the attached pic. I also received a late entry into the Tobias picture competition, which deserves a look! Well done!

Please pray for the repose of the soul of Betty Wallace, whose funeral I will be celebrating at Carleton Crematorium and Poulton New Cemetery this afternoon. *May her soul, and the souls of the faithful departed, rest in peace. Amen.*

It looks like it's going to be another beautiful day, so whatever you are getting up to, enjoy the sunshine, and the fact that we seem to grow ever nearer to restrictions being lifted for us to come together as our community.

Mass for the Twelfth Sunday of the Year is available on the YouTube at

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PN0e_G6n4AE&feature=youtu.be

The official link for the Mass Sheet is

https://www.rpbooks.co.uk/uploads/www.rpbooks.co.uk/14_12inOrdinaryTimeA.pdf

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed, though the building is, most of the time. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.

