

ST. JOHN BAPTIST/IV TRINITY 2018

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ISAIAH 40.1-11 ST. LUKE 1.57-80



One day a priest named Zechariah was busy doing his work in the Temple. It was his task to burn incense at the Altar that day.

Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, loved God and always tried to live according to his laws. They both wanted children but Elizabeth was never able to get pregnant.

While Zechariah was performing his priestly duties the Archangel Gabriel paid him a visit and announced God had heard his prayers...he told Zechariah he was bringing wonderful news that would make him and many others happy...his wife Elizabeth would become pregnant and give birth to a son.

Gabriel went on to tell Zechariah...

...“...You are to name him John...he will go ahead of the Lord, strong and mighty like the prophet Elijah...he will get the Lord’s people ready for him.”

Instead of jumping for joy at the news he was about to become a father...Zechariah asked for proof the news was true. Bad move on Zechariah’s part. Gabriel told Zechariah because he didn’t believe the news...he would be unable to speak until after his son was born. Luke doesn’t record Elizabeth’s reaction to her husband’s sudden silence...at least she would get the last word in for nine months.

Today’s Gospel picks up the story from the time Elizabeth gives birth to the son Gabriel promised would be God’s messenger. It was customary when it came time to circumcise a boy to name him after the father or another male relative...something like John Zechariahson. Elizabeth, however, said his name was to be John. Zechariah, still unable to speak, wrote down on some paper that his name is John!

Zechariah was now able to speak again. Filled with the Holy Spirit he begins to praise God in the prophetic message that has come down to us as one of our greatest treasures...the Cantic from Morning Prayer called the **Benedictus**...meaning simply **Blessed!**

Zechariah first prophesizes about Jesus...

...“Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel...he has provided for us a mighty Savior, a descendent of his servant David.”

He then prophesizes about the role his own son, John, will have...

...“You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High God. You will go ahead of the Lord to prepare his road for him, to tell his people they will be saved by having their sins forgiven.”

The **Benedictus** reminds us that it is God’s nature to show mercy and forgiveness; through Jesus we are led out of darkness and death into light and life...and giving us a peace an often confused and mixed up world can’t possibly give. The **Benedictus** is often read at graveside services...reminding us death does not mean extinction.

John the Baptist is the bridge between the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah and their fulfillment in and through the life and work of Jesus. He is the last of the Old Testament line of prophets... the voice crying in the wilderness to make a straight path for our God.

The role of John the Baptist as the forerunner...the one who came before...to point the way to Jesus...is a pivotal role. He is a key player in the readings for the Third and Fourth Sundays in Advent preparing us for Jesus’ birth and the Second Sunday after the Epiphany on which John identified Jesus as God’s Lamb...freeing us from sin.

Gabriel brought startling good news to Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a son named John who would get people ready to receive Jesus. Let’s pay attention to John’s message...make the path Jesus takes to us straight. When we do this...it becomes our straight path to him.

