

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint  
John the Baptist  
June 24, 2018  
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The Solemnity of the Nativity of St John the Baptist does not fall on a Sunday very often. June 24<sup>th</sup> lands on Sunday only occasionally. But St John is no stranger to us. We hear about the Lord's cousin at other times of the year, and especially during the Advent season. St John also figures prominently in early January when we commemorate the Baptism of Our Lord, and again whenever the lovely account of the Visitation of Our Lady to St Elizabeth is told.

Today commemorates *the nativity* of St John. Holy Church provides celebrations for only three nativities: those of Our Lord, Our Lady, and John the Baptist. That puts St John in exalted company indeed! Many books describing the lives of the saints devote more pages to St John than to any other church figures save Our Lady. And there is indeed much to say about John the Baptist.

John was *and is* preeminently the one who prepares the way for the Lord. Of course there have been and are many other people doing that. The Old Testament prophets had prepared the way, and had told men about the Lord Who was to come. John the Baptist, however, is different. He showed the Jews Our Lord Jesus present among them. John was the first to point to a man and declare, "Behold the Lamb of God." We use John's words in every Mass when the priest invites the faithful to communion. John the Baptist is still preparing the way for the Lord.

Even that is only a sign of the greatness which sets John the Baptist apart from everybody else in Christian history save Our Blessed Mother. That John is privileged to show Christ to others was the *result*, not the cause, of his greatness. Almighty God marked out John the Baptist for Himself, in an unparalleled way. The Lord consecrated John even before he was born. And that is what takes us to the heart of the matter about John.

Go back with me to that lovely account of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. In the most mysterious part of that visit, the unborn Jesus, alive in Mary, sanctified John. We are told John, in his own mother's womb, was filled with the Holy Ghost. From that moment, and *all his life*, John rejoiced at the Lord's voice. From that moment at the Visitation there was a strange affinity between John and the

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Lord Jesus. We can all it strange because unique and mysterious and wonderful. John could not help thrilling at the Lord's Presence.

These cousins were six months apart in age. That is why we observe today's feast six months before Christmas. One might suppose these boys grew up together. But although Scripture provides no warrant for such a thought, the popular imagination puts Jesus and John in the same playpen! There are many famous paintings of Mary and Elizabeth with the two chubby little boys on their laps.

Even when the New Testament tells us St John grew up in the desert we might assume, and perhaps rightly, these two young men stayed in touch,. But if that happened, Our Lord did not reveal His Deity to His cousin. John the Baptist himself tells us he did not know Christ until he saw the Holy Dove descend upon Jesus at His Baptism.

That is God's way. John the Baptist, with all his considerable gifts and graces, and of whom Our Lord's verdict was, "No one was greater than John" was still allowed to walk by faith and learn slowly. In the desert, where none could speak to him except God, where he was not distracted from God by any creature, here, slowly, little by little, divine truth came to him through heart and conscience.

You and I must not be surprised when Almighty God leaves us to find the answers to spiritual questions through our quiet time, meditations, retreats, repeated Bible reading, all of it a slowly ripening spiritual experience. Our Lord Jesus did not give a private revelation to His singularly-graced cousin John. Neither should we expect or demand this to happen for us!

Our souls will develop when we walk by faith. Remember St John the Baptist, in his obscure life of simple obedience, prayer, and self-denial, came to such a great holiness he was the Divine choice to show Christ's Presence, to baptize God Incarnate, and to reveal the Holy Trinity to the world. Such is God's way with souls. Such is the recipe we too must follow.