

In Nomine Iesu

The Nativity of St. John the Baptist/ Third Sunday after Trinity

Our holy calling and the call of the Holy One - Luke 1:67-80

Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:, “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messenger of the Covenant whose way John prepared, dear fellow redeemed:

There were 400 years of silence from Malachi to John the Baptist. Then an angel, Gabriel, appears to one of the many priests of Israel as he is carrying out his temple duties. Zechariah was the priest. He and his wife, Elizabeth, had no children. But the angel who appeared to him in the holy place of the temple as he prepared the altar of incense told him that the time had come, not simply for him and Elizabeth to have a child, but the time of God's silence was about to end. Gabriel said, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,'* and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:13-17)

But Zechariah had his doubts. So, the silence would last a little longer ... until the 8th day after John's birth. The command God gave Israel through Moses was that every male child born to Israel be circumcised on the 8th day of his life. It became customary that parents would also give the child his name that day. For more than nine months Zechariah had silently contemplated the message of Gabriel. For nine months he had watched as Elizabeth grew in size as her pregnancy progressed. He watched in

silence as his doubt were taken away, as the impossible became reality. When it was time to name the child, all their friends and neighbors anticipated that he would bear his father's name, Zechariah. But Elizabeth said, "No, he shall be called John." (Luke 1:60)

The relatives, friends, and neighbors all protested. And, so, they turned to the long silent Zechariah and asked if this was to be. Since he could not speak, Zechariah asked for a writing tablet, and simply wrote, "His name is John." And with that he began to speak, and to tell his relatives, friends, and neighbors all that the angel had said, all that happened to him that day in the temple, and, most importantly, all that he had been meditating about in the silence of the last nine months. Among the torrent of stored up words and thoughts that poured from his mouth that day were words that were not his. No, these are the first words God Himself has spoken to Israel in four hundred years:

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the

Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (vv. 68-79)

When John had grown to manhood and at last appeared to Israel as the prophet of God, the messenger to prepare the way of the Savior, no one doubted that he was a prophet. There was something about the man in a camel’s hair coat, who subsisted on locusts and honey, and cried out in the wilderness: “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!” The prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Malachi, told everyone who John was. The questions of the temple authorities were not about his calling as prophet, or whether his preaching conformed to the teaching of the prophets before him. This was not in doubt. No, they wanted to know: Are you the messenger? Is the talk that began that day that your father Zechariah first wrote your name thirty years ago really true? What do you say?

He did not say, “I am John, miracle of baby of Zechariah and Elizabeth,” or “I am the forerunner promised through Isaiah,” though he would admit to that later. His immediate response to the question, “Who are you?” was “I am not the Christ.” I don’t how many times in my life the question has been put to me, “Who are you?” Whether on the telephone, in a store, in a hospital room as the fear of impending death hangs heavy and unspoken in the air, I’ve never been tempted to say, “I am not the Christ.” It

isn't the first definition of myself that comes to mind when asked who I am. Nor do I think it would be the first thing that comes to your mind when asked. But it was for John. It was the first answer that came into his mind, for he was the greatest of prophets, and rightly understood that nothing else matters save the Christ and His calling before God, that is, to be the Savior of the world.

Dear friends in Christ, we have celebrated Mothers Day and Fathers Day, as we do every year. We have noted birthdays and anniversaries, gone to graduations and weddings. We've witnessed the recognition of work well done at work, whether our own or that of a co-worker. We have witnessed baptisms, confirmations, and funerals in the church. All of these pertain to our calling, our vocation before God. All are important. All define who we are. All help us to understand what it is that God has called us to do in this life as his people. Together all these things define our calling, our divine vocation. Through us God desires to work, to bless and bring good things to those around us. Through us as we faithfully carry out our calling, our vocation, God would have us be ready always to give answer to the hope that is in us, the hope we have of salvation and life everlasting for the sake of Jesus Christ. We have not given such words as Zechariah spoke that day, words beautiful and flawless, words that came straight from heaven untarnished by any lack of understanding on our part.

But we will be given words to say. That is why we come to church, hear sermons, study the Scriptures, sing the hymns, repeat the words of the liturgy that we know so

well. Here we are being comforted with the grace and forgiveness of God, with the knowledge of who the Savior is, and why we can be confident in Him. And we are also being prepared to open our mouths and speak, even as Zechariah did. We are being told by God, what is the nature of our hope and who did what we cannot do, that is, save us from our sins. Here we are taught, yes, about the importance of our own calling, our duties as fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, sons and daughters, employers and employees. We are taught how important it is that we do these things faithfully. But above all we are being taught that only One has been called to be Savior of the world, Savior of each and everyone in the world. Only One is the Christ. Only One can save. And He has done all things well.

+++

Who are you? You are not the Christ! No, the Son of God and Son of Mary is. His office is not yours. His duty is not yours. His vocation is not yours. He has done all for you. Your calling is to live out your life here on earth according to God's will, much as faithful Zechariah and Elizabeth. Like them and like John, you are not the Christ. You cannot save yourself. But you are His by faith. Receive what He gives to you, receive what He has earned with His life and His death: His righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. Receive all His blessings in humble awe and silent thanksgiving. And then, as Zechariah once did, be ready for the day when you too are called on to testify of Him who was called from eternity to be your Savior.

Who are you? You are not the Christ. Thanks be to God.
Jesus Christ is! Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria