

# The Minor Festivals of the Church Year

## The Nativity of John the Baptist - June 24th

June 24<sup>th</sup> is exactly 6 months before December 24<sup>th</sup>, the celebration of Jesus' birth at Christmas. When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary she would conceive a Son, Elizabeth was already 6 months pregnant with John the Baptist. John the Baptist was 6 months older than Jesus, as they both were 30 years old when they began their respective ministries. Jesus' ministry as the Savior of the world, and John's ministry to prepare the way before Jesus, the Savior of the world.

John's ministry was to be a "harbinger" (*one who announces the coming of another person*), in this case John was to be an announcer of the coming Jesus. In the last prophetic book of the Bible, where the Old Testament ends, the prophet Malachi speaks to Israel saying, "*See I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come*" (*Malachi 3:1*). From that time, the people of Israel waited for the coming of the harbinger knowing the Savior would be close behind.

The New Testament Gospel begins with the announcement of John's birth. The angel Gabriel came to Zachariah, a priest in the temple, with the news that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son, who would be the forerunner of Christ. At their son's birth is when Zachariah gave him the name "John" meaning *God has been gracious, or God has shown favor*. It was a name befitting of John as he would go on to declare the grace and favor of God in the sending of Jesus, the promised Messiah and Christ.

John would become known as John the Baptist for the baptisms he would perform in the Jordan River. John's baptizing was a call to repentance for the nation of Israel. A call to empty themselves of their sins that the coming Savior might fill them with forgiveness and salvation. "*I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire*" (*Luke 3:16*). John's great ministry was to point God's people to Christ. What an awesome privilege as John not only was sent to prepare the way for Jesus but also had the privilege of baptizing Jesus marking the beginning of his earthly ministry, Jesus declared, "*of all those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist*" (*Matthew 1:11*).

In Christian tradition, we celebrate the *Minor Festival: The Nativity of John the Baptist* on June 24<sup>th</sup>, not only because it is 6 months before Jesus' birth but also remembering John's words in his connection with Christ, "*He must become greater, I must become less*" (*John 3:30*). June is the time of the Summer solstice, the longest daylight hours of the year. After June the hours of daylight decrease, but what increases is the anticipation of Christ's birth leading into December.

Today we thank the Lord for the birth of John the Baptist, his special servant who brought the good news of the Savior's coming. May we continue in the spirit of John the Baptist to everyday declare the praises of God in the sending of his Son, our Savior. As one of the early church fathers, Augustine, stated, "John was a voice that lasted only for a time; Christ, the Word in the beginning, is eternal."

**Read....Luke 1:1-25; 3:1-20** as today's Scripture Lesson.

Blessings to you and your families,

Pastor Matthew Guse