

## **Weekend Homily for 2nd Weekend of Advent—Dec. 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

### **Deacon Jim Trzinski**

This weekend, as we celebrate community weekend with cookies following the Saturday Masses and donuts following the Sunday Masses, we will honor St. John the Baptist by placing wild honey and locusts in our treats!! -----Just Kidding

Over the next two weekends, we will hear about some of the early ministry life of St. John the Baptist and his work as being the precursor of the Lord. The scriptures for this weekend point out that God sends a prophet as “A voice crying out in the desert to make straight his paths”

The scriptures do not mention many details about the early years of John the Baptist. We know that he was the son of Zachariah and Elizabeth, they conceived John very late in life and he was the cousin of Jesus. The scriptures this weekend begin with St. John the Baptist in the desert wilderness wearing a shirt of camel hair and eating wild honey and locusts.

But what led him out into the desert in the first place? I, along with the homiletics group, were intrigued with that question and so I did a little research to find out. I found that certain private revelations to a holy Spanish nun may give us insight into John’s early life.

In the 17th century, the Franciscan nun Venerable Maria de Jesus de Ágreda wrote of several mystical visits that the Blessed Mother paid to her. In these visits, the Blessed Mother’s narrative encompassed several Biblical names, including John the Baptist.

After the Holy Family received word of Herod’s plan to murder the children of Bethlehem, the Blessed Mother sent an angel to her cousin Elizabeth, warning her to flee with John into safety.

Elizabeth took her son—who was less than a year old—into the desert. Maria Ágreda writes: “For on account of the warning of the angel, and knowing of the cruel disposition of Herod, [Elizabeth] had resolved to flee to the desert with her child and live there in the company of wild beasts rather than within the dangerous reach of Herod.”

John was only four years old when Elizabeth passed away. God looked after His greatest prophet “[The Blessed Mother] sent to him every day his sustenance, until he was of sufficient age to provide for his living by his own labors and exertions in gathering herbs, roots, and woodland honey.” —Ven. Maria de Ágreda. There was a group called the Essenes, who were content to live ascetic lives of manual labor in seclusion in the desert area that may have taken part in his upbringing.

John the Baptist's father Zechariah was believe to be killed by Herod's soldiers for refusing to divulge the whereabouts of his son during the massacre of the innocent.

So that shares an insight why John was out in the desert, but more importantly we need to examine the message that John was sent to deliver.

The First Reading from Isaiah and the Gospel almost give a word for word description of his work, *Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way.*

*A voice of one crying out in the desert: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”*

This was certainly John's calling in his role of a prophet of Jesus. To teach people the path of repentance in their life as they prepare for the coming of the savior. In some ways when we look at John's teaching as it is written, we read that he taught in a very direct way. Yet, I believe that John's message had an underlying theme of bringing comfort to the people in assuring them that a Savior was coming and that they needed to prepare their hearts for that coming.

"Comfort", the word that appears in the first reading from Isaiah today. John comforted his followers of the assurance of a savior but then he was very direct in pointing out the challenges and the situations in his follower's life that they needed to change to be completely open to the Messiah, Jesus.

We need to learn from John's approach and heed the words of first bringing comfort when we approach people in our lives. An example might include how doctors welcome their patients into their office and greet them and assures them of their personal care, but eventually they point out what needs to be done to heal us.

We are all called to be prophets of Christ through our baptism and help others to be open to Jesus in their lives. There is a prayer that those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours pray each morning as a reminder of John the Baptist's mission and our mission as well. It is called the canticle of Zachariah and many believe it was a prayer that Zechariah shared as he held the infant John in his arms:

*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; for he has come to his people and set them free.*

*He has raised up for us a mighty savior, born of the house of his servant David.*

*Through his holy prophets he promised of old that he would save us from our enemies, and from the hands of all who hate us.*

*He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.*

*This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hand of our enemies, free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.*

*You, child, shall be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by forgiveness of their sins.*

*In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

I often visualize Jesus holding me in his arms and asking me to do the same thing, to help people draw closer to him with the comfort and love that he wishes to bring to all of us.

So I ask you to think about that this week. What is Jesus asking me to do in order to prepare his way, not only in my life but for those around me? How can I bring comfort through that message?

For we too are: *"Called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way."*

Take some time in prayer this week to ask the Lord how he is calling you to prepare the way of the Lord during this Advent season!!      *God Bless—Deacon Jim*