

THE NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

CYCLE C

Isaiah 49: 1-6
Acts 13: 22-26
Luke 1:57-66

(An unlit candle and a bible open to this week's gospel rest on a table in the gathering place)

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit and the community joins in singing, "Here I Am Lord," #373. Following the song, a member reads the reflection that follows.)

Leader: Once you know that you and the Father are one you can take some risks. You don't need to be the perfect little boy or girl all the time, you don't need to be the pleaser of the system, because your Father has named you. Isn't that what happened to Jesus in the desert? At thirty years of age, he heard his name and he went out from that point with great determination and self-assurance.

The place within is your soul. It is where you have heard your name spoken, that spiritual name, that sense of yourself. That place within is where you have heard yourself believed in and affirmed, that place where God has given the divine name and self to you, that place where all your names are as one.

Richard Rohr and John Bookser Feister, **Called by Name from A Man's Approach to God**; *Radical Grace – Daily Meditations* by Richard Rohr, (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1995)

Sisters and brothers, let us listen in the depths of our souls. Listen for God to speak to you by name.

(The community pauses for an extended time of silence.)

COMMENTARY

John had a calling in life. He had been destined by God to be the herald of Christ. He fulfilled this call. But how did he recognize God's purpose for him or know what gifts he had to accomplish this mission? There had to be a period of uncertainty, of not knowing what he was to do. Listening to the story of John we might think his life was one straight line, never deviating, never off course. Like the rest of us, however, he probably had some false starts, occasionally going off in the wrong direction. But propelled by a basic fidelity to God, he left the security of his family and community to live in the desert eating locusts and honey. Through this austerity he was able to focus on and listen to the call of God.

We too are called. We have a purpose. We are challenged to identify God's plan for us. Again and again, we need to find our quiet place and reflect on God's will for us and how we can be faithful to that call. More than likely this will not be a desert experience where we eat locusts and honey. But probably we also need to find a way to simplify our lives and shed our concern with so many inconsequential things pressing on us. In the midst of our busy and noisy world, we need to find a place and make time where we experience the peace of Christ and understand better our gifts and our call from God.

Making the effort to recognize Christ's challenge is the first step to understanding God's will for our lives. When we embrace God's invitation, like John did, we may discover that we have not always embarked on an easy road or the carefree way. By walking this road faithfully, however, we will have surrendered to God and been true to our deepest selves.

Like John, our ultimate challenge is to prepare the way for Christ and to recognize his coming into our lives and circumstances. With the Spirit in our midst and in our hearts, we have been given a remarkable gift to be able to know God's love for us and of feeling God's presence in our lives. We need to share that gift and make available the light of Christ to anyone who would see.

We are made in the image and likeness of God and are, therefore, God-like, all of us. We need to give witness to this in the way we live our lives, by the extraordinary respect we show for each other. When we reflect on God's values in our lives and when we treat each other with profound respect, we prepare the way for others to encounter God in their hearts and lives.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ When recently have you felt called by God? How have you responded?
- ◆ What does *preparing the way for Christ* mean for you? Who needs you to help prepare the way for them?
- ◆ What do you need to simplify in your life to make more room for God in your heart?
- ◆ Where do you hear the call of God in your life circumstances these days?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week in some quiet place for reflection and prayer. Listen for God to call you by name.
- ◆ Made in the image and likeness of God, we are called to treat each other with respect. Be deliberate this week about treating with respect the strangers who cross your path.
- ◆ Visit hungersite.com to support an effort to donate food free to the hungry of the world. You can click once a day to insure a donation of food. You can learn more at this site about the challenge of world hunger.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader calls the community to a time of quiet reflection. After a few minutes, the community prays as follows.)

Leader: Almighty Father, you are lavish in bestowing all your gifts and we give you thanks for the favors you have given to us. In your goodness you have favored us and kept us safe in the past. We ask that you continue to protect us and to shelter us in the shadow of your wings. We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

Leader: May God the Father, with the Son and the Holy Spirit, who has shown us such great mercy, be praised and blessed forever and ever.

All: Amen.

The Book of Blessings, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989)

(The community joins hands and prays the Lord's Prayer. The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.)