

For groups using the Gospel Centered Format

THE NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

June 24, 2018 B

(Before starting, allow a few minutes for the members to exchange greetings, then call the group together to prayer.)

Facilitator: Let us take a minute to consciously place ourselves in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.

(Pause for a minute.)

(Play a religious song if you are able to do so.)

Opening prayer: *God our Father, the voice of John the Baptist challenges us to repentance and points the way to Christ, the Lord. Open our ears to his message, and free our hearts to turn from sin and receive the life of the Gospel. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

*(Prior to your meeting you are encouraged to read the first and second readings and the commentary on them. After the opening prayer, go to the section titled **Proclamation of the Gospel**, i.e., skip the first and second readings as well as the commentaries.)*

FIRST READING: Isaiah 49:1-6

In the book of Isaiah, there are four “Suffering Servant Song”, passages that refer to a mysterious person. In the early Church, the servant was often identified with Jesus. For this feast, we can identify this servant-person with John the Baptist who is also a very special servant of God.

Like John the Baptist, this servant was called from the moment of his conception. The servant is set aside to carry out a special mission. He is endowed with an eloquence as piercing as a sharp-edged sword or a polished arrow. His being “concealed in the shadow of God’s arm” may indicate divine protection.

The servant bears his soul with us when he says that he believes he has “toiled in vain”. But God reassures him that his “reward or recompense is with God.” With a deep sense that God is his strength, the servant believes that he will be used to restore Israel and bring light to the nations.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 139

These verses are a beautiful reflection on God as always being with us from the moment he knits us together in our mother’s womb.

SECOND READING: Acts 13:22-26

This reading is a part of a larger speech in which Paul emphasizes all the interventions God undertook for

Israel. The actions of Jesus are, of course, central to God’s entire saving plan.

In these verses, Paul indicates how special David was to God. “He was a man after God’s own heart”. Jesus, a descendent of David, is heralded by John the Baptist who preaches a “baptism of repentance,” But John was only the precursor of Jesus. He is not even worthy to untie Jesus’ sandal straps. Paul concludes by saying that his message of salvation is meant for us.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

Facilitator: As we listen to this gospel, let us listen with our *heads* for the *content* of the message.

(A member of the group reads the gospel.)

*(After the reading **pause** . . .)*

Facilitator: In this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our *heart* to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge for you to embrace

Facilitator: *Let us now take a moment to quietly meditate on the Gospel text.*

GOSPEL COMMENTARY

Facilitator: *Let us now read quietly the gospel commentary.*

GOSPEL: Luke 1:57-66, 80

The birth of John is seen as an act of mercy on the part of God since Elizabeth has been barren, and barrenness is considered a curse. The response to God's mercy is rejoicing on the part of the people, a favorite theme in Luke. As faithful Jews, John's parents have him circumcised. Then he is named – an event that causes wonder, since everyone anticipates that the child would be called Zechariah, after his father. But both parents insist that the name be John. When Zechariah writes on the tablet that the child will be named John, his ability to speak is restored. He has now fulfilled the angel's command to call the infant, John, a name which means "God has shown favor."

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse in the Gospel caught your attention. Why?

Share the next questions with the whole group.

2. What do you think it must have been like for Elizabeth to give birth in her older years, perhaps in her forties?

3. If you have given birth to one or more children, what was that experience like for you?

4. Do you know why your parents ended up calling you the name you have and this includes your middle name if you have one? Do you like your name? If your name is a saint's name, do you ever pray to that saint?

5. What is one thing Jesus is saying to us in this Sunday's gospel about how a disciple should speak or act?

JOURNALING ON THE WORD

(2 or 3 minutes)

(Gather the group back together.)

Facilitator: This section of your time together gives you the opportunity to express in writing further thoughts on the gospel. What is the gospel asking of you and how can you respond in *prayer* to the message of the gospel.

In this time of journaling, go wherever the Spirit leads you.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Consider sharing your response to this question with one other person. How can you name one way you can act on or respond to the message of this Sunday's Gospel?

Suggestions: Pray for couples seeking to have a child but it's not happening for them. Pray for couples seeking to adopt a child. Pray for foster parents, pray for women currently dealing with a difficult pregnancy. Pray for women considering an abortion that they will choose life.

SHARE PRAYER RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD

Stand, form a circle and if comfortable, hold hands. See if you can share a prayer, however brief on the gospel you have just heard, discussed and journaled on.

Facilitator: Do not be afraid of long pauses. When all or some have shared a prayer on the gospel say:

Let us now conclude with any personal prayers of petition (prayers for self) and intercession (prayers for others).