

Homily — Feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist, 2018
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**So, what's all this fuss about John the Baptist?
What's so important about this guy who dressed in camel's hair
and ate wild honey and locusts?**

**Since at least fourth century, this feast honoring the birth of John the Baptist
has held a special place
in the imagination of Christians in both west and east.
The Gospel of Luke speaks of John's birth coming six months
before the birth of Jesus.
So, here we are six months before Christmas, celebrating another nativity.**

**St. Augustine notes the closeness of this date to the Summer Solstice.
The sun, for those who live north of the equator,
now begins to wane.
Augustine recalls the words of chapter three of John's Gospel,
"He must increase while I must decrease."
All that suggests some kind of vast cosmic shift taking place.
The whole world is tilting in a new direction.
Something bigger is going on here than the usual day-to-day stuff.**

**Something beyond imagining is happening here.
That's what all the fuss is about.**

**In the biblical narrative, this young virgin who is mysteriously with child
visits her kinswoman, Elizabeth, who is also mysteriously with child.**

As Mary approaches, the child in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy.

**That child, John the Baptist,
is the first witness to the Light coming into the world.
He is the forerunner for us all.
For, you see, we also must be witnesses to the Light.
His PREDESTINATION – His God-given destiny is to be a witness
to a fresh, amazing, brilliant new light coming into our dark times –
And his destiny is our destiny too.**

**John may be just the saint we need for our times.
While WE KNOW the Christ John could only hope for,
we too live an in-between time as John did.
Many aspects of the modern world to which we have been accustomed
are changing or ending.**

- The Church of our youth is gone forever,
despite the efforts of some to resurrect it.**
- Our American democracy is crumbling before our eyes.**
- The modes of human communication and transportation**

are being replaced at lightning speed.

- Doctors can hardly keep pace with medical breakthroughs taking place all over the world.

The most we know about the future is that we cannot imagine it.

Perhaps the best we can hope for is to be like John,
not having all the answers
but willing to help awaken one another to see the Christ who is here among us.

John utilized his idiosyncrasies,
which is another way of saying his own unique gifts,
to point to Jesus.
You see, it appears that Jesus was so commonplace
that he might have been overlooked had John not cried out.

One way of articulating the Christian mission
is through the mission of the Baptist,
A way to envision our lives.

Isaiah:

"I am made glorious in the sight of the Lord,
and my God is now my strength.
It too little for you to raise up the tribes of Israel.
I will make you a light to the nations."

Paul:

". . . To US this word of salvation has been sent."

Luke raises the question:

"What will this child be?"

I can't help think of the children at our southern border
now viciously separated from their parents
or the young people from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School
in Parkland, Fla.

They raise the same question for us.

"What will these children be? What are these children pointing to for us?"

We had a visit this week from two young people, a man and a woman
representing an international organization called Ashoka.
Ashoka is the largest network of leading social entrepreneurs in the world.
You might think of these two young people as modern-day John the Baptists.
They are traveling the country in search groups, communities, organizations
who are acting as agents for positive change.

So, that's what all the fuss is about
on this feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist.