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Reflection, Nativity of St. John the Baptist  
24 June 2024  
Texts: Isaiah 49:1-6;  
Acts of the Apostles 13:22-26;  
Luke 1:57-66, 80

Today is the Feast of the Solemnity of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist. The Gospel text is from the infancy narrative of Luke where Luke has the focus on *Mary* whereas in Matthew's infancy narrative Matthew has the focus on *Joseph*.

Previously in Luke's Gospel, Chapter 1: verses 5-21, Zechariah who served as a priest, was on duty in the Temple, and he was chosen to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and to offer incense. The people were waiting outside since they could not enter the sanctuary. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and said that his wife would bear a child and his name shall be called *John*. But Zechariah doubted the angel, since normally his son would be named Zechariah after his father. And immediately Zechariah was made speechless by the angel Gabriel.

This is the background of the text proclaimed today. When the baby was brought to the synagogue to be circumcised, Elizabeth said, "*No. He shall be called John.*" Then, because Zechariah could not speak, he asked for a writing tablet. He wrote on it: "His name is John." And "immediately, his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God."

What is *not* in our text declared this morning are verses 67-79. I shall cite only a few of them.

*Then John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:*

*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.*

*And you child will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.*

*He will give light to those who sit in the darkness and  
in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

Zechariah was cured by the Angel and filled with joy just as Mary, in the previous Lukan visitation narrative, proclaimed her Magnificat. John, by the way, in Hebrew is *johannan*, which means *beloved of God*.

We turn now to the Acts of the Apostles text which, according to contemporary scholars of Luke, was also written by him.

John says, "I am not he who is to come. Behold the one who is to come after me, I am not worthy to unfasten the sandals of his feet," and thus John points to Jesus."

The first reading that we heard today is from Second Isaiah. In those days, the Jewish people were held captive in Babylon from 612 BCE to 537 BCE. The Babylonians raided the land of Israel and destroyed the Temple of the Jewish people in Jerusalem. But in 537 BCE, Cyrus, King of the Persians, defeated the Babylonians. He released the Jewish people to return to their homeland and to rebuild their Temple.

During those 75 years, the author of Second Isaiah *consoles* the Jewish people, offering them comfort and hope, their faith in the future to reclaim their land and to rebuild their temple. And thus, in 537 BCE Cyrus the Persian sends them back to their own land and to rebuild their temple. The last verse six says it all:

*I will make you the light of the nations that my salvation may reach  
the ends of the earth.*

Let us all be a *light of the world*, experience Zechariah's *joy*, and no matter what our names are, let us be beloved by God now and into the future!