

THE NATIVITY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

Year B

Isaiah 49:1-6

Psalm 139:1b-3, 13-14ab, 14c-15

Acts 13:22-26

Luke 1:57-66, 80

Gathering

(A candle, a bible open to this week's gospel, and a clear glass bowl of water are arranged on a table in the gathering space.)

Prayer

(The candle is lit. The leader invites members to be attentive to God's presence. After a time of quiet, three members lead the community in prayer as follows.)

I: O LORD, you have probed me, you know me:
you know when I sit and when I stand;
you understand my thoughts from afar.
My journeys and my rest you scrutinize,
with all my ways you are familiar.

All: I praise you, for I am wonderfully made.

II: Truly you have formed my inmost being;
you knit me in my mother's womb.
I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made;
wonderful are your works.

All: I praise you, for I am wonderfully made.

III: My soul also you knew full well;
nor was my frame unknown to you
when I was made in secret,
when I was fashioned in the depths of the earth.

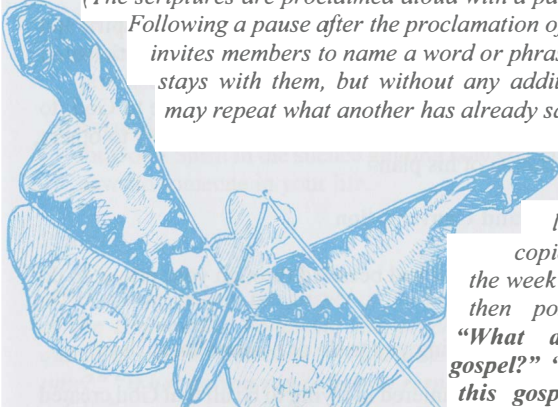
All: I praise you, for I am wonderfully made.

Psalm 139:1b-3, 13-14ab, 14c-15

(A selection of instrumental music is played.)

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)



When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. The leader then poses these questions: "What draws you to this gospel?" "Where do you resist this gospel?" The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After additional time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

John the Baptist's life was marked with the grace of God from his conception to his death. John was vital to ushering in a new era in salvation history as the herald announcing the messiah.

John lived up to his name, which meant the Lord has been gracious. His life was a gift and blessing to others. John was conceived in love to an elderly couple who were too old for children. Their faith in God and trust in God's goodness overflowed with gratitude to know they were to have a son.

From his infancy, people had the sense that "the hand of the Lord was

with him". When John grew older, he sought the desert where he lived in simple harmony with God.

John knew all things came from God. In time he came to know that he had a mission given to him by God. John's life set the stage for him to become the herald, announcing the long awaited messiah. He preached repentance. Accepting his baptism was a sign expressing one's willingness to join the movement of renewal.

The baptism Jesus will preach will be a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. It becomes for us the full realization of the promise John but anticipated.

John exemplifies for us what it means to dedicate one's life to God, to know all things come from God, to be heralds of the good news to others, leaving to God the realization of his plan.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ Name a time you knew that you had been led through your prayer to do something.
- ◆ What do you think God is calling you to do or become these days? What obstacles have you encountered in trying to be all that God created you to become?
- ◆ Speak of someone who was a significant herald of the good news in your life.

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: "What do you hear Christ saying to us in hearing and sharing his word?" "What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?" "How are you/we being called to live in response to God's word?" After a pause, the leader invites the community to conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

Plan now to go on a retreat in the months ahead. That long delayed retreat

can help you set the right directions needed for you this year. Contact a local retreat center and reserve a weekend. Consult your pastor or diocesan office if you need help identifying retreat houses in your area.

- ◆ Extend yourself in affirmation to a young person in your life who is trying to sort out their choices for the future. Mentor as you are able; promise your prayers.
- ◆ Set aside ten minutes each day this week for reflection and prayer. Listen for God's Spirit in the silence guiding how you might be a herald of good news to someone in your life.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel of the week is re-proclaimed by a member of the community. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: "What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?" "What do you say to him in response?" The community pauses for a full five, perhaps even seven, minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members without additional conversation simply to mention a word or two or a brief thought that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. Following this sharing, a member prays the following on behalf of all.)

All: Loving and all-knowing God, we give you thanks and praise for our lives and for our wonderful creation. You know us each by name. You have prepared us from the beginning to follow you and glorify your Name. You draw us toward you as we journey thorough life. Guide us with your truth and grace. In Jesus name, we pray.

(Members sprinkle each other with the water and sign each other with the sign of the cross. Then joining hands, members pray the Lord's Prayer.)