

Solemnity of the Birth of Saint John the Baptist

Luke 1:57-66,80

‘His name is John’.

We celebrate the birth of John the Baptist today, on June 24th, six months before we celebrate the birth of Jesus on December 25th. There was great excitement when a child was born to Elizabeth and Zechariah, because Elizabeth was getting on in years. The unexpected happened to them. John’s parents are models of faith and trust in God. We read from the gospel that Elizabeth’s neighbours and relations shared her joy. The naming of the baby becomes topical: *‘His name is John’*. The name reveals that the child was destined for a special mission. It had been revealed to them that they should call the child John, and they stand by it even in the face of criticism and misunderstanding on the part of their relatives and neighbours. A lot of thought usually goes into the naming of a child. In the culture of Israel, naming children was much more family based. The naming of a child entailed the carrying on of a family tradition. It was expected to have the child was named after a parent or a grandparent. That was the reason why when Elizabeth and Zechariah chose the name **‘John’**, it caused quite a stir from the neighbours: *‘No one in your family has that name’*. The name ‘John’ meant *‘the Lord is gracious’*. The Lord had been gracious to Elizabeth and Zechariah by giving them a child. On our part, the Lord has been gracious to all of us because this child would prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. The birth of this child was the beginning of something wonderful for us all. The question of those who witnessed the birth of this child was a very appropriate one, *‘What will this child turn out to be?’* This question can be asked of ourselves at any stage of our lives, *‘What will I turn out to be?’* We are called to keep growing up into the person of Christ. That is the calling of a lifetime, which can only be fully responded to in the power of the Spirit.