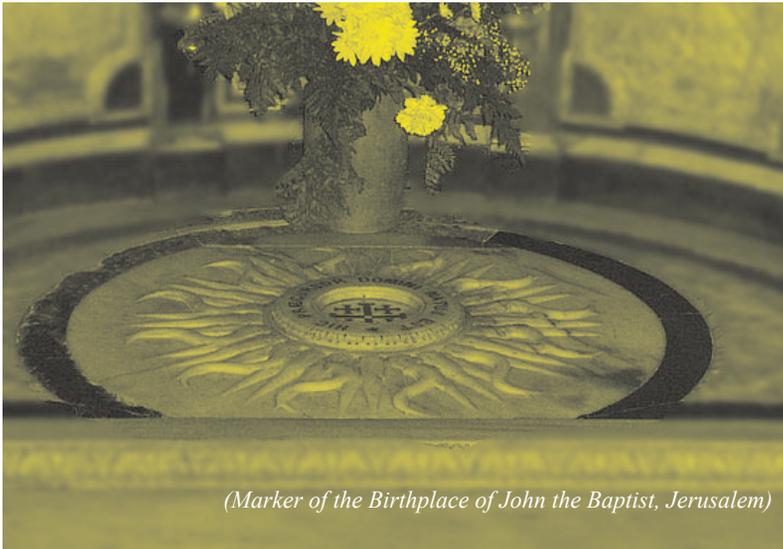


John's Witness



(Marker of the Birthplace of John the Baptist, Jerusalem)

I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (Is 61:1-2,10-11)

¹The spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent me to bring **glad tidings** to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, ²To announce **a year of favor** from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God, to comfort all who mourn;

¹⁰I **rejoice** heartily in the LORD, in my God is the **joy** of my soul; For he has clothed me with a robe of salvation, and wrapped me in a mantle of justice, like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem, like a bride bedecked with her jewels. ¹¹As the earth brings forth its plants, and a garden makes its growth spring up, so will the LORD God make justice and praise spring up before all the nations.

THE FOCUS: Joy

COMMENTARY

- Vv.1-2 very meaningful passage quoted by Lk 4 and put on the lips of Jesus in his inaugural sermon in his hometown Nazareth.
- Vv.10-12 an expression of joy in God who gives salvation. Images used: clothings like robe, mantle, diadem (= dignity, respect, wealth, freedom).
- Salvation will also be experienced in terms of justice and praise.
- Images used as simile: plants, garden (= fertility, abundance, beauty).
- Joy is the feeling of people who believe in the announcement.

REFLECTIONS

There are many reasons to celebrate / to be joyful.

The spirit-filled Messiah is coming as a prophet and liberator: to bring glad tidings to the lowly; to heal the brokenhearted; to pro-

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claim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners; to announce a year of favor from the LORD, and a day of vindication by our God, to comfort all who mourn.

We must rejoice at the coming of the Messiah, because he is coming to change our lives, our structures, our systems for the better.

A sign that he is taking hold of us is when we are ourselves: free, happy and productive.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Lk 1:46-48) MY SOUL REJOICES IN MY GOD.

SECOND READING (1 Thes 5:16-24)

Brothers and sisters: ¹⁶Rejoice always. ¹⁷Pray without ceasing. ¹⁸In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophetic utterances. ²¹Test everything; retain what is good. ²²Refrain from every kind of evil.

²³May the God of peace make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it.

THE FOCUS: Rejoice

COMMENTARY

Exhortations / Imperatives (*Action of Christians*)— vv. 16-21

Wish (*Action of God*) — v. 23

Assurance —v. 24

- V.16 Rejoicing is a matter of attitude. It is not conditioned by outside circumstances (always!).
- Vv.17-18 Praying is part of Christian living, (non-stop!).
- Vv.19-21 talk about the presence of the Holy Spirit, in prophetic oracles. Discern what comes from the Spirit and retain it.
- V.22 goes along with the next verse (v.23)

which talks about holiness, being blameless.
• All the exhortations and imperatives and wishes are in line with the coming of our Lord Jesus.

REFLECTIONS

As we draw close to Christmas, our disposition by now should be that of joy.

Joy comes out of our own prayerfulness and attitude of thanksgiving, and allowing the Spirit to work in us and avoiding evil.

We allow God to make us truly holy (like him) and blameless, in view of his coming.

GOSPEL READING (Jn 1:6-8,19-28)

John and his mission

⁶A man named John was sent from God. ⁷He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.

John's testimony to the two groups sent:

¹⁹And this is the testimony of John.

When the Jews from Jerusalem **sent priests and Levites** (to him) to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹So they asked him, "What are you then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?" ²³He said: **"I am 'the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'"** as Isaiah the prophet said."

²⁴**Some Pharisees were also sent.** ²⁵They asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, **"I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, 'the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.'"** ²⁸This happened in Bethany across the

Jordan, where John was baptizing.

THE FOCUS: **Testimony**

COMMENTARY

- Take note of the characters of the story:
 - John
 - Priests and Levites
 - Pharisees
- John is sent from God, while the priests, Levites and Pharisees are sent from the Jews of Jerusalem.
- John is there to testify; the priests, Levites and Pharisees are there to investigate (John's identity).
- John's testimony is two pronged:
 - He is not the Messiah, Elijah or prophet, but the voice crying out in the desert.
 - About the one coming after himself: greater than he. He is the Messiah, with the power of Elijah or the prophet.
- Going back to v.8, the Messiah is the light.
- The reason for testifying: that all might believe
- The Jews of Jerusalem through the priests and the Levites and Pharisees were there only to know but not to believe.

REFLECTION

John the Baptist plays a big role in the preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

John the evangelist specifies his role: to give testimony, witness (*martyria*), not just to baptize for the forgiveness of sins.

We listeners and readers must respond in faith.

We must believe that the One John is testifying to is light (the way and the truth). We take him as the source of our salvation and liberation.

We do not espouse our own traditions or fixations or comforts as a way to salvation.

Christians are always open to something

new which is perceived by a disposed or prepared minds and hearts.

Excitement and joy is the feeling of those who take to heart the testimony of John.

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR SHARING/HOMILY

Definitely the message of the First Reading evokes joy and rejoicing.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, etc.

The Second Reading exhorts Christians to rejoice at the coming of Jesus.

The Gospel Reading does not explicitly talk about joy but anyone who hears of the message of John will naturally rejoice.

-Prepared by Fr. Cielo Almazan, OFM

III. OUR CONTEXT

- Parol Makers are so creative
- OFW remittances are coming in
- Millions of pesos allocated to have kindergarten in public schools
- Take note of the increase of electric bills this December
- Honest taxi drivers during rush hour
- Patience during Christmas Rush traffic
- Joy in preparing a Christmas list
- Filipino-made gifts (**HM**)