

eat, since he had to dress in rough animal skin and eat the vegetarian food of locusts and wild honey. He adopted a lifestyle that would enhance his calling in life. To discern what God is calling us to be we need to cultivate some sort of desert in our lives where we can listen to God. We need to make Samuel's words to the Lord, "Speak, your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10) part of our daily prayer. And, to be faithful to the call of God, we need the courage and discipline to keep away from any choice of association or lifestyle that does not help us along the path to which God has called us. John is great today not just because God called him to a special vocation but because he walked faithfully in the path that leads to the goal that God had set for him.

The neighborhood in which John was born did not help him to realize his divine calling. In fact they wanted to prevent John from receiving his God-given name and identity. They wanted to give him his father's name "Zachary." They objected to his being named John because "None of your relatives has this name" (Luke 1:61). For them what a child can be is determined by what his family and lineage has been. Their dream of a wonderful future for the child is limited by his family background. But God's dream for us far exceeds anything that has been in our family background. Carey Landry was on target when he sang, "The dream I have today, my Lord, is only a shadow of your dreams for me." Our life's work is to wake up and make God's glorious dream for us a reality.

As we celebrate the birth of John the Baptist and read the marvelous story of how he got his God-given name, let us ask ourselves: If I am now to receive a new name, a name that represents my God-given identity and calling in life, what would that name be? If you do not know your God-given name, the name which represents all that God sent you into the world to be and to accomplish, then it is time to find out by listening in prayer. This is because our greatness as children of God, like the greatness of John the Baptist, consists in discovering what God had created us to be and living out the demands of that call without compromise.

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Birth of John the Baptist

Feast Day: June 24



... Elizabeth will bear you a son,

and his name will be John...

Birth of John the Baptist

by: Fr. Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp

Homily for Birth of John the Baptist--June 24

"Among those born of women no one is greater than John" (Luke 7:28). These words which our Lord said about John the Baptist are probably behind the solemn feast of the birthday of John the Baptist which we celebrate today. As a rule, the church celebrates the feast of a saint once a year, on the anniversary of the saint's death. In the case of John the Baptist we celebrate his death as well as his birth. John is the only saint after Christ whose birth we celebrate with a solemn feast. This is the Church's way of saying with Jesus that "among those born of women no one is greater than John."

The gospel story of the birth of John focuses on the naming ceremony. Why does the gospel show such an interest in the naming of the child? We tend to ask Juliet's famous question to Romeo in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, "What's in a name? that which we call a rose/By any other name would smell as sweet." But not everybody would agree with this view. In biblical times, and still today in many African cultures, personal names function the way business names do, that is, they aim to convey what the bearer of the names stands for. When Simon shows that he could be relied on as a leader of the apostles, he gets the name "Rock." When the sons of Zebedee, James and John, petition Jesus to call down lightning from heaven to burn up the inhabitants of a Samaritan village who do not welcome Jesus, they

get a new name "Sons of Thunder." Names reveal an essential character or destiny of the bearer.

The name John means "God is gracious." His birth signals the beginning of a new era in God-human relationship, an era to be characterized by grace and not by law. God himself gave John that name and it was revealed to his father Zachary in a vision (Luke 1:13). That this name was given the child already before his birth shows that God has a purpose and plan for the child. The words of Isaiah in the first reading apply equally to John: "The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me...he formed me in the womb to be his servant" (Isaiah 49: 1, 5). In the birth of John we see that the existential philosopher Jean Paul Satre was wrong when he said that people come into the world without a purpose, and that it is by exercising their freedom that they create a purpose for their lives. In John we see that God already has a purpose for His children before they come into this world, and so the challenge of life is for them to discover this purpose and to be faithful to its demands.

The purpose for which God created you may require that you walk to a different drumbeat than other people. For John it required that he live in the desert far from normal human contact and civilization. God's purpose for his life dictated even the minutest details of how he would dress and