

**For The Bulletin Of
June 24, 2018**



**THE NATIVITY OF JOHN
THE BAPTIST**

From Father Robert

Families can be powerful indicators of paths we take in life. Children born into a family of those dedicated to public service often grow up to be public servants themselves. Those who teach for a living often have children in the teaching professions. And how many police officers and firefighters have come from families of the same. It's too simplistic to say we follow in our parents' footsteps, but it can also be challenging (but not impossible) for us to blaze new trails or to do something completely different. Our environment, especially our family environment, shapes who we are and who we become.

Luke is the sole voice in the New Testament telling us about the familiar relationship between Elizabeth and Mary, making Jesus and John the Baptist cousins. Should we be surprised that each child was a charismatic preacher, attracting crowds, challenging religious and political leaders, and paying the ultimate price for their actions? What kind of relationship did Mary and Elizabeth have? What were their conversations to have resulted in the raising of two such sons? How did they act with one another and with their

children? Perhaps surprisingly, we don't hear much about either Zechariah or Joseph. Luke tells us more about the women, and this might be a nod to the influence mothers have in our lives, and therefore in the lives of Jesus and John.

As Luke tells the story, Elizabeth was three months pregnant when Mary received the news that she would bear a son. Liturgically speaking, this feast is thus three months later than the annunciation (March 25) or six months prior to Christmas. The newborn John is a herald of the Messiah, even by his very birth. Like the marvelous conception and birth of Jesus, John too has something marvelous surrounding his conception and birth. Like the forebears in faith, Zechariah and Elizabeth are too old to have children. But God has other plans.

Today, we consider the role of family in our own upbringing and that of John and his cousin Jesus. It has been said that the family is the domestic church. It is there that children first learn the faith, first learn what is important, what is a priority. And actions certainly speak more loudly than words. How our family acts indicates its priorities. A nourishing faith life, which is so important for so many in finding meaning in daily life, is often nurtured first in the family. May our families be places of safety, nourishment, love, care, and faith.

Living The Paschal Mystery

The natural cycle of life involves both birth and death. Moments of joy, love, hope, and sheer happiness accompany the birth of a child. We wonder what she will do, what choices she will make, what her personality will be, etc. This

entire future life is pure potential and opportunity in a newborn. And at the conclusion of one's life, we reflect back on what this person has become, the relationships and choices that made him who he was. We often look to the children and grandchildren, if the person was so blessed, and are in some ways comforted to know that something of the deceased lives on in his posterity.

Churches are often the points at which these significant life moments are ritualized, like baptism, marriage, or a funeral. Our faith can be nourished by such events, but also by the daily activities of life.

For Elizabeth and Mary, too, their faith was nourished by the joys of a newborn with all the hope and promise that it brought. On this day we recognize how fundamentally human our relationship with God is. Through the sacred event of birth, which we know ultimately leads to death, hope springs eternal and we live again the paschal mystery.

Some questions for further reflection and hopefully conversation with family and friends:

- When have you discovered God at work in your life, despite your initial doubts?
- When has some unexpected joy left you without words to express gratitude, or when has a moment of sadness or grief left you speechless? In hindsight, what would you have liked to say?
- What do you hear God saying to you in the depths of your heart that you try to suppress or ignore?
- When was the last time you reacted to a set of circumstances

in your life with the doubt of Zechariah, but were eventually able to cope with the situation with the optimism of Elizabeth?



About Liturgy

Every year, around the summer solstice, when, in the Northern Hemisphere, the time for daylight begins to shorten, the church marks the birth of John the Baptist. Like Christmas, this is a fixed feast, meaning its observance is always on the same date each year. Therefore, what a blessing to have the birth of John the Baptist fall on a Sunday this year so all can praise God for this other holy family!

In a way, however, the church recalls this “forerunner of Jesus” at the beginning of every day when it prays the Liturgy of the Hours. In Morning Prayer, the gospel canticle, which is the climax of this liturgy, comes from the song Zechariah sings the very moment his mouth is opened at the naming of his son, John. The opening words of that canticle are the source of its Latin title, the *Benedictus*: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel/for he has visited and brought redemption to his people.” That canticle ends with Zechariah addressing his newborn child: “And you, child will be called prophet of the Most High/for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way/to give his people knowledge of salvation/through the forgiveness of their sins/because of the tender mercy of our

God by which the daybreak from on high will visit us to shine on those who sit in darkness and death's shadow to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:76-79)

What does it mean for Christians that we sing this song about John the Baptist at the start of each new day? After having been silenced by sleep throughout the night, God opens our mouths, and one of the first things Christians do is sing this blessing of God whose dawn will break forth to shine on us and guide our way to peace. As the response to our silence being broken, we learn that singing holds a pride of place when it comes to giving praise to God. In the *Benedictus*, we join ourselves to the mission of John the Baptist, who came to prepare a way for the Lord by being a witness of God's salvation, living a simple and penitential life, and calling others to do the same. Our work each day, then is to use our voice – like Zechariah and his son – and the witness of our lives to make God's presence known wherever we go.



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Last Thursday, June 14th, our parish joined approximately 80 other individuals from various faith communities, along with members of the Pittsburg and Antioch Police departments in our First Community Forum and Night Walk Against Violence. Sgt. Cassie Wilkerson, Pittsburg Police Department, welcomed

all to the event and was followed by greetings from the host past of Christ is The Answer Church, Chief Brian Addington, Chief of the Pittsburg Police Department, and then three individuals who have broken free of gangs and violence and become active, contributing members of their respective communities. Their stories were nothing short of inspiring. We then were invited to participate in the first Night Walk Against Violence through “El Pueblo,” where a number of shootings and homicides have taken place. The walk and witness were peaceful, energetic, and vocal. When we returned to the church, there was a brief evaluation, several participants shared their reflections on the march, and then a closing prayer. I am deeply grateful to the following parishioners who joined me for this event: **George Torres, Steve Rojek, Blake Rojek, Dorothy O'Connor, Pat Kramer, Heather Hatteroth, Brian and Vicki McCoy, and Vince Augusta.** The next Forum and Nightwalk will take place here in Antioch next month. Please watch my Insert for the time and date.



...to our volunteers who arrive early each Saturday morning to clean and maintain our church and parish hall: **Jean Rogers, Alfred Madoshi, Carole Miller, Mency Osborne, Angela Bueno, Emilia Freking, and Steve Rojek.**

...to those who clean and maintain the bathrooms in both the church and parish hall: **Mary Ewing, Patricia Britton, Robert Goncalves, Harlan Young and Father Robert.**

...to **Dilcia Aparacio** who does such an excellent job of washing, ironing, and caring for the Sacred Linens.

...to our Sacristans and Altar Guild who prepare the sanctuary for the celebration of Eucharist each week:

Peter Degl'Innocenti, Pam and Rich Confetti, Vincent Rodriguez, Harlan Young, Rowena Cayaban, Monika Kauer, Cynthia Enrique, Belen Farin, Nancy Santos and Rose Salamanca.

...to **our counting teams** who are here every week to count the weekly collections.

...to our volunteers who assisted in the parish office last week:

Melodye Costanza, Alicia Perez, Harlan Young, Yvette Young, Joe Fanfa and Bev Iacona.

...to our St. Vincent de Paul and Mobile Mall volunteers who transported last week's donations: **Frank Zamora and Barbara Jackson.**

...to our faithful weekly bulletin assembly team: **Dave Costanza, Beth Enea, Richard Enea, Kathy Augusta, Vince Augusta and Sherry Webb.**

...to our wonderful Parking Lot Security who keep watch over our vehicles during the weekend liturgies: **Don Benson, Steve Rojek and Jose Perez.**

Jesus founded a movement led by both women and men

Jun 15, 2018

by [Christine Schenk](#)

Sometimes it is really difficult to be both female and Catholic.

On the one hand, I couldn't be prouder of the creative leadership taken by the University of Notre Dame and Pope Francis in [working with oil executives](#) to address climate change. It is amazing that dozens of Catholic institutions, including [Caritas Internationalis](#), have [divested from fossil fuels](#).

On the other hand, I am dismayed by yet [another statement](#) from the Vatican — this time from Cardinal-designate Luis Ladaria — prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith — about the non-ordination of women to the priesthood.

I have been tracking Vatican statements on women priests since the 1970s. They are invariably ahistorical and biblically naive. It is embarrassing. Worse, they bear false witness to the Jesus of history and are ultimately destructive to the body of Christ, especially the distaff side.

As a contribution to the ongoing conversation about women's roles in our church, I present here a few examples from mainstream scholarship about Jesus and the female exercise of authority in early Christianity.

Consider this from Ladaria's statement: "Christ willed to confer this sacrament on the 12 apostles — all men — who, in

turn, communicated it to other men. The church always has seen itself as bound to this decision of the Lord, which excludes that the ministerial priesthood can be conferred validly on women."

Biblical scholars have long known that Jesus did not intend to found a new church led by 12 men, but to reform his own Judaic tradition. As such, the Twelve were meant to represent the new 12 tribes of Israel. They were not called to offer animal sacrifice at the Jerusalem Temple, as priesthood was understood in Jesus' day.

That Jesus included women in his itinerant Galilean discipleship is undisputed. [Luke 8:1-3](#) tells us that Mary of Magdala, Joanna, Susanna "and many other women" accompanied him around Galilee. With Mary and Elizabeth, women were present and active in Jesus' life and ministry from womb to empty tomb. With Mary of Magdala, they were the first to proclaim the good news of Jesus' resurrection-victory over the powers of death. From the first century, we see a repeating pattern of women exercising ecclesial authority in the growth of early Christianity:

- Women founded and led house church communities ([Lydia](#), [Prisca](#), [Nympha](#), [Mary of Jerusalem](#), [Tabitha](#));
- Prophesied ([Philip's daughters](#), [Corinthian women](#));
- Taught male evangelists ([Prisca](#));
- Functioned as apostles ([Junia](#), [Mary of Magdala](#)), benefactors and envoys ([Phoebe](#));
- Probably led communities in Philippi as *episcopoi* and *diaconoi* ([Euodia and Syntyche](#)). (It should be noted that *episcopoi* and *diakonoi* cannot simply be translated as "bishops" and

"deacons" as we understand these church offices today. The titles do, however, indicate an important leadership function.)

Paul's letters are the earliest historical documents we have. From him, we learn more about the title "apostle." Writing between A.D. 40 and 60, Paul uses the word "apostle" inclusively to describe his own mission to the gentiles as well as that of other missionaries. In Romans 16:7, he calls Andronicus and Junia (a married missionary couple) "prominent among the apostles."

Twenty years later, after the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 80-85), Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles reflect a growing struggle over who may exercise authority in the early church. Luke names three requirements for replacing the apostle Judas:

"Therefore, it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection" ([Acts 1:21-22](#)).

Luke's new criteria stipulate that apostles must be male, part of Jesus' original discipleship, and eyewitnesses to the Resurrection. They guarantee that the individual title of apostle will die out as the original witnesses die.

Further, prominent leaders such as Paul, Mary of Magdala, James of Jerusalem, Junia and Andronicus no longer qualify as "apostles." Ironically, third- and fourth-century churchmen will claim the authority of the apostles in imposing new church orders that exclude women

from leadership. Sadly, the practice continues to the present day.

Yet archaeologists and church historians point to gender balance in the exercise of authority in the early communities. For example, "ordination" as a "presbyter" (as priests were called at the time) did not take shape until long after Jesus' death and resurrection. And there is compelling literary and inscriptional evidence that in the fourth and fifth centuries, women held presbyteral titles. These early presbyters were the precursors of today's priests, and the evidence suggests that in some early communities both women and men functioned in these roles.

[Ladaria's contention](#) that a male-only priesthood belongs to the "substance of the sacrament" and cannot be changed because Christ instituted the sacrament is another example of the ahistorical nature of current Vatican formulations. The Christian understanding of sacrament did not become part of church teaching until the Middle Ages. It is the product of later reflection by exclusively male members of the body of Christ. This is not to say that sacraments are not a central part of Catholic teaching, as well as a beautiful way of describing the action of God in our lives. It is to say that this theological construct did not have the benefit of the Spirit-guided insights of the female members of Christ's body.

It is perhaps for this reason that Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, in an [Easter interview](#) with the Austrian publication [Die Presse](#), called for a new council to discuss the matter :

One of the key questions is the role of women in the church. In this, religious

organizations as a whole are in need of development. ... The question of ordination is a question that surely can only be settled by a council. A pope cannot decide this by himself. This is too large a question for it to be settled from the desk of a pope.

If Pope Francis can convene an international meeting of leaders to [counter global warming](#), surely he can convene an international gender-balanced council to address the sexism and misogyny that have plagued our church for millennia.

[St. Joseph Sr. Christine Schenk served urban families for 18 years as a nurse midwife before co-founding FutureChurch, where she served for 23 years. She holds master's degrees in nursing and theology.]



Parish To Initiate The Sheepdog Program

At one of our Deanery meetings recently, a presentation was made by the Chaplain of the Brentwood Police Department regarding the "Sheepdog Program." The program consists of off-duty police officers, sheriff's deputies, and California Highway Patrol officers who are members of the parish and provide security during liturgies in the event of an active shooter. I have asked

retired **Pittsburg Police Officer Kirby McNesby** to coordinate the program in our parish and am requesting that all those in Law Enforcement to please contact me with your names and phone numbers to create a list of available officers to participate in the program. Once the list is compiled, we would like to have a meeting of all participants in early August to put the program in place. Thank you for offering yourselves in service to our community in this important way. As of last Sunday, two parishioners have come forward to offer to serve in this new ministry. You may also call the parish office and leave your name and contact information with the receptionist or our Pastoral Secretary, **Maryann Peddicord**.

