

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Drenched in the Reality of God Nativity of St. John the Baptist Wednesday,
June 24, 2015 8:15 AM Is 49:1-6; Acts 12:22-26; **Lk 1:57-66, 80** (Metanoia—you
really need a new way of looking at everything.)

“For surely the hand of the Lord was with him.”

The story of John the Baptist, as St. Augustine points out, is very parallel to the story of Christ. Jesus did make that remark about him that “No one born of woman is greater than John the Baptist,” and yet, “The least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” Again, this shows the difference between life in the world and life in the Spirit, this distinction that is essential to understand what is meant by salvation.

So John came baptizing; it was called a baptism of repentance, in Greek *metanoia*. What *metanoia* means is **a change of heart, a change of mind, a change of the way one thinks in general**. So it’s not change your mind about one thing. It’s not like saying, well, I used to vote Democrat, now I am going to vote Republican; or I used to like dairy products, but now I am going to become a vegan. It’s not that kind of a change. It’s a way of looking at life, and it’s very hard to change the general way we look at life. We can make little changes; that is, we can sew new patches on old garments, but we can’t make big changes—very hard. We are a product of so many different causes. So many different people have played a role in who we’ve become. So many different experiences, good and bad, have fashioned who we are. But now comes the announcement: you really need a new way of looking at everything. There’s **time to let go of the past to embrace the future**. That’s the idea of *metanoia*. And John announced that.

Then **John said, “There is one greater than I who will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.”** This is something Christians often fail to appreciate. In fact we fail to appreciate even what is meant by baptism of repentance. We don’t get there yet, much less into baptism in the Holy

Spirit. We say in our theology that the sacrament of Baptism is the beginning of new life, but in many ways it isn't. **In many ways people just keep living the same old life they were born into.**

God's plans are much greater than ours. **Not only does God want something wholly new and different for all of us, but he provides it,** and has already provided it. It's not something to look at in the distant future. **It's something we can experience right now, but it requires a response.** We have to be willing to let go of what is not helping us. We have to be willing to think thoughts and form **new categories in thinking** that the world didn't give us. **We have to let God give them to us. That's repentance. Then we have to be open to the Holy Spirit. This is the life of God himself,** nothing less. And John the Baptist said that "The one coming after me," referring of course to Christ, "will baptize in the Holy Spirit." **When we are baptized in the Holy Spirit we are drenched in the reality of God.** This is something we have to at least begin to long for.