

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Herald of Christ**    **Nativity of St. John the Baptist**    Friday, **June 24**, 2016    8:15 AM  
Is 49:1-6;    Acts 3:22-26;    **Lk 1:57-66, 80**    (Jesus said, “No one born of woman is greater than John the Baptist, and yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”)

In the ancient liturgy of the Church there are only two birthdays, one is Jesus, the Nativity of Christ, Christmas, the other this, the Nativity of John the Baptist. Now since then someone added the Birth of Mary, but that’s not actually a solemnity or anything ancient.

Now neither of these nativities are celebrated at the time or on the date of the birth of the person, which we don’t know either. We don’t know when John the Baptist was born; we don’t know when Christ was born. We know that they were born. Their birthdays celebrate a reality that is really cosmic in nature and therefore they are placed at the solstices. **The winter solstice is a celebration of Christ because from him onward in time the light of God increases just as the days increase after the winter solstice. John the Baptist is put at the time of the summer solstice because henceforth what John represents decreases.** He said, “I must decrease while he,” referring to Christ, “must increase.” John represents of course the greatest that humanity has produced. **Jesus said, “No one born of woman is greater than John the Baptist, and yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”**

Now that’s something you need to think about. It sounds rather paradoxical. He is greater than anyone born of woman, in other words, **insofar as humanity is naturally prone to religion and worship of God and seeking of God and virtue, John is the greatest.** But the kingdom of God is not about religion. It isn’t about human nature. It isn’t about virtue and ideals. **The kingdom of God is God placing his own power and nature within the human beings,** within human life, within the human nature joining itself and therefore **creating a new creation.** And **the new creation, even the tiniest part of it, is far greater than the greatest of the original creation. And we live in both of them simultaneously,** often not even distinguishing one from

the other. Well they are united. They are not two separate parts distinct in the sense of separate. **They interpenetrate each other, but they are different.** We are called to be good human beings. We are called to be just and virtuous and honest and pure. **But the kingdom of God is about God's justice, God's purity, God's righteousness, and God's love, which is far more than anything our nature could produce, and yet it is given to us as grace.** And this is **the very mystery of the incarnation of the word God.**

And **John the Baptist was the herald** because he was actually even a cousin of Jesus. But even as a herald he was heralding something already passing away in the sense that **he spoke a rather harsh word.** If you ever hear about "fire and brimstone preaching," well, that's John the Baptist. He called the Pharisees "a brood of vipers." Jesus called them hypocrites, which just means he is observing the fact that they are acting rather than really being. But "brood of vipers" is much stronger. And he said, "Who told you to flee the wrath to come?" That would not be called being welcoming. That is not hospitality. That was not John's way. But it was Jesus' way. So in a way **John announced the coming of Christ by being his opposite** in a sense, **complement in one way**, but opposite in another, the firebrand who led the way to the one of whom it was said, "A bruised reed he shall not break; a smoldering wick he shall not quench." That was the real Messiah. And John was very clear about that as well when he said, "The one you think I am I am not. There is one coming after me however whose sandal I'm not worthy to loose," which is another way of saying I'm not worthy to be his disciple, because a disciple was a servant, a valet, a butler, a cook. And he says, "I'm not worthy to be his valet. I'm not worthy to untie his sandal." **I can't be his disciple. This is a very provocative idea, and hopefully it will provoke us.**