

The story of Jesus doesn't start with Jesus but with the amazing birth of John the Baptist. His parents were childless and in their 80's when he was conceived – a miracle birth. Previously, an angel appeared to his dad, Zechariah, and foretold this, and said he was to name him John. But Zechariah doubted, and for his lack of faith, was struck mute. But when John was born, his voice was restored, because he ordered that his son be named John, contrary to Jewish custom.

One of the translations for the name John is that it means “The Lord has shown favor.” And God surely did show favor to his parents. John would go on to provide the beginning to the greatest story ever told. He is central to the way God chose to bring salvation to us in Jesus. He prepares the way for the *Messiah*.

We heard Isaiah in our First Reading because his description of his experience as a prophet parallels John the Baptist's experience. But most of the description isn't limited to prophets; it applies to all of us disciples of Christ. Every Christian is called to be a herald of God's continuous wonderful action in the world. But we're not all called to do it in the same way.

God looks at each one of us so positively. Each one of us is affirmed as Isaiah describes how God calls us from birth – to be his child, to be part of his plan. He calls us from our mother's womb. He knows our names; he knows us through and through even before we're born. God has thought about us from the beginning of time; he has a purpose for us in his plan.

Then Isaiah continues his description. He believes that he – and I'll quote him here – “had toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly spent my strength.” Isaiah thought he had failed. Despite his prophecies, the Judeans refused to repent of their sins. We might call that a mid-life crisis now, but that dissatisfaction with ourselves isn't limited to mid-life.

In high school I didn't make the Honor Society; I thought it was the end of the world. In college I lost the election for student government president; I thought it was the end of the world. In mid-life I regretted leaving the seminary 20 years earlier; I thought those doors were closed forever. ... Maybe you had parents with high expectations for you, that were crushing; you were never good enough.

When we look back on our lives at any age, if we think we have accomplished so little, we need to remember what Isaiah says right after he's expressed his disappointment with his life. He says: “I will be glorious in the sight of the Lord.” Even if we don't look glorious in our own eyes, we are glorious in God's eyes.

If we have done our best to do God's will in how we live, we can be confident that even though we don't see any results in our lifetime, there will be a payoff later, like how Isaiah and John the Baptist look good now – they didn't in their day. We are the seeds by which God grows in the heart and soul of others.

God works through us, even though we're sinners! John the Baptist knew that God is active in this world through us. God wants the best for us; God is interested in our lives, he cares about us and wants to save us. He hopes we'll do his will. That's why John preached repentance for sins.

I would suggest we start showing God is still active in our world in our families. Ask for God's grace; receive his help in the Eucharist, so we can be Christ-like for our families; be patient, respectful and forgiving, share time with your cousins and grandparents, care about their successes and problems, show how your Christian faith gives you joy and stamina. And never think you're too old for this. Like St. Paul wrote, “You must never get tired of doing good.”

We are living billboards that show God is still at work in the world.

Fr. John Ozella, The Nativity of St. John the Baptist, June 24, 2018