

**Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis**  
**The Nativity of St. John the Baptist, Sunday, June 23-24, 2018 Cycle B**

In the Gospel of John, chapter 3 verse 30, we hear John the Baptist announce to his disciples about Jesus: "he must increase; I must decrease." Some of the Baptist's disciples had been complaining to him that several of John's disciples were leaving him and were now following Jesus. John was trying to tell his disciples, you know, that is the way it should be. I came into the world to prepare the way for the Messiah. Having seen the Spirit come down upon Jesus after Baptism, he is definitely the one. Therefore "he must increase; I must decrease."

Just this past Thursday, June 21<sup>st</sup>, we celebrated at precisely 6:07 AM, the Summer Solstice; the day with the most hours of daylight in the northern hemisphere. With each succeeding day now, the daylight hours grow shorter and shorter until we come to the day with longest hours of darkness, the winter Solstice, usually around December 21<sup>st</sup>. After the Winter Solstice as we all know, the hours of daylight begin to increase once again.

Since the New Testament does not supply precise information about the dates of John the Baptist's birth or Jesus's birth, as the liturgical calendar developed over the centuries. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Jesus birth was assigned to December 25<sup>th</sup> in the Western Church, when the days began to grow longer! John the Baptist's birth was assigned to June 24<sup>th</sup>, when the days were noticeably growing shorter. The Church saw the seasonal cycles as enhancing backdrops to the spirituality espoused by John the Baptist: Jesus light must increase while my light must decrease.

The Scripture readings we have for the Nativity of John the Baptist – all reflects this scriptural dynamic of decreasing between John and Jesus. The Vocation of John the Baptist was to point out the Messiah to the World, and once the Messiah was on the scene, John allowed the light of the Messiah to shine brighter and brighter, while he humbly receded into the background.

John once proclaimed to his own followers: "What you suppose me to be I am not. Rather, look for the one who comes after me. I am not worthy to unfasten the sandals on his feet."

When John was born, his parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, insisted that he be named John – over the objection of all their relatives because the name "John" was not a tradition in the family. The name John (Yohanan in Hebrew) means "God showers his people with mercy and favor." The Prophet John knew that God's mercy comes only through God's Messiah – John knew he was to prepare people for God's mercy and favor for the day when it arrived. One day, as John was walking with his disciples, he noticed Jesus approaching, and he was inspired by the Spirit to proclaim: "Behold, there goes the Lamb of God."

John the Baptist's vocation to point out the Messiah is the vocation of every Christian. Like John the Baptist, we are born to give way to Jesus. As Christians we all must reflect the spiritual dynamic of letting our light decrease in favor of letting Jesus' light increase ever so brightly through us. The Spiritual challenge before us – is the same spiritual challenge faced by John the Baptist – to let our lives spiritually reflect the natural dynamic of the Summer Sun – for it is Jesus we proclaim, it is Jesus we preach – not ourselves – either as individuals or ourselves as the Church. Like John the Baptist, our mission is to point to Jesus and say: "Behold, the Lamb of God." We each might want to reflect on the question, how is my life allowing the Light who is Jesus shine brightly in the world.