

**Nativity of St. John the Baptist
Cathedral of St John the Baptist, June 22, 2020**

It is a privilege to be with you on this Sunday here at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist as this community marks its Patronal Festival, the celebration of your Patron Saint, John the Baptist and his birth on June 24 in three days' time. St John the Baptist figures prominently in both ecclesiastical and secular history here because not only does our Cathedral, the Mother Church of our Diocese, bear his name, but so does the capital city of this province, St. John's.

But today we mark more than the birthday of John the Baptist for this day is also National Indigenous Peoples Day and the National Indigenous Day of Prayer on which we recognize and honour the cultures and contributions of all the Indigenous peoples of Canada. We commit ourselves to reconciliation with the first peoples of Canada and pledge to work together for healing.

And ... this Sunday is also Father's Day on which we honor our fathers and those who have cared for us as fathers in this life. We thank them and we thank God for the gift of fathers today.

And ... there is still more to celebrate because we will also dedicate a new outdoor "Cathedral Garden Labyrinth" on the green to the south of the cathedral. I trust that it will be a blessing for you and for all who use it as a way of praying and reflecting and being with God and with nature.

With all that is happening today I regret very much that we are unable to join together in person and I ask everyone to hold firm until all the familiar and much-loved activities of church life resume. I thank everyone for your continued faithfulness during this very strange time. On this special Sunday we continue to pray for everyone affected in any way by COVID-19.

As the Mother Church of the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador this cathedral has a great history to remember and an enduring responsibility to maintain in the life of our church. Part of that responsibility is one of teaching and leading by example. This is an unusual time for us in which we have had to discover all kinds of new ways to be the church. As our doors were closed to the world, our windows were opened wide and this cathedral has certainly opened its windows. Your presence online has been strong, and I know that you have continued to care for your members and others in good ways through the telephone and appropriate personal contact. Right now, that is pretty much all we can ask of our faith communities and you have done it well. Some of our traditional types of worship and gatherings will continue to be denied to us until this pandemic is fully past, however, it is important that we do the best we can with what we have. I thank you for doing the best you can with what is available to you at this time and continuing to tell the world about the Good News of God-in-Christ.

The Gospel reading for today is all about someone who told the world about the Good News of God-in-Christ. It is from the first chapter of Luke and tells of the Nativity, or birth, of John the Baptist - one of at least three birthdays we mark in the church year - others being that of Jesus on December 25 and his mother Mary on September 8.

Your Patron Saint, John the Baptist **or** *John the Baptizer*, has always been known as the one who prepared the way for Jesus and in fact John and Jesus were cousins, born about six months apart, Jesus to Mary, John to

Elizabeth. The Gospel of John describes John the Baptist as "a man sent from God" who "was not the light," but "came as a witness ... to the light, so that through him everyone might believe." We read in scripture that John first appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People from the Judean countryside and Jerusalem went to him, and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. Even Jesus came for Baptism at the hands of John.

Both John and Jesus gathered disciples around them, and several New Testament accounts report that some of Jesus' early followers had previously been followers of John. But John quickly gave way to Jesus following Jesus' baptism because his role had been fulfilled by then. According to the New Testament, John expected a figure greater than himself, and that greater One was Jesus, described by John as "more powerful than I ... [for] ... I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals."

A popular hymn captures this well:

***On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;***

John the Baptist is a major figure in our New Testament ... *and* a major figure in the life of Jesus ... *and* a major figure in the life of this Cathedral. I have already identified him as a Saint, but he was also a Prophet – one who speaks the truth to the world on behalf of God even if that truth is difficult for the world to hear. Luke tells us John the Baptist was also something of a roadbuilder and landscaper as he called people to get ready for the coming of Jesus with these words from the Book of Isaiah: "*Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*"

Speaking of outdoor construction, I have been spending time in my backyard this past week, building garden boxes, preparing the soil, and getting ready to plant seeds in a few days' time. I like to grow a few vegetables and other things, and I am always amazed at how the tiny seeds I plant in June become something entirely different with time and care over the summer and fall. In many ways, your story as a Cathedral is one of time and care over hundreds of years. Since at least 1699, the people of this cathedral have been planting good seeds that continue to bear fruit today. Your forebears in faith could not have imagined in the beginning what time and care over the centuries would create in this holy place.

May you continue to plant good seeds here as you prepare the way of our Lord.

Amen