

Pro-Choice
Nativity of John the Baptist
(Vigil – Jer 1:4-10; Lk 1:5-17)
(Day – Is 49:1-6; Ps 139; Lk 1:57-66,80)

St. Luke begins his Gospel with two very long chapters on the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. When God took flesh and became man, his conception and birth were unique. Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit directly in the womb of the Virgin Mary, without biological father.

In preparation for his nativity, there was another miraculous birth, that of his cousin John. His conception too, transcended the power of nature, because Zechariah and Elizabeth were childless and elderly. All were in wonder, and filled with reverent awe at his birth, wondering what this child would be.

This great feast day of the Church gives occasion to reflect how in fact every human conception and birth is a high miracle of God, involving the ministration of angels of a very high order. The nativity of every new child is an event to be celebrated, and commemorated annually in thanksgiving to God. The “hand of the Lord” (Lk 1:66) is upon every life.

We live in a world that has rejected the mystery of the nativity, and God. It refuses to respect with reverent awe what takes place in the womb. And it dares to speak of being “pro-choice.” This is such an evil phrase because of the way it twists words and distorts the truth.

When a child is conceived there is a choice that takes place, but it is God’s choice, not man’s. No baby chooses his own existence; but neither do the parents. Only after the choice is made, do the parents find out, beginning with the mother. Whether or not a child is conceived, and when, is up to God.

What takes place is a solemn and deliberate choice on God’s part; a new act of creation, an eternal event. Though He works through a mother and father, creating a child by uniting their flesh, and though they have a “procreative” role, it is in fact God alone who directly creates the new spiritual soul of the child, a spiritual being, a *person*. The material for that person’s body existed already in his parents, but the *person* of the child in no way existed until that moment.

This sacred truth is highlighted in the nativity of John the Baptist by his *name* which is given angelically and not chosen by his parents. Everyone wonders what John will be when he grows up; everyone wonders “who” this child is. Likewise with every new baby; no one actually knows *who* that child is until after his birth, after he starts growing and talking and interacting with the world and other people. In fact, nothing is really known about the new child until the day of birth (although these days we are able to discover in advance if it is a boy or girl).

Yet God already knows “who” this person is. Long before the rest of the world discovers this new person, God knows each person through and through: *“My soul also you knew full well; nor was my frame unknown to you when I was made in secret, when I was fashioned in the depths of the earth”* (Ps 139:14-15).

Already in the womb, as God fearfully, wonderfully, “knits together” the physical body that develops by leaps and bounds (Ps 139:13), He knows everything about that person’s inmost spiritual being and future destiny.

Already in the womb, the spiritual life of the person is well underway. John the Baptist was anointed by the Holy Spirit from the womb (Lk 1:15). He recognized Jesus, himself in the womb of Mary, from the womb when he leaped for joy (Lk 1:44). Both Jeremiah and Isaiah were appointed prophets “from my mother’s womb” (Is 49:2), from the first moment of conception (Jer 1:4).

In celebrating this great feast, the Catholic Church is called to imitate John the Baptist in being a prophet to the world. And this prophetic ministry begins with the proclamation of the sanctity of life, the great choice of God when new life comes into the womb. God makes the choice, we must respect and serve.

God knows the circumstances and exigencies of life, including the difficulties. None of this changes the fact that when a new child is conceived, God’s hand is directly involved.

Recognizing this great truth, we have a great responsibility to order our lives in such a way that they harmonize and conform to God’s sacred choices. This means preparing carefully for marriage according to God’s law, so that in marriage there is freedom to accept as many children as God might send. Understanding the momentous privilege of serving God through childbearing, Catholics shun any form of artificial contraception or sterilization which deliberately thwarts and contradicts the fundamental blessing of marriage. Likewise, in those difficult cases of childlessness experienced by Zechariah and Elizabeth, Catholics do not resort to immoral means of conceiving children artificially in a petri dish. Catholics are repulsed by the idea of attempting to genetically engineer the “perfect” child. We are *pro-choice* in the true, biblical sense, that is to say we recognize the choice is God’s.

The joy, gratitude, and wonderment that was shared by friends and relatives on the nameday of John the Baptist, are the same joy celebrated by Christians in every birthday celebration. John was the greatest of the prophets, “no one born of women is greater than he” (Mt 11:11)), but every Christian shares to a degree in his prophetic role. John’s nativity is the greatest of all the saints, but every Christian shares too, in this dignity at the commemoration of their own nativity.