

The Solemnity of the Nativity of John the Baptist
Isaiah 49:1-6
Psalm 139:1B-3, 13-14AB, 14C-15
Acts 13:22-26
Luke 1:57-66, 80
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What is true of the great prophet Isaiah, is true of each of us: God has chosen us from birth to be sharp-edged swords concealed in the shadow of God's arm. And that sharp edge isn't just for show. Each one of us is intended to be God's instrument in the world. We are to take part in the greatest work of art of which the human spirit can conceive: the shaping of our world, the shaping of the *universe* into the image of Christ.

Our sharp edge may not be evident to us, but that must not prevent us from acting on behalf of the Kingdom of God. Isaiah thought he was toiling in vain. He feared that he was spending his strength for nothing. But that fear did not stop him from laboring. And it must not stop us.

In the end, Isaiah discovered that even his fondest dreams about the usefulness of his efforts were too modest. In his most optimistic moments, Isaiah hoped he might help restore Israel and raise up the tribes of Jacob. But that was too little for God. God intended that Isaiah should be a light to the nations, so that salvation might reach the ends of the earth. And now we, in a time and place Isaiah could not imagine, are inspired by his words to greater efforts for the sake of the Kingdom.

God said of David, "I have found him to be a man after my own heart who will carry out my every wish." God says the same of each one of us. Through us, as through David, and through John the Baptist,

whose birth we celebrate today, the message of salvation is sent forth.

John's birth was marked by great signs and wonders. Perhaps yours and mine were not. But when we look back upon a life in service to the gospel we can often see patterns in the events of our lives. We can perceive moments when the hand of the Lord was clearly upon us.

But even if we can't yet see how we have contributed, you and I are not the best judges. One day it will all be clear. Meanwhile we might seem to ourselves to be mere laborers, perhaps laborers in a nail factory. But if we fail, for that reason, to pour out our lives for Christ, we might find in the end that it was for the lack of one of *our* nails that a great battle was lost.