



**The Nativity of John the Baptist: June 23, 2018
Ordinations to the Diaconate and to the Priesthood
The Diocese of New Westminster**

Luke 1:57-80

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name."⁶² Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a mighty savior for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.
Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days.
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

Stories about John the Baptist at the end of June. It’s a little weird, a little disorienting, a little like Christmas in July, isn’t it?

That’s, of course, because we are accustomed to hearing about John the Baptist during Advent, in the month of December when we are all about preparing and waiting and watching for the coming of Jesus into the world as a vulnerable baby. But now? When we’ve already sweated through a few hot days here in our part of the world? Now? As our attention has begun shifting to relaxation and recreation and time off? Now? When we are not that interested in the weird and wondrous events, interactions and people surrounding John’s birth: his faithful mother, his father struck dumb and then regaining his speech when he accedes to the name God had chosen for the boy, this same father’s prophecy and, finally, the boy John turned man and his proclivity for the wilderness?

And so part of me wants to say “Be gone, faithful Elizabeth! Be gone, dumbstruck and then loquacious Zechariah! Be gone, weird naming process! Be gone, John the Baptist, baby and man! Be gone, wilderness!” And right along with this: “Bring on summer. Bring on unplugging and zoning out! Bring on the beach! Bring on a time of simplicity and not taking ourselves so seriously. Bring on rest. Especially, bring on rest.”

But then I look at the faces of those we will ordain today and think about their stories, the strange and wondrous twists and turns, the times of wordlessness and the necessary verbal declarations that they have had to make along the way, the birthing of their new identities and the involvement in that birthing of so many others. I think of all these things, and I have to say to myself and to all of you “Stay. Stay and bear witness to these stories for they are just as wondrous and just as strange, just as full as twists and turns, just as much about God’s action in preparing the way for Jesus as is the story of the birth of John the Baptist.

And so, for instance, take Juanita Clark, who for years served in Indigenous and Northern Affairs for the government of Canada, working on land claims. Her job was insuring that Indigenous bands or groups were fairly represented in any proceedings. One can only imagine all the listening and learning, all the persistence and courage needed as she exercised that role over the years. But the listening and learning, the persistence and courage that I’m most mindful of today is her willingness to be an intern at the Anglo-Catholic parish of St. James over the past year where Sunday after Sunday she put herself in a church setting that was completely foreign to her and ended up coming away with a changed sense of her spiritual identity.

And then there’s Peggy Trendell-Jensen, a writer by trade but a social justice activist by heart—someone who cannot help but speak up and speak out. Peggy’s Facebook feed is full of images of marches she has participated in, causes she has championed and the inspirational sources of her

actions. Peggy who spoke up to me last week about why at the ordination of deacons the bishop alone lays hands on the ordinand whereas when priests are ordained the bishops and other priests lay hands on the ordinand. “I think people need an explanation” she told me. And so today I’ll offer one.

And then there’s Hyok Kim—born in Korea, with a background and extensive work experience in drama and stage management, not raised in the Anglican Church. Hyok came to Vancouver to study at Regent College and after returning to Seoul, attended worship at the Anglican Cathedral there where he got the Anglican bug. Then upon returning to Vancouver, he and his family settled at St. Anselm’s on the UBC campus, the place that, through supportive clergy and parishioners, finally became the doorway into the Anglican Church and to priesthood. Hyok, on fire about what the Anglican Church of Canada can offer to University students.

Next we come to Sharon Smith—born in South Africa, trained as an Occupational Therapist and the daughter of a pastor in the Reformed Church in South Africa, and also not a cradle Anglican. Fascinated by mental health, intrigued by spirituality, Sharon worked in, founded and led organizations that has sought to bring a unified and integrated wellness to others. Somewhere along the way, she was led into the Anglican Church. Sharon, one of the few people to be ordained to the priesthood in recent times who right off the bat will be appointed to serve as the rector of a parish.

And finally Marion Wong—born in Hong Kong and ordained in the United Church of Canada. She had been exposed to the Anglican Church in Hong Kong but it wasn’t until after a number of years of working for the United Church that conversations with some of her friends led Marion to consider leaving the United Church and seeking ordination to the diaconate and now to the priesthood in the Anglican Church of Canada. Marion in a moment will become one of the two priests in our diocese who are fluent in English, Mandarin and Cantonese and who has the capability to work with those who speak those languages.

If you’re at all like me, as you hear these stories, full of twists and turns, full of times of waiting and gestation, full of tussling with God, self and others, full of wilderness, full of God working to prepare the way of the Lord. As you hear these stories, you might just fall as silent as Zechariah in that you might feel a little overwhelmed. And who would blame you? For how can we explain in any rational way how each of these ordinands happens to be before us today? The only explanation can be that it is God who has guided them to this moment, God who has been working through all the events you heard.

But there’s more. For if we were to believe this in a whole-hearted way—that God is the one who has been guiding them—then you and I have to believe that we were and are part of God’s guiding, that we are not here today accidentally or by chance, and that, just as in the story of the parents of John the Baptist and the circumstances related to his birth, we have never been bystanders to the purposes of the Creator of the world who yearns to draw all the world to himself.

We are part of a great chain of weird and wondrous events, of twists and turns and interactions and people, of silences and bold declarations that lead somewhere important. And today it all leads to this: the ordinations of Juanita, Peggy, Hyok, Sharon and Marion, all in their own way heralds of the kingdom and servant leaders for us in following the Christian way.

And so, stay, stay with me here, savoring the moment, not rushing ahead to get it all done, to make it to the reception and then head back out into the world and on to the next thing. Stay and witness the fruition of God's guiding hand through us and beyond us. Stay and celebrate God's leading them forward and God's leading us forward today.