

A Liturgy for Midsummer Day

The Feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist

Opening Sentences

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world.
Whoever comes to me will never walk in darkness
but will have the light of life."
—John 8:12

Psalm

Show us your mercy, O LORD, *
and grant us your salvation.
I will hearken to what the LORD God will say, *
for he shall speak peace unto his people, and to his saints, that they turn not again.
For his salvation is near to those who fear him, *
that glory may dwell in our land.
Mercy and truth have met together; *
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
Truth shall flourish out of the earth, *
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.
Indeed, the LORD shall show goodness, *
and our land shall give its increase.
Righteousness shall go before him, *
and he shall direct his going in the way.

—Psalm 85:7-13, New Coverdale

Poem

St. John's eve
Midsummer night, and bonfires on the hill
Burn for the man who makes way for the Light:
'He must increase and I diminish still,
Until his sun illuminates my night.'
So John the Baptist pioneers our path,
Unfolds the essence of the life of prayer,
Unlatches the last doorway into faith,
And makes one inner space an everywhere.
Least of the new and greatest of the old,
Orpheus on the threshold with his lyre,
He sets himself aside, and cries, 'Behold
The One who stands amongst you comes with fire!'
So keep his fires burning through this night,
Beacons and gateways for the child of light.

—Malcolm Guite

The Readings

A voice cries:

“In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
The uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

—Isaiah 40:3-5, ESV

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.”

And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God...[and saying],

You, my child, shall be the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way,
to give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.
In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

—Luke 1:57-64, ESV, and Luke 1:76-79, Book of Common Prayer

Reflection

The girls left their baskets in Hester’s garden and spent the rest of the afternoon rambling in the woods and fields surrounding it, discovering many pretty nooks and lanes. When they got hungry they had lunch in the prettiest spot of all...on the steep bank of a gurgling brook where white birches shot up out of long feathery grasses...

“Look, do you see that poem?” Anne said suddenly, pointing.

“Where?” Jane and Diana stared, as if expecting to see Runic rhymes on the birch trees.

“There...down in the brook...that old green, mossy log with the water flowing over it in those smooth ripples that look as if they’d been combed, and that single shaft of sunshine falling right athwart it, far down into the pool. Oh, it’s the most beautiful poem I ever saw.”

“I should rather call it a picture,” said Jane. “A poem is lines and verses.”

“Oh dear me, no.” Anne shook her head with its fluffy wild cherry coronal positively. “The lines and verses are only the outward garments of the poem and are no more really it than your ruffles and flounces are *you*, Jane. The real poem is the soul within them...and that beautiful bit is the soul of an unwritten poem. It is not every day one sees a soul...even of a poem.”

“I wonder what a soul...a person’s soul...would look like,” said Priscilla dreamily.

“Like that, I should think,” answered Anne, pointing to a radiance of sifted sunlight streaming through a birch tree. “Only with shape and features of course. I like to fancy souls as being made of light. And some are all shot through with rosy stains and quivers...and some have a soft glitter like moonlight on the sea...and some are pale and transparent like mist at dawn.”

—L. M. Montgomery, *Anne of Avonlea*

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, by whose providence your servant John the Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of your Son our Savior by preaching repentance: Make us so to follow his teaching and holy life, that we may truly repent, boldly rebuke vice, patiently suffer for the sake of truth, and proclaim the coming of Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

—Book of Common Prayer

Benediction

May you know in the coming days, as the light begins to wane, that the true Light has come into the world, and that the darkness cannot overcome it. May you know that your life is hidden with Christ in God, and that nothing—truly *nothing*—can separate you from the love of God which is yours in Christ Jesus. May this knowledge strengthen you to live awake and attentive to His beauty and goodness right where you are. **Amen.**

Resources:

“St John’s eve” by Malcolm Guite is from [Sounding the Seasons: Seventy Sonnets for the Church Year](#).
[Anne of Avonlea](#) by L. M. Montgomery
[The Book of Common Prayer](#)

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