

# Solemnity of the Nativity of John the Baptist

Cycle B

Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air

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## Names

This past November, my nephew Mark and his wife Augusta had twins.

Naturally, they knew that Augusta was bearing twins and for some months, they were considering different names for their new children. Finally, as the day came for the twins to be born, they made their decision.

They named the little girl Matilda Lynn – Matilda after Augusta’s aunt, and Lynn after Mark’s grandmother, my sister-in-law. They named the little boy George Franklin – George after both Mark’s grandfather and Augusta’s grandfather, and Franklin after Augusta’s uncle.

So Mark and Augusta gave a lot of thought to these names. They ended up connecting their two newborns with family members who meant a great deal to them.

I imagine that all of you who have children have gone through the same thing. Naming your children enables you to connect them with loved ones or with favorite saints or with people in your cultural heritage.

Or it enables you to select a completely new name and express your love and hope for your child in that way. Naming your children is a wonderful opportunity.

## Jewish Naming

We hear about the naming of a child in today’s gospel.

It is interesting that the Jewish custom of Jesus’ day allowed neighbors to have a say into the naming. A new child was seen as a gift for both the family and the entire village.

The Jewish custom also dictated that the first son would be named after the father. So it is natural that the villagers in today’s gospel expect this little boy to be named after his father Zechariah.

But when the angel reveals to Elizabeth and Zechariah that they are going to have a baby, the angel also reveals the name – John. So God must have some special plan for this child and this gets expressed in the naming.

## God’s Renaming

If we look in the Scripture, we also see that God sometimes changes peoples’ names.

For example, God renames Abram and calls him Abraham – which means, “*the father of many nations.*” Jesus renames Simon and calls him Peter – which means, “*rock.*”

In effect, God renames the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah and calls him John – which means, “*The Lord has shown favor.*” This renaming by God means that God who is the author of life is authoring new life in these persons.

God is doing something new. Existing human ways are put aside in the renaming.

And the message here is that human beings no longer need to be trapped in the patterns and habits and outlooks that they now have. This renaming by God gives new hope and new possibilities for these particular persons in the Bible and for all of humanity.

### Our Renaming

God in Jesus can also rename us.

Jesus can break through patterns or habits or outlooks that trap us in a certain way. His presence and life can empower us in new ways.

So for example, if we feel lost and aimless and without purpose, we can be renamed “*Visionary.*” If we are holding on to a hurt that seems impossible to let go of, we can be renamed “*Forgiver.*”

God, through the light and love and life of Jesus Christ, can in effect rename us. We only need to cooperate with God as do Zechariah and Elizabeth

This is the power of God. And, in turn, we are empowered by Jesus to rename others.

So maybe they are named “*drunkard*” or “*addict*” and we can rename them “*persons dealing with a challenge.*” Or maybe they are named “*alien*” or “*illegal*” and we can rename them “*persons seeking a better life for themselves and their families.*”

Our renaming others is a way to bring the healing, positive, hopeful, and inclusive way of Jesus to them. It enables others to feel new worth or purpose or direction for their lives.

### Conclusion

So, naming and renaming – a powerful lesson and possibility this morning!