

W E E K L Y M E D I T A T I O N

THE NATIVITY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (JUNE 24)

One of the hymns for this feast was written by the 9th century hymnographer and nun Cassia (or Kassia or Cassiane). She writes:

Today the voice of Isaiah the Prophet is fulfilled / in the birth of John, the greatest of prophets. / He said: "Behold, I will send my Angel before Thy face, to prepare Thy Way!" / Now the warrior of the heavenly King has come. / He truly will prepare the way for our God. / He is a man by nature, but an angel in manner of life. / He embraced purity and chastity forever. / Now they are his by nature. / Let us all the faithful greet him, crying:// "Pray for us, that our souls may be saved!"

Her hymn draws upon most of the important themes connected with our understanding of the one we call the Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist. He fulfills ancient biblical prophecy. He is himself is the greatest of the prophets. He is the greatest born of woman. He is renowned for his asceticism. Above all he points toward Christ and directs us to look to Him and deepen our relationship with Him. He says in words that define true spiritual maturity: *He must increase, but I must decrease* (John 3:30).

John is, in a sense, the very best that nature, prophecy, and law have to offer. He represents the climax of the long tradition of Old Testament prophecy, of righteous struggle, of the anticipation of God's mighty act of deliverance of His people. He stands at the threshold of the new covenant of grace, of a new birth that transcends even the best that nature, prophecy and law have to offer: the new life in Christ.

By the forerunner's heavenly intercession may we too seek always the Lord's increase in our life and witness.

Fr. Andrew