

Nativity of St. John the Baptist (June 24)

“When All the World Was Cursed” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #346)

The Christian Church has its own Church Year. This calendar includes not only the very familiar Sundays and seasons, but also Feasts and Festivals, Occasions (like Thanksgiving Day), and Commemorations (saints including men and women of the Old and New Testaments and others from the first 19 centuries of the Church’s life).

The Nativity of St. John the Baptist (June 24th) is considered a “major” Feast, which means that, when it falls on a Sunday, it is normally observed and the regular Sunday lessons are set aside.

Even though we often sing “When All the World Was Cursed” during Advent, this hymn of the day was originally written for this festival in 1664.

We can understand its ongoing popularity. It’s a study chorale and its text contains many of the familiar elements of John’s story—his leaping in his mother’s womb when Mary visits her, his passionate preaching of repentance in the desert, his baptism of Jesus in the Jordan with the proclamation “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”,

In our day the phrase “O grant, dear Lord of love....our true repentance voicing...” has a particular resonance.

Our world is also “cursed by Moses’ condemnation.” It continues to need to hear the Church declare: We are all sinful by our fallen, human nature. We daily sin against God’s will by thoughts, words, and deeds, by actions taken and by actions not taken. The world needs to hear a solid call to repentance, that each of us acknowledge our sinful nature, repent of our actions, make amends where we have wronged others, and vow to strive for a better life according to God’s good and gracious will.

But the world also needs to hear the second part of John’s message—that Jesus is the Christ, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Only the shining Light of God’s goodness and love can bring healing to a broken world.

Thanks be to God that he continues to strengthen his Church for this two-part message, showing us the way through women and men, the saints who have gone before us , “that we may imitate their faith and good works according to our calling.” (*Augsburg Confession* 21)

[Another favorite song for this day is the *Benedictus* (“Blessed Be the Lord, the God of Israel”), which John’s father, Zechariah, sang at his birth.]

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{photo of Barry}

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When all the world was cursed by Moses’ condemnation,
Saint John the Baptist came with words of consolation.
With true forerunner’s zeal the greater One he named,
and him, as yet unknown, as Savior he proclaimed.

Before he yet was born, he leaped in joyful meeting,
confessing him as Lord whose mother he was greeting.
By Jordan’s rolling stream, a new Elijah bold,
he testified of him of whom the prophets told:

Behold the Lamb of God that bears the world’s transgression,
whose sacrifice removes the devil’s dread oppression.
Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin,
who for our peace and joy will full atonement win.

O grant, dear Lord of love, that we receive, rejoicing,
the word proclaimed by John, our true repentance voicing,
that gladly we may walk upon our Savior’s way
until we live with him in his eternal day.

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