

It's only 6 more months till Christmas. I'm sure the stores will be putting up their decorations any day now. Six months before we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we celebrate the birth of John the Baptist. No one knows when Jesus was born. There's an old tradition that Passover fell on March 25 the year he died, and that he died on the anniversary of the day he was conceived, and 9 months after that gave us December 25 for Christmas, but no one really knows when Jesus was born. According to Luke's gospel, at the annunciation the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary that her kinswoman Elizabeth was already in her sixth month of pregnancy. Logically, her son was born 6 months before Jesus. So every year on June 24 the Catholic Church celebrates the birth of John the Baptist. No one knows when John was born, but this is as good a guess as any.

John the Baptist was the greatest of the prophets. He personally foreshadowed the coming of Jesus in his birth, the life of Jesus in his preaching, and the death of Jesus in his martyrdom. So to celebrate John is to celebrate Jesus.

A special hymn to John the Baptist was composed in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. During the middle ages, the Church developed Gregorian chant for every day of the year. This particular hymn played an important role in the history of music. Very few people sing this hymn any more, so I will sing the first verse for you. *Ut queant laxis resonare fibris Mira gestorum famuli tuorum, Solve polluti labii reatum, Sancte Iohannes.* OK, all together now! I realize it's not a catchy tune. This verse asks Saint John the Baptist to loosen our voices to praise God, just as the voice of his father Zechariah was loosened; Zechariah was mute throughout Elizabeth's pregnancy, and got his voice back after John was born.

Anyway, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century a musician named Guido of Arezzo noticed that the first note of each phrase of this hymn made a scale. Listen again. (*Ut queant. . .*) So he took the 6 syllables that began the 6 phrases of this hymn, and gave their names to those 6 notes of the scale: ut, re, mi, fa, so, la. Later someone changed ut to do and added ti to round out the scale. So Julie Andrews could never have sung "Do a deer, a female deer" if it hadn't been for the birth of John the Baptist.

On this day the notes go up, but the sun goes down. We have passed the first day of summer and now the days are getting shorter. John the Baptist was very popular, but he said of Jesus, "He must increase; I must decrease." We celebrate the birth of John at the beginning of summer as a reminder that we live for Christ, not for ourselves. Our computers come with files called "my computer," "my files," "my music," and "my pictures." Merchants try to convince us that we are the center of the universe and that we should pamper ourselves. But this feast has something else in mind. We live for Christ, not for ourselves. We evaluate all our wants in the light of the gospel. Not everything we want is something we should have. Some things that we have, we should give away. We must decrease so that Christ may increase.