

## A New...

We've heard how Jesus is the New Adam, or the New Moses. Or we've heard how Mary is the New Eve. And how John the Baptist is the New Elijah. But have you considered how John the Baptist is the New Samson?

When we compare the first reading and the Gospel, some similarities arise: an angel announces the birth of Samson and John the Baptist, both mothers were barren before that, and both men were inspired by the Holy Spirit either at birth or a young age. Yet there is one last parallel: they are both not to be exposed to wine or strong drink. The angel announces this to the mother of Samson and to Zechariah, the father of John and in the book of Judges, it explains why: because they are both to be consecrated from the womb.

In an ancient Israelite tradition that comes from the book of Numbers, you could take a vow and become a Nazirite. Nazirites are like monks of the Catholic Church, like Jewish monks. To become a Nazirite, someone who was consecrated, set apart for God, you would have to fulfill three things: you can't cut your hair, you can't go near a dead corpse and finally, you can't consume anything made by grapes e.g., no wine or strong drink.

Just as Samson was consecrated to God from his birth, so too John the Baptist was consecrated. This brings us to the reason why the Church gives us this reading for Advent: just as Samson was called to 'BEGIN the deliverance of Israel from the power of the Philistines', so too John the Baptist was called to BEGIN the deliverance of Israel and the whole world from the power of sin.

The Philistines were the constant enemies of Israel before the time of David and even during his time too. Samson defeated many Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey, but John the Baptist will help defeat the greater enemy of Israel, sin itself, by preaching a baptism of repentance and preparing them for the Messiah. John the Baptist is the New Samson.

However, John the Baptist is the New Samson because he fulfilled more perfectly what Samson failed to do. Although Samson defeated many Philistines, he was not the most upright person. He violated his vow of avoiding corpses by grabbing honey from a lion's carcass, he visited prostitutes, and he lived selfishly for himself. Eventually, he sacrificed his life to defeat the Philistines but he put himself in that situation by telling Delilah how to weaken himself. Samson was really only consecrated to the Lord with his HAIR and not with his HEART like John the Baptist whose HEART was on fire and eager for the coming of the Messiah.

As we approach the birth of our King, we need to ask ourselves whether we are only consecrated to the Lord with our HAIR and our HEART; that is to say, in the externals of Christmas (Christmas tree, wreaths, presents, turkey) AND the internal dedication (faithful prayer, love for all our neighbors, true repentance, aspiration for sanctity). May the Lord shape us according to his will so that we too may be like John the Baptist dedicated to God with our HAIR and with our HEARTS to become a New Me, a New Samson.