



Saint John the Baptist

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On the 26th day of the blessed month of Tute (October 6), it was announced to Zacharias, the priest, the birth of **St John the Baptist**. Zacharias was praying and asking God persistently to give him a child. The people of Israel despised anyone without a son and they treated them with disrespect; they would say that he was without the blessing that God had told Adam in these words: “Be fruitful and multiply.”



Head of St John on a platter. (Monastery of St Paul)

But our Lord had compassion on Zacharias and attended to his appeal. While Zacharias was praying in the sanctuary, Archangel Gabriel appeared to him as it was stated in the Holy Gospel according to St Luke: “Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him standing on the right side of the altar of incense” (Luke 1:11). Archangel Gabriel informed him that he would have a son. Zacharias replied, asking the angel, “Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is well advanced in years.” The angel told him that he was sent from God to announce this to him and that it was not apt for him to doubt the Word of God. As a result, Zacharias became mute for challenging the Word of God. Afterward, Elizabeth conceived a child according to the promise, which God had announced to them.

On the day of the newborn’s circumcision, they asked Zacharias about the child’s name. He asked for a tablet and wrote “**John**.” Zacharias miraculously began

to speak and soon thereafter prophesized about **St John** becoming a prophet of the Highest.

After describing the birth of **St John**, St Luke says that he grew, and “was in the wilderness until the day of his showing to Israel.” The people of the Qumran settlement, which produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, sometime use the term “living in the wilderness” to refer to residing in their community at Qumran near the Dead Sea. Accordingly, it has been suggested that **St**

John spent some of his early years being educated at Qumran.

Although not too much is documented about the childhood and growth of **St John**, it is well established by the Holy Gospels as well as the Jewish historian Josephus (who wrote after 70 AD), that he was a Jewish preacher in the time of Pontius Pilate (AD 26-36). He called the people to repentance and to a renewal of their essential relation with God. The Holy Gospels prove that **St John** preached near the Jordan River in the wilderness of Judea. He preached to the people saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:3). In the Holy Gospel according to St Matthew, **St John** states, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3:11). **St John** spoke of One greater than himself who was to come. The Lord



Jesus Christ came to be baptized by **St John** and he said to some of his followers, “This is the Man I spoke of.” Because **St John** knew that he was not worthy of touching the Lord our God, he humbly refused the Lord Jesus’ requests to baptize Him; “...Jesus answered and said to him ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him. Then when He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him. And suddenly the voice came from Heaven saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’” (Matthew 3:15-17).

During **St John’s** quest to call all to repentance, he rebuked King Herod’s actions of divorcing his current wife to marry his brother Philip’s wife, Herodias. **St John** sternly objected to this and told King Herod that “it is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife” (Mark 6:18). Being influenced by Herodias, Herod detained **St John** and put him into prison during a feast that was being held in honor of Herod. On this occasion, Herodias’ daughter danced for Herod and pleased him. He then promised her anything she may ask for, even as much as half of his kingdom. Herodias’ daughter accordingly took the opinion of her mother, “Ask for the head of **St John the Baptist** on a platter.” When Herod heard this, he was exceedingly sorry for he feared **St John’s** spirituality and acceptance by the people and thus hesitated to harm the Saint. Despite this, Herodias’ influence was great and Herod then commanded his servants to behead **St John the Baptist**. His head was then put on a platter and given to Herodias. The joy of the people at the feast soon turned into sorrow. It was said that when the holy head of **St John** was cut off, it flew into the air and cried out saying again, “It is not right to have your brother’s wife.”

By looking at the story of **St John the Baptist**, we

learn several points to help us in our daily lives as Christians.

First, when Zacharias doubted the Word of God when Archangel Gabriel appeared to him, he became mute until the time of **St John’s** circumcision. If we constantly have faith in the Lord, nothing is impossible. For it is written, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20) To have faith in the Lord means to trust Him and to believe what the Holy Bible says about Him. We all need to fully rely and place our undividable trust in God.

Another thing **St John** was well known for was his acts of evangelism. **St John** prepared the path for his followers to walk in the way of the Lord. We should try to be like **St John the Baptist** in the sense of evangelizing. In the Holy Book of Malachi 3:1, it is written, “Behold, I send My messenger. And he will prepare the way before Me.” In this verse, God tells of the messenger (i.e., **St John**) that is to come and prepare the people to follow the Lord our God. “Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert, a highway for our God.” (Isaiah 40:3) God wants us to unceasingly preach His word to all—not only by mouth, by furthermore by humble actions.

St John especially was a humble person. When he told his followers about the One who is to come, he said “...but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.” When the Lord Jesus Christ approached **St John** to get baptized, **St John** humbly refused. “...John tried to prevent Him, saying ‘I have need to be baptized by You, and are you coming to me?’” (Matthew 3:14). **St John** did not boast, brag, or act proud when the Lord asked to be baptized. He instead was humble and felt that he was not worthy to baptize the Lord Jesus Christ.



The Lord Jesus Christ insisted (Matthew 3:15) and as a son should obey his father, **St John** did not hesitate to obey the command of the Lord.

In the Holy Bible, it says, “For Herod feared **John**, knowing that he was just a holy man, and he protected him” (Mark 6:20). When **St John** talked to Herod, he wasn’t intimidated or afraid. For example, **St John** kept telling Herod that it was not lawful to

have his brother’s wife. Herod did, in fact, get intimidated by **St John** and feared him. Herod had a whole army to protect him, similarly, **St John** had God’s protection. As Christians, we should unquestionably place our trust in Him and have confidence that the Lord is our ultimate protector. “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

Viruses

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The composition of a virus is relatively simple, and its size is extremely small. It cannot even properly be called an organism because it is unable to carry on life processes outside a living cell of an animal, plant, or bacteria. Yet its method of entering and “enslaving” a living cell is so ingenious that the virus is humankind’s deadliest enemy and resists the most advanced efforts of modern science to eliminate it.

Millions of people throughout the world suffer each year from viral diseases such as polio, measles, chicken pox, mumps, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), and the common cold. Viruses also produce such illnesses as foot-and-mouth disease in livestock, distemper in dogs, panleukopenia in cats, and hog cholera.

Viruses are exceedingly small; they range from about 0.02 to 0.25 microns in diameter (1 micron=0.000039 inch). By contrast, the smallest bacteria are about 0.4 micron in size. Outside of a living cell, a virus is a dormant particle. It exhibits none of the characteristics generally associated with life. Unlike bacteria and other microorganisms, viruses remain dormant in body fluids. Thus, great numbers of viruses may be present in a body and yet not produce a disease because they have not invaded the body’s cells. Once inside a host cell, however, the virus becomes an active entity capable of taking over the infected cell’s metabolic

machinery. The cellular metabolism becomes so altered it helps to produce thousands of new viruses.

In our spiritual life, we are also in danger of being infected with viruses. These “spiritual” viruses are the tiny sins that appear “harmless” on the outside, yet once they enter the person’s life; they enslave it and destroy it. St Paul reminds us how we were enslaved to sin, yet by obeying the teachings of the Lord, we were set free. “But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered; having been set free from sin...” (Romans 6:17)

He also gives us the prognosis of allowing sin to dwell in us: “For the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) We are warned to beware of the little foxes that destroy the vineyards (Song of Solomon 2:15). See how these small “harmless” sins work: “But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire.” (Romans 7:8) “When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” (James 1:15)

We must therefore, be very careful and immunize ourselves against these viruses through prayer, fasting, reading the Holy Bible, and other spiritual exercises. “For sin shall not have dominion over you.” (Romans 6:14)