



A New Word Was Heard

ΔΥΩΤΕΝ ΝΟΥΡΑΧΙ ὕΒΕΡΙ

Written by: His Grace Bishop Youssef
Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

St John was chosen before his birth to be the forerunner of the Messiah (Luke 1:13-17). The saint was born of priestly lineage (Luke 1:5). He was the son of Zechariah, a priest of the division of Abijah a division that regularly served at the Temple in Jerusalem. St John's mother was St Elizabeth and was one of the daughters of Aaron thus making her of priestly lineage as well.

St John desired the ascetic life in the Judean wilderness where his spartan food consisted of locusts and wild honey (Mark 1:6). Even the Lord Jesus Christ noted the meager and simple food of St John, *John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has a demon.'* (Luke 7: 33-35) Neither did St John choose a comfortable populated region in which to live and preach but the arid, harsh, wilderness bordering the Dead Sea below where the Jordan River empties. St John the Baptist dressed as the poor, a man dressed in the rough garb of camel's hair homespun with a leather belt around his waist. By this saint's food, lifestyle and dress he readily **identified himself with the lowly.**

St Clement of Alexandria wrote, *'The blessed John, despising the locks of sheep as savoring luxury, chose*



Icon representing Saint Mary, Lord Jesus Christ, Saint John the Baptist at His feet and angels.

camel's hair, and was clad in it. So he became an example of frugality and simplicity of life.¹

St John's desires were upon the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing more than this.

Many thought St John the Baptist Elijah returned from the Heavens to which he had been taken by a chariot of fire in a whirlwind. While certainly not the case of THE Elijah returned, the Lord Jesus Christ taught that St John fulfilled the prophecy of the return of Elijah as one who was to precede the Messiah *the voice crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord* (Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4, John 1:23).

Origen writes, *'There is nothing absurd in believing that John in the spirit and power of Elijah turned the hearts of the fathers to the children and that it was on account of this spirit that he was called Elijah who was to come'* for he who was called John was not the

Elijah who had been taken up.¹

Justin Martyr said, *'John was a prophet among your Jewish nation. After him, no other prophet appeared among you.'*

In the Holy Gospel of St Luke it was emphasized that St



John was subordinate to the Lord Jesus Christ while in the womb. St Luke records that when the Virgin St Mary visited St Elizabeth who was then six months pregnant with St John the Baptist, the infant in St Elizabeth's womb leaped at the sound of St Mary's voice (Luke 1:41). For he recognized God the Word conceived in the womb.

In the Holy Gospel of St John it is recorded that the St John the Baptist vehemently denied he was the Lord Christ. St John the Baptist was **humble in the sight of the Lord.**

 A hymn on his behalf declares: *i You are indeed more worthy of honor than the Prophets, for you were found worthy to baptize in the waters Him Whom you announced. Thereafter, you suffered for the truth, and rejoicing, announced the good news also to those in Hades that God had appeared as man, taking away the sins of the world and granting to all of us the abundance of mercy. î*

St John preached a message of final divine judgment and a call to repentance, *iWho warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits that befit repentance—Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fireî (Luke 3:7-9). St John's fruits of repentance **emphasized social justice:** *iHe who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewiseî (Luke 3:11). His message of repentance was for the poor, the prostitute, the rich, and the tax collectors alike. St John **could relate to all who would listen and hear the Word of God.****

St John continued preaching after the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry began.

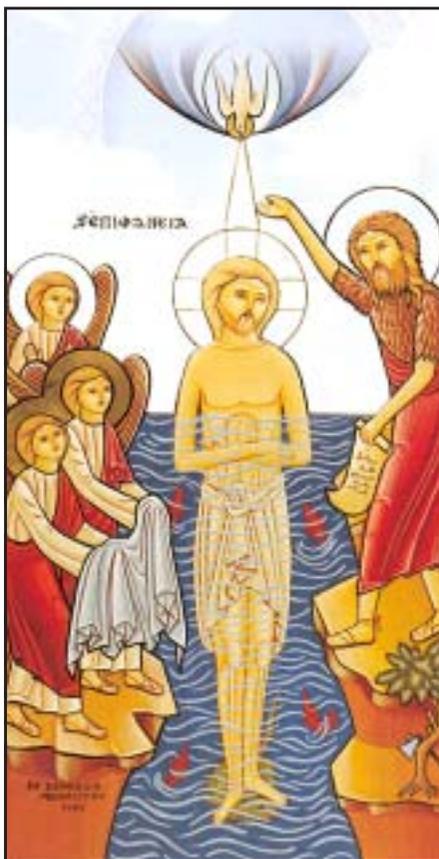
The Lord taught in the towns and St John in the countryside. St John had clearly proclaimed that he was simply the forerunner and that after him would come, *iHe who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untieî (Mark 1:7). By St John's own testimony his ministry was to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ, directing us to the One who was to come after him.*

St John taught his disciples how to **fast and pray.**

St John **never saw himself superior** to the Lord Jesus Christ although St John baptized the Lord. When the Lord Jesus Christ appeared before St John to be baptized, St John was immediately humbled, and said it was he who was in need of baptism by the Lord. But the Lord Jesus Christ knew what was needed *ito fulfill all righteousnessî (Matthew 3:15) and St John **obeyed.** Following the Lord Jesus Christ baptism a voice from the Heavens declares, *iThis is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleasedî (Matthew 3:17). It is well agreed upon that the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry actually began with His baptism by St John.**

When the Lord Jesus Christ began His earthly ministry He took with Him some of St John's disciples as His first disciples. The Lord Jesus Christ took with Him St Andrew, St John, St Andrew's brother, St Simon (Peter), and St Bartholomew from among St John's brotherhood.

St John the Baptist ministry and work were essential to the Lord's. Not that the Lord Jesus Christ needed St John's teachings to build upon but rather they were preparation for the people to



St John baptizing the Lord Jesus Christ



accept the Lord's teachings and plan of salvation. The people's acceptance of St John as a **godly man** prepared them for the acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah. It was St John's **spiritual discipline** and teachings that made a pathway for the Lord.

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke highly of St John; *Among those born of women none is greater than John, yet he who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he* (Luke 7:28). What did this mean? The Lord Jesus Christ was explaining not only high praise of St John but that a new era of history had begun with His ministry and that St John remained still a part of the earlier era.

St John was imprisoned by Herod Antipas whose anger against St John derived from the saint accusing Herod of breaking Jewish law in marrying a half brother's wife, Heriodas. At a banquet Heriodas daughter danced for Herod and giving him such great pleasure that he made a promise to her without limits. She asked for St John's head upon a platter. Herod had the forerunner beheaded and his head placed upon a platter for his stepdaughter and a dance.

Following St John the Baptist's martyrdom it is believed he became a forerunner in the Hades. Hippolytus writes, *He also first preached to those in Hades, becoming a forerunner there when he was put to death by Herod. For He wanted there too, to reveal that the Savior would descend to ransom the souls of the saints from the hand of death.*

To further St John's honor, the Holy Book of Acts 1:21-22 tells us the vacancy in the apostolic college was filled by one who had been St John's followers.

St John, the lowly and humble whose desires were upon the Lord only, stood piously at the very beginning of the Holy Gospel story. St John stood compassionately for social justice and taught the poor and the rich from different walks of life, anyone who would hear the Word of God. St John only request was a beginner's mind. He taught spiritual discipline through his simple ascetic example of fasting, prayer, and obedience. Through the heart of St John truly a ***New Word was heard.*** ✚

How Would the Repaired Violin Sound?

British violinist Peter Cropper was invited to Finland for a special concert. As a personal favor, the Royal Academy of Music lent Peter their priceless 285-year-old Stradivarius.

The violin was known the world over for its incredible sound. At the concert, a nightmare happened. Going on stage, Peter tripped and fell. The violin broke into several pieces!

Peter flew home to England in a state of shock.

A master craftsperson, Charles Beare, spent endless hours repairing the violin. Then came the moment of truth. What would the violin sound like?



Those present couldn't believe their ears. The violin's sound was better than before.

The story of that violin is our story. Sin nearly destroyed us, but God, the master craftsperson, repaired us. Our sound is now more beautiful than it was before.