

Nativity of St. John the Baptist

June 24



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Biblical Figure

The priest Zechariah watched with joy in his heart as his wife, Elizabeth, held the miracle of their newborn son in her arms. Their younger cousin, Mary, stood beside her. She had helped Elizabeth all through the birth with her strong and gentle care.

Even though Zechariah was bursting with happiness, he could not speak. He remembered the day, nine months before, when the Archangel Gabriel had appeared to him, a bright and wondrous messenger of God. The angel had told him that Elizabeth would bear a son, whom they were to name John, and that he would turn many people to God. But Zechariah had doubted the angel's words. He and Elizabeth were old; she was past child-bearing years. He had thought that the miracle would be impossible for God. Because of Zechariah's doubt, the angel had taken away his ability to speak. He would not be able to talk again until the angel's words were fulfilled. Now the miracle of his son's birth had come true. But there was something else that still had to happen before the angel's words were completely fulfilled—Elizabeth and Zechariah had to name their son.

Elizabeth declared that they would name the child John. Their neighbors and relatives were confused: it was part of Jewish tradition to name a child after a family member. But no one in their family was called John. The neighbors and relatives went to Zechariah. Surely, they thought, he would give a different name to his son. Zechariah signaled for a tablet. On it he wrote, "John is his name." The people were amazed.

With the naming of the baby, the angel's words had come to pass. Suddenly, Zechariah could speak again! He gave great shouts of joy and praise to God. Now the people's amazement turned into curiosity. What great things would baby John do when he grew up, they wondered, since God was surely with him?

Zechariah sang a song in praise of God for the birth of his son: "And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways" (Luke 1:76). As he sang, Mary and Elizabeth gazed into each other's eyes, Elizabeth holding John in her arms, and Mary's hand resting on her belly. They knew that John would prepare the way for Mary's son, who was the Messiah. John would be a voice calling out in the desert of Galilee, "Make straight the way of the Lord." St. John the Baptist, help my heart to be always ready for Jesus!