

## **The Faces of Advent**

### **Calling for Repentance – The Forerunner**

St. John the Baptist is most commonly known as the forerunner of Christ, the one who went before the Lord to prepare His way. His role as forerunner, however, is seen not only during Christ's public ministry but even in the events surrounding the incarnation and nativity of our Lord.

St. John was born to St. Elizabeth, a cousin of St. Mary's, and St. Zacharias the priest. They had always wanted a child and prayed fervently, but St. Elizabeth was barren and well advanced in her years. One day, while St. Zacharias was offering incense in the Temple, the angel Gabriel appeared to St. Zacharias and told him that his wife would conceive a child. Because Zacharias doubted the angel's message, he was struck mute until the child's birth ([Luke 1:5-25](#)).

When the archangel Gabriel visited St. Mary, he spoke to her about how she would give birth to Christ. When St. Mary learned that her cousin had conceived a child in her old age, she hastened to see her cousin to rejoice at the good news ([Luke 1:28-38](#)).

The Gospel tells us that:

When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" ([Luke 1:41-42](#))

St. Ephrem the Syrian comments on this greeting, saying,

John jumped for joy to make an announcement concerning his future preaching. The infant of the barren woman exulted before the infant of the virgin. He sought out his mother's tongue and desired to pronounce a prophecy concerning the Lord.

Likewise, St. Ambrose of Milan explains,

St. John, who before he was born, when yet in his mother's womb, bore witness to the grace of the Spirit which he had received, when leaping in the womb of his parent he hailed the glad tidings of the coming of the Lord

Even before his birth, St. John the Baptist was praising God and preaching about Him while still in his mother's womb!

When St. Elizabeth gave birth to John, Zacharias was finally released from his muteness. He cried out and prophesied, saying,

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways...to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace ([Luke 1:76-79](#)).

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St. John was always willing to praise and prepare the way for his Creator, even before he was out of the womb. St. John's whole life was dedicated to this mission to prepare the way for his Creator. His example confronts our own excuses in our spiritual life. Let us remember St. John's wholehearted zeal and obedience, because, similar to St. John, we are also called to bring the light of Christ to those who are in spiritual darkness.

But what does it truly mean to be a forerunner, to be like St. John? St. Irenaeus explains it simply: John the Forerunner "prepared and made ready the people beforehand for the reception of the Word of life." He called them to repentance, awakened their consciences, and reminded them of the prophecies so they might receive God with humility.

May Christ guide us in our daily evangelism and obedience through the intercessions of St. John the Baptist.

#### **Sources:**

- Bible, ESV
- Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron, St. Ephrem the Syrian
- Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, St. Ambrose of Milan
- Proof of the Apostolic Preaching, Irenaeus