

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The mute Priest of the division of Abijah spoke: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel... for He hath visited and redeemed His people.” The revelation of the Coming One was too great to remain silenced. It is He for whom the whole creation groans. The miraculous conception and birth of Zacharias’ son would soon be eclipsed by another Birth, a Birth more miraculous, a Holy Birth that would change the course of mankind for time and eternity - the birth of the Son of God.

Adam and Eve believed in Him and awaited Him. Noah, Shem Ham and Japheth worshipped Him. Abraham believed in Him and it was credited unto him as righteousness. The Prophets of old foretold Him. Moses promised Him. Isaiah and Ezekiel saw Him and wrote of Him. Jeremiah and Daniel pointed to Him. But before the coming of the Promised God Man, the last of the Old Testament Prophets, the Elijah who was to come, was born. His birth too was miraculous, revealed by an angel, attended by Divine signs. But he was not without sin.

His name was John, the name given by revelation, the name the silent Prophet proclaimed by writing. John was the forerunner, the one who would go before the Lord to prepare His Ways. And that miraculous birth, the birth of St. John called the Baptizer, meant that the Holy Incarnation of the Son of God was accomplished, and His birth of the Virgin was nigh. In the mystery of the Holy Incarnation of Mary’s Son, Zacharias’ son was God’s cousin, but his Cousin, Son of Mary, was not son of Joseph. He was the Son of God.

The Baptizer’s Prophetic work had already begun. At the Visitation of Elizabeth his mother by Mary, the Mother of God, that child still in the darkness of the womb of his mother leapt for joy at the presence of the True Light, yet in the mysterious darkness of the womb of the Virgin. The nascent Baptizer already, even before his birth, pointed to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He performed his bounding homily that you might know, not John, but the Lord to whom he pointed. It was a kinetic sermon of pure Gospel.

There is only one sentence in Scripture that records the Nativity of St. John the Baptizer, the miracle we celebrate and give thanks to God for this day. That sentence is found in the Gospel according to St. Luke, the First Chapter: “At that time Elizabeth’s full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son.”

Matthew and Mark begin with the preaching of John in the desert, but don’t mention his birth. The Evangelist John simply states: “There was a man sent from God whose name was John.” And the Disciple whom the Lord loved is quick to add of John “He was not the Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.”

Luke dedicates half of his first chapter to the angelic visit to Zacharias, in the Temple, to the Priest being dumbstruck, to the unusual name by which the boy would be called at his circumcision, to the loosing of Zacharias’ tongue, and to the Spirit-inspired *Benedictus* that focuses not on his new son, but on the Horn of Salvation that the Blessed God of Israel raised up.

So as miraculous as John's conception, birth and ministry were; and they were by any measure miraculous; his entire life and work was to point away from himself and to One Greater, One who coming after him was before him, the strap of Whose sandals John was not worthy to loose.

Filled with the Spirit of God, Zacharias proclaimed that in Christ, as the Prophets foretold of David's house, God has brought forth a Savior. In Christ God has visited and redeemed His people. It is He that performs the promised mercy, in faithful remembrance of His Holy Testament. And then Zacharias' divinely given prophetic homily points to you: "that we, being delivered from the hands of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life."

Only then does John's father's prophetic burden turn to his new son. He will be called the Prophet of the Highest. He will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His Ways. He will give knowledge of salvation to God's people by the remission of their sins. He would not be the Highest, but rather His Prophet. He would not be the Lord, but would prepare His Ways. And He would not give salvation, but rather the knowledge of it. And so John would preach Another, prepare the world for a better Coming, and promise a remission that John himself could not give.

And when that Promised Horn of Salvation came, John would decrease so that He would increase. John would send his disciples to the Christ, for He, not John, was the Coming One. And faithful to his Prophetic vocation, John would condemn the sin of a ruler whose lust and pride would swing the sword that would meet John's neck, sundering John from the tribulations of this fallen world, freeing him to enter heaven.

Zacharias was a sinner. Elizabeth too. Mary and Joseph as well. So it is no surprise that you too are a sinner, a sinner under the just and holy curse. Could there be a greater manifestation of God's grace than His loving choice of such fallen men to be the messengers of, and the ark that bore, the Promised Savior? God became like them – like Zacharias and Elizabeth and Mary and Joseph.

God became like you – a man – to redeem men imprisoned by sin, to redeem you who were dead in your transgressions, and bring you from death to life. To borrow the Words of the Apostle abnormally born: Brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of Abraham by faith, those among you who fear God, to you this Word of Salvation has been sent.

For you, you born in sin, to save you from your sins, God prepared a miraculous birth, a birth foreshadowed by John's Jordan washings, birth from above by water and the Spirit. In that birth all the benefits of the precious death and glorious resurrection of your Lord Jesus Christ are imputed to you. In that birth your sins are removed, and flow backwards in time and space to cover the Lamb baptized by John. So in your baptism the sign of the Holy Cross is made both upon your forehead and upon your heart, to mark you as one redeemed of Christ the Crucified.

In that Holy Birth, your rebirth, you are given a Divinely chosen Name as the magnificent Name of the Triune God is scribed upon you, a Name at which the angels bow, the Name of the God who created you, the God who redeemed you, the God who sanctifies you. And cleansed in the

washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, your tongue is loosed to speak the praises of the God who created you, the God who redeemed you, the God who sanctifies you.

The Forerunner has come and done his Prophetic, preparatory work that you might know, not John, but the Lord to whom he would point, and through the accounts of the Evangelists, the Lord and Savior to whom he points you even this day.

The feet that filled the sandals he was not worthy to loose were pierced and laid in a tomb. But He to whom John pointed took up His life again, that you might have eternal life through faith in Him. That is the oath He swore to your father Abraham, who believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

In Christ, you who are freed from sin may serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of your life. For it is you who have knowledge of the remission of your sins, through the tender mercy of your God. You have the Light that guides your feet into the Way of Peace, the Way of Salvation, the Way to heaven.

This day, the Horn of Salvation the Lord God raised up is raised up before you, as the Pastor elevates the Bread which is His Body, and the Cup which is His Blood. It is by His Body and Blood that His salvation comes, comes to you, you who eat and drink believing.

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