



## St. John's Message Still Applies to Us Today: On the Nativity of St. John, the Forerunner and Baptist of Christ

Dear Fathers, Brothers, and Sisters,

Today we commemorate and celebrate the Birth of St. John the Forerunner and Baptist of our Lord. His birth, like his life was quite miraculous, and was foretold centuries beforehand by the Prophet Isaiah: "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight..." Then, before his conception, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to his father, the high priest Zacharias, proclaiming that his wife Elizabeth, already advanced in years, would conceive and bear a son, whose name would be John. He told Zacharias: "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall neither drink wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." Because Zacharias did not believe the Archangel Gabriel, he was struck dumb until the fulfillment of the prophecy. Then when the child was born and they came to circumcise him on the eighth day, his tongue was loosed and he prophesied concerning his son, saying: "And you child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1: 76-79)



The fact that St. John's birth was miraculously foretold by the Archangel Gabriel, that his mother Elizabeth miraculously conceived and bore him, and that his father, the High Priest Zacharias, prophesied after his birth, all caused great fear and wonder among the Jewish population, as they wondered "what kind of child will this be?" St. John was unique in all the history of mankind, being chosen by God to be the Forerunner of the Messiah, the Savior of the world. His task was to prepare the way for Christ and His kingdom; to call people to repentance for the forgiveness of their sins, so that their hearts would be ready to meet and



accept Christ. As Christ Himself testified: “Among those born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.” He did not call them to go live in the desert as he did, but to live a just life, not extorting from their neighbor. He told them not to presume that being descendants of Abraham was enough for salvation, but that they must bear fruit, and that “every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

This same message of St. John, brothers and sisters, still applies to us today, over 2,000 years later. “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” It is not enough for us to say that we are Orthodox Christians, or that we follow the Old Calendar, or that we have a certain priest as our spiritual father, or that we belong to a special organization. We must bear good fruit, or we will be thrown into the fire. These words of St. John are very clear. He does not demand that we go to live in the desert as he did, or eat only honey and locusts, or wear clothes made of camel hair. Instead of going to the desert and avoiding all society, let us avoid evil society and impious gatherings, and seek out acquaintances who will help us draw closer to God. Instead of avoiding all wine and spirits, let us eat and drink in moderation, never over-indulging, striving to always keep the fasts. Perhaps we cannot be constantly in prayer like St. John, but let us make an effort to say our prayers in the morning and evening, before and after meals, and during all our daily activities as much as possible; and let us take every opportunity to attend church services, repenting of our sins and receiving the Holy Mysteries, the Body and Blood of our Saviour. Just as St. John called the Jews to repentance so that they may receive the Saviour, he is also calling each of us to repentance, so that our hearts may be cleansed and may become suitable dwelling places for our Saviour.

In one of the hymns of the Church we hear that St. John was given special Grace in order to pray for us. Let us continually turn to him in prayer, asking for his help and intercession. Let us follow his teachings so that we may bear good fruit and be true disciples of Christ. In this way we will truly glorify our patron saint, the heavenly protector of our parish, and honor his memory. Amen.