

Nativity of St. John the Baptist

The apparition of the holy Archangel Gabriel to the priest Zacharias in the Temple, with the announcement of the birth to him and the righteous Elizabeth, of a son who would prepare the way for the Lord, the Savior of the world, and the subsequent fulfillment of this promise, are the first of the events related by the Evangelists.

The announcement of the holy Archangel Gabriel to Zacharias in the Temple begins the New Testament Gospel. The announcement of the same Archangel Gabriel six months later in Nazareth to the Virgin Mary concerning the birth from Her of the Son of God, Who was to become incarnate, is a continuation of the revelation of the Pre-eternal Counsel concerning the salvation of the human race.

Three months after, the Annunciation, St. John the Forerunner was born "in a city of Judah," and six months after him Christ Himself was born in Bethlehem.

The Nativity of John the Baptist is the first joy sent down by God to the human race, the beginning of its deliverance from the power of the devil, sin and eternal death.

It is true that even before the Forerunner, the Most Holy Virgin Mary was born, and angels announced Her birth to Her parents. However, at that time, only Her parents knew of the exalted lot that was prepared for the Virgin Who was born, and they themselves were not fully aware of what had been announced to them beforehand. Therefore, it was only they, who celebrated at the birth of their Daughter, while the rest of the world only later understood the joy that had been announced (to it), by this birth.

From the day of the Nativity of John the Forerunner, the preparation of the human race begins for meeting the Son of God on earth. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people . . . And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most High: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways (Luke 1:68, 76). These God-inspired words of the priest Zacharias, after he had regained the gift of speech, were made known in all the land of Judea, causing disturbance to all living there, who asked each other in astonishment: What manner of child shall this be? (Luke 1:66).

Involuntarily the thought arose: Is this not the Messiah Himself? Judea was in an especially tense state of expectation of the Savior. Thus, the child John prepared the way for the Lord by his very birth; and even while he was still in the womb of His mother, by his leaping (Luke 1:41) he announced the coming birth of the Child Jesus, as if crying out: "Christ is born, give ye glory. Christ comes from heaven, meet ye Him"

Being born exactly half a year before Christ, John the Forerunner by the exact time of his birth depicted his mission of preparing the way for the Lord. He was born at the time of the year (June 24) when the day begins to grow shorter after the summer solstice, whereas the Nativity of Christ occurs (December 25) when the day begins to grow longer after the winter solstice. These facts are an embodiment of the words spoken later, by the Forerunner, after the beginning of Christ's preaching: He must increase, but I must decrease (John 3:30).

"The herald of the Sun, the Forerunner" was John the Baptist, who was like the morning star that announces the rising of the Sun of Righteousness in the East.