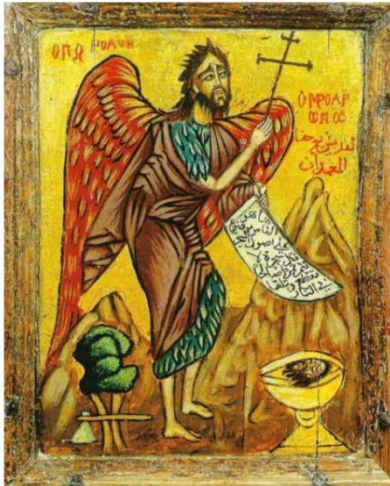


In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## I. John



A. Each year, on the Second Sunday of Advent, John the Baptist bursts on the scene – in the region around the Jordan, and into our hearts and lives.

1. Each year, John comes to us as “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

2. And, as we hear in next week’s Gospel, the people to flock to the desert to hear John – to hear this itinerant preacher who calls them to repent and turn their lives around, for the coming of the Kingdom of God;  
- and to be Baptized by him.

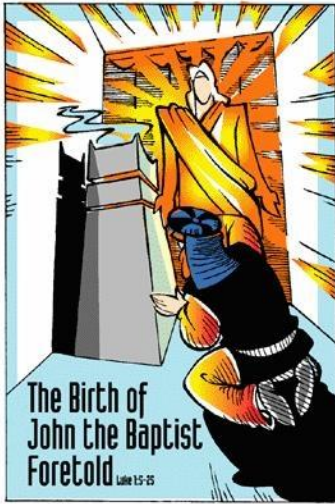
3. The people are stunned at what he says and does; yet, somehow it feels right.

4. And the people are amazed, for they flocked to this “wild man in the desert” to hear what he has to say.

5. But what did his parents think?

6. They undoubtedly were gone by the time John burst on the scene – after all, they were old when he was conceived – but what did they think when he was born, while he grew up?

B. We know what John’s Father, Zechariah, thought as we have a taste of his hopes and dreams for his son in the Benedictus – our Canticle this morning.



1. In his song, Zechariah expresses thanksgiving for the birth of his son and foretells the mission of John the Baptist.

*“And you, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,*

*To give to his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.*

*In the tender compassion of our God*

*the dawn from on high shall break upon us,*

*To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.”* (BCP p. 93)

2. Zechariah is forecasting that his son will “prepare the way of the Lord” – something that he literally did later in his life.

2. And as Zechariah predicts, the world will be liberated from the darkness of sin and brought into the light of God’s peace.

## II. Elizabeth

A. But what did John’s mother think about all this?

1. She was the one who had to endure what must have been a difficult pregnancy late in life.

2. She was the one who had to hold out against her family and friends and insist on calling the baby John – only to subsequently have Zechariah recover his speech when he affirmed the name.

3. She was the one who had suffered years and years of endless taunting and reminders that she had no child – no future – no one to remember her; and then had to endure more comments about being pregnant at this point in life.

4. What must she have thought?

5. Luke doesn't tell – but my friend and colleague Beryl Nyre, offers us these possibilities in this meditation.

B. Welcome to all of you! Welcome to my home!

1. So let me tell you my story. It's a little like Mary's story—and a little *not* like Mary's.

2. As you can probably tell, I am going to have a baby—at my age! that in itself is a miracle, don't you think?

- At my age, I should be having grandchildren!

3. Oh—I forgot to tell you my name. It's Elizabeth.

4. I am married to a very important man, whose name is Zechariah.

5. Zechariah is a priest of the Temple, and—well, let me tell you how the story began, and how it came to be that here I am, pregnant, and expecting a baby like my cousin.

6. Zechariah was in the Temple, doing whatever it is that priests do in the Temple.

7. I don't really know what he does in there all day, but he does many things, like praying and taking care of the Holy things that are there.

C. Anyway, he was working there one day, and suddenly there was a great bright light that surrounded him.

1. It was an enormous, dazzling light, and it surrounded Zechariah.

2. It was clearly from heaven, and it scared Zechariah half to death!

3. He fell on his face, terrified, and wondering what in the world it was!

4. Then a deep and powerful voice—but a kind voice—said to him, “I am an Angel of God”—blessed be His name.

5. And the angel Gabriel said, “Zechariah, your wife Elizabeth is going to have a baby!”

6. Now any sensible woman would have said, “Why thank you, Angel! That's wonderful news!”

7. But not Zechariah. Oh, no. What did he do? He *argued* with the angel! Sometimes I think that man has no sense!

8. So he said to the angel, “You’ve got to be kidding. (As if angels would kid around about a thing like that).

9. “It isn’t possible. I am an old, old, man. And Elizabeth isn’t as old as me, but she’s way too old to be having any babies. We gave up our dreams of having babies a long time ago. Nope. You’re wrong.”

D. In fact, when Zechariah and I were first married, we planned on having a big family—maybe even a dozen boys and girls.

1. We loved children so much, we wanted as many as we could take care of.

2. But the years came and went, and there were no babies.

3. We waited and waited, and many times I cried and cried and begged God—blessed be His name—for a baby.

4. I thought maybe I’d done something wrong, and God—blessed be His name—was not letting me have children because of it.

5. It didn’t seem fair, and sometimes I felt really angry and disappointed.

6. But over time, I got used to it, and I learned to help other people with their babies.

7. It wasn’t the same as having my own children, but it was better than not having any children around me at all.

E. And then the day came when the Angel told Zechariah that I was going to have a baby at last, and Zechariah said “NO! It’s not true, not true.”

1. What do you think the Angel felt like, then?

2. Well, the angel was offended. I mean he got *mad*. Believe me; you don’t want an *angel* to be mad at you!

3. And the Angel said to Zechariah, “Are you going to tell me that when an Angel—no less than a messenger of God—blessed be His name—comes and tells you something, that you are going to say, ‘Not true’?”

4. You listen to me, Zechariah—you listen very carefully.

- Your wife, Elizabeth, is going to have a baby son. It *is* true.
- And his name will not be Zechariah, Junior.
- Instead, you will name him John.

5. And because you are so impertinent, you are not going to be able to speak a word until after that baby is born!”

6. Poor Zechariah!

7. Well, as I said, if that Angel had come to me, I’d have danced with joy and life would have been a whole lot simpler.

8. There would have been none of this nonsense, and I’d have understood exactly what was happening. But God—blessed be His name—seems to know what he’s doing. So I don’t argue.

F. Anyway, poor Zechariah came stumbling out of the Temple like a crazy man.

1. His eyes were wide with fear, and he kept pointing to his mouth and clutching his throat.

2. And the people outside said, “What’s with Zechariah?” “Is he drunk?” “Maybe he’s sick.” But then one or two others, who were wiser than most, said, “No. He’s seen an angel.”

3. How did they know? Maybe they recognized the signs—because Zechariah’s face was all aglow, and he was radiant. They knew an angel had been near him.

4. After he calmed down, Zechariah wrote all this down, and that’s how we know what happened.

5. And as you can see, it came to pass! Here I am, and I am expecting a baby, who is going to be born in about three months.

6. And we will obey the angel, and we will name our baby John.

7. I don’t know what God—blessed be His name—has planned for our son, but I know it must be very important.

8. And I believe that after John is born, God—blessed be His name—will restore Zechariah’s ability to speak again.

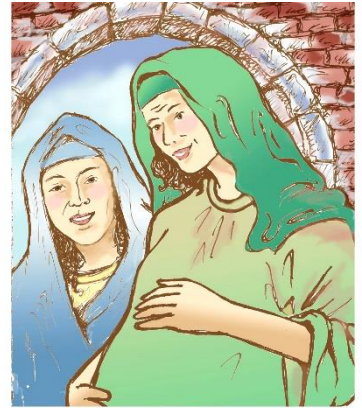
G. And then another wonderful thing happened. Mary came to see me!

1. And guess what? She had great news, too! Just like me, she was also full of a child.

2. And when we hugged each other, I felt my own little baby move inside me and kick. It felt like he was jumping for joy!

3. All babies do that—but when my baby jumped, I knew it was because somehow, he knew that Mary’s baby—his cousin—was a great and wonderful child.

4. Now I believe—and I know that you believe—that every baby is a great and wonderful and special child, and that God—blessed be His name—has a great purpose for each of us. Every child of God—blessed be His name—is special.



When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb.  
Luke 1:41, ESV

### III. Our call to the Desert

A. And it is into our lives that John comes today, calling us once again to come to the desert and to “prepare the way of the Lord.”

1. John calls US to put away those things that interfere with our relationship with God, and to **REPENT** and **REFOCUS** our lives on God and God’s call to us.

2. At this time of year when we can get so snowed under by all the trappings and expectations of Christmas – we need to hear John’s call to come to the desert – to find what is true and most precious – to “prepare the way of the Lord.”

3. For in Advent we too acknowledge that in order for Christ to be born in our hearts there must first be *repentance*.

4. This means a change of mind – but also implies a transformation in how we live, a reversal of direction and reordering of what we are about.

B. This Advent come to the desert – return to the wilderness – to be quiet – to be still – to hear the Word of God once again.

1. So often in this season we get busier and busier, when what we know we need is time to slow down and be quiet – and listen for God.

2. May we heed **John's** call to refocus our lives on God, and let the other trappings of Christmas fall where they may.

3. Come to the desert – be in the silence – listen for the *word of the God* – and then join **John's** call to *prepare the way of the Lord* in this Advent season and always.

### Let Us Pray

God of unexpected birth and desert waters:  
silence our cynicism and give us a new voice; that with John the Baptist we may proclaim your overwhelming grace; through Jesus Christ, the One who is to come. **Amen.**

(Shakespeare p.118)

