

The Birth of John the Baptist

During the time when Herod was king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah. His wife's name was Elizabeth. They both lived good lives in God's sight and obeyed fully all the Lord's laws and commands. They had no children because Elizabeth could not have any, and she and Zechariah were both very old.

One day Zechariah was doing his work as a priest in the Temple, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar where the incense was burned. When Zechariah saw him, he was alarmed and felt afraid. But the angel said to him, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You are to name him John. How glad and happy you will be, and how happy many others will be when he is born! John will be great in the Lord's sight. From his very birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit." But Zechariah doubted this messenger so the angel said, "because you have not believed, you will be unable to speak; you will remain silent until the day my promise to you comes true."

Shortly after, the same angel—the angel Gabriel—told Mary that she would have a son and call him Jesus. After this, Mary stayed about three months with Elizabeth and then went back home. Mary and Elizabeth were cousins, so Jesus and John the Baptist were also related. When the time came for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard how wonderfully good the Lord had been to her, and they all rejoiced with her. When the baby was a week old, they were going to name him Zechariah, after his father. But his mother said, "No! His name is to be John." They said to her, "But you don't have any relative with that name!" Then they made signs to his father, asking him what name he would like the boy to have. Zechariah asked for a writing pad and wrote, "His name is John."



At that moment Zechariah was able to speak again, and he

started praising God. The neighbours were all filled with fear, and the news about these things spread through all the hill country of Judea. Everyone who heard of it thought about it and asked, "What is this child going to be?" For it was plain that the Lord's power was upon him. The child grew and developed in body and spirit. He lived in the desert until the day when he appeared publicly to the people of Israel.

John Begins to Preach

John appeared in the desert, baptising and preaching. "Turn away from your sins and be baptised," he told the people, "and God will forgive your sins." Many people from the



province of Judea and the city of Jerusalem went out to hear John. They confessed their sins, and he baptised them in the Jordan River. John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. He announced to the people, "The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to bend down and untie his sandals. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

The Baptism of Jesus

Not long afterward Jesus came from Nazareth in the province of Galilee, and was baptised by John in the Jordan. As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, he saw heaven opening and the Spirit coming down on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you."



The Arrest of John

King Herod ordered John's arrest, and he had him tied up and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. For some time John the Baptist had told Herod, "It isn't right for you to be married to Herodias!" Herod wanted to kill him, but he was afraid of the Jewish people, because they considered John to be a prophet.

On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced in front of the whole group. Herod was so pleased that he promised her, "I swear that I will give you anything you ask for!" At her mother's suggestion she asked him, "Give me here and now the head of John the Baptist on a plate!" The king was sad, but because of the promise he had made in front of all his guests he gave orders that her wish be granted. So he had John beheaded in prison. The head was brought in on a plate and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. John's disciples came, carried away his body, and buried it; then they went and told Jesus.



Review:

1. Who are John the Baptist's parents?
2. How are Jesus and John related?
3. What happened to John's father after he spoke with the angel?

4. Write one of the things John said while he was preaching in the desert:

5. Where did John baptise Jesus?

6. Who had John arrested?

Collect for the Third Sunday after Advent

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare the way before thee: Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.
Amen.



Saint John the Baptist

U B G O D G B S C O T G P O Y E P Q
G N Z J D J I B J G R R R Q I L R O
F K E O O T B C O J E T I H V I E M
O L C H D V L P R G J N E E S Z A W
R W H N M E E A D M O J S R P A C N
G B A P T I S E A P I A T O I B H Z
I Z R V T R U E N V C C U D R E I K
V Y I I J C K H R O E O Q P I T N G
E X A N N A M E N T M A R Y T H G J
D G H P R I S O N W A N G E L W Q F
D E U S J E S U S J P X B T M I M Q
D P N C M A G O S P E L G G D I Q D

Find the following words in the puzzle.

Words are hidden → ↓ and ↘ .

ANGEL
BAPTISE
BIBLE
DESERT
ELIZABETH
FORGIVE
GOD

GOSPEL
HEROD
JESUS
JOHN
JORDAN
MARY
NAME

PREACHING
PRIEST
PRISON
REJOICE
SPIRIT
ZECHARIAH

 How many of these words appear in today's reading from the St John's Gospel? Read the passage again and underline any words you recognise from the word search!