

Nativity of St. John the Baptist 2024
Luke 1:57-80 (ESV)

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways.”

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A blessed feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist to all of you, dear ones. A blessed evening to you as we celebrate the arrival of the forerunner and herald of the Christ.

If you know your biblical chronology, dear ones, you know that it had been a long time in coming when John the Baptizer finally arrived on the scene. It had been a long time since the prophet Malachi was sent to preach to God’s people—no less than 400 years, in fact—and for God’s people of old, this was a time of waiting and silence, which in my experience are certainly two of the most difficult things to endure. Especially having grown accustomed to a world where information travels at the speed of light, where there’s two-day shipping from Amazon, and we have any number of different things available at our fingertips.

Some of you know this all too well. If you’ve ever experienced the eerie calm before a terrible storm rolling in and all you can do is take shelter, watch, and pray. Or if you’ve ever been in the waiting room of a hospital while your spouse or loved one is being treated by the doctors and it’s been a little too long since you received any update on how everything’s going. And, of course, who among us is unfamiliar with the pain felt when our prayers seem to go unanswered and unheard?

Sometimes all we can do is take up the words of the Psalter and speak as King David does in Psalm 13 saying, “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long?...”

Well Zechariah the priest in our Gospel text certainly knew what that was like after being struck mute for quite some time by the angel. And likewise, all God’s people at that time, as I said, were yearning for the Lord to break the silence and the waiting He’d imposed on them for so long.

And so, the nativity of St. John the Baptist teaches you, it is a testament you and to me, that the Lord will not be silent forever, and the marvelous work He brings about in the end is well worth the wait.

For at the appointed time, when the Lord finally opens Zechariah’s mouth, looses his tongue, and fills him with the Spirit, of what do we hear?

It’s a hymn of praise, which serves as the text of the Benedictus. And we hear him blessing the Lord God of Israel for He visiting and redeeming His people, that in His perfect wisdom and timing, He has at last raised up a horn of salvation to deliver His people from their enemies—a horn being an ancient symbol of strength and power. And we also hear of God remembering His holy covenant, that He is faithful to keep His promises, and that Zechariah’s own son, little John, would be called the prophet of the Most High—a man coming in the spirit and power of the

mighty prophet Elijah, as Malachi said long ago. And John would go before our Lord Himself to prepare His ways, to make straight His paths, as Isaiah says, removing every impediment from before Him. For the glory of the Lord would most certainly be revealed to all flesh *in the holy flesh* of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whose life, death, and resurrection has accomplished our salvation and obtained for you the forgiveness of all your sins.

Dear ones, the time of waiting was over. At last, the time of divinely imposed silence was at an end. For the prophecy of Zechariah had gone forth and so too, soon enough, would the preaching of St. John the Baptist. Just look and marvel at how much was being set in motion together with the nativity of this holy man. Truly, his arrival signals that the time had come for the light of salvation to dawn on mankind in Jesus Christ.

And for all of you, dear ones, waiting on the Lord with faithfulness and longsuffering—waiting on the Him for deliverance and an answer to your prayers, let the Word of the Lord concerning the nativity of John the Baptist and the holy Sacrament of the Altar renew your faith tonight. Let them bring comfort to you in the knowledge that the Lord is faithful to keep His promises. And none who wait on Him and call upon His name shall be put to shame—not one.

Consider, too, the fact that even for John the Baptist himself there was a time of waiting and silence before the Word of the Lord came to him and he would begin his holy ministry. He didn't just start preaching and baptizing as soon as he could walk and talk. Our text tells us that he grew as a child and became strong in spirit and that he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

And what do you suppose he was doing out there while he waited? Well, if nothing else, he surely devoted himself to prayer and fasting, training himself not to rely on worldly things to satisfy him, but looking to God for strength and satisfaction as should *we* while *we* wait for the Lord to answer *our* prayers and as we anticipate the day when the sound of silence gives way to songs of joy flowing forth from us like a spring in a parched land—just like it was for Zechariah the priest after hearing the cries of his newborn son and as it was for all the people of God when they too heard his voice crying out in the wilderness.

Thanks be to God for his nativity, that the Lord is faithful to keep His promises and will not be silent forever, and that because of the glory revealed in His beloved Son, the appointed time of our deliverance from *everything* we must now endure is well worth the wait.

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.