Saint John the Baptist   (June 24)

Six months before his appearance in Nazareth to the Virgin Mary, Archangel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias the high priest in the Temple at Jerusalem. The Archangel announced the miraculous conception by his childless old woman. Zacharias did not immediately believe the words of the Archangel and his tongue was bound by dumbness and it remained thus until eight days after the birth of the child.

On the eight day of the birth the relatives of Zacharias and Elizabeth gathered for the new born circumcision and naming. When they asked the father what name he wished to give to his son, since he was mute he wrote on a tablet "John." At that moment his tongue was loosed and he began to speak.

The home of Zacharias was on the heights between Bethlehem and Hebron. Throughout all Israel they spread the news of the appearance of the angel of God to Zacharias, as well as that of his dumbness and the loosing of his tongue at the moment he wrote the name "John". The news of this event reached King Herod. Therefore, Herod sent soldiers to slay the children in Bethlehem, he directed men to the hills, to the dwelling place of the family of Zacharias, to kill John also. But Elizabeth promptly hid the child. Enraged at this, King Herod sent his executioners to Zacharias who

was in the Temple to slay him. Zacharias was slain between the court and the temple. Elizabeth hid with the child in a cave, where she died soon after.

The young child John remained alone in the wilderness under the care of God and His Angels as he grew and learned to live and eat from the desert. The main role in his life was on the day of Theophany, when he baptized our Lord Jesus Christ. This great prophet was beheaded by Herod Antipas (son of Herod who slew the children in Bethlehem).

Saint John the Baptist has various feasts. His Conception on September 23, his Nativity on June 24, his Beheading on August 29, the findings of his head on February 24 and May 25 and his Synaxis on January 7.

The variants of the name John (English) are: Ioannes (Greek); Yohanan (Hebrew) meaning "God is gracious"; Ivan (Russian); Jean (French); Hans, Johann (German); Jan (Polish); Giovanni (Italian); Janos (Hungarian); Sean, Shawn (Irish); Ian (Welsh); Hansel (Bavarian); Hovhannes (Armenian); Iban (Basque); Jehan (Belgian); Ioan (Bulgarian); Hanus, Ianos (Czech); Joba (Laponian); Jonas (Lituanian); Jens, Hohan (Norwegian); Jehan (Persian); Joao (Portuguese); Iancu (Rumanian); Ohannes (Turkish); Yochanan (Yiddish); Hanes (Finnish); Jannik (Breton); Hannus (Estonian); Hanna (Arabic); Iwan (Polish) and Ioan (Roman).

Troparion of Saint John the Baptist (Tone 4)

O prophet and forerunner of the coming of Christ,
we who honor you with love
are at a loss how to praise you worthily
for by your glorious and honored nativity
you loosed the barrenness of her who gave birth to you
and the muteness of your father,
and proclaimed to the world the incarnation of the Son of God.