

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Prophet & Forerunner of the Messiah

Feast Day: 24 June

Collect: Almighty God, by whose providence your servant John the Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of your Son our Savior by preaching repentance: Make us so to follow his teaching and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and, following his example, constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Facts:

- Son of elderly parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, and was related to Jesus on his mother's side
- Birth is celebrated six months before Christmas Day, since, according to Luke, Elizabeth became pregnant six months before the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary
- Appears in all 4 gospels, but account of his birth is only in Luke
- Father, Zechariah, was struck speechless because he doubted a vision foretelling John's birth. When his speech was restored, he uttered the *Benedictus* canticle of praise (see Daily Office)
- John lived in the desert as an ascetic, clothed with camel's hair and a leather belt, and ate locusts and wild honey
- Denounced Herod for his incestuous marriage, was imprisoned for it. Doubted Jesus while in prison
- Was ultimately beheaded as a result of palace intrigue
- Also written of as a prophet in the Qur'an
- May have been influenced by the Essenes (apocalyptic Jewish sect)
- Some disciples of John became followers of Jesus

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Origin of Christian practice of baptism for repentance and the forgiveness of sins
- The major prophet of the New Testament, and understood himself in the role of forerunner to Jesus
- Required more ascetic practices of his followers than Jesus did
- Was much more directly engaged in political life of Israel than Jesus—directly rebuked Herod by name, and paid the price for it
- Did not feel worthy to baptize Jesus himself, but did so at Jesus' encouragement
- Preached repentance and the coming of the Kingdom of God and its Messiah
- Quoted Isaiah and other prophets of the Jewish tradition to both define his own role and describe the coming Messiah
- There is a direct and palpable connection between the Magnificat (Song of Mary), John's justice preaching, and Jesus' justice preaching, all of which point toward the mighty being cast down and the poor and lowly being lifted up

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- One of John's most important theological statements comes in John 3:30: "He must increase, but I must decrease." What does this statement reveal about John's inner spirit? What does it have to teach us in our own spiritual lives?
- John definitely has a more apocalyptic turn than Jesus. What is the value of discussion of apocalypse? What do we gain by thinking about the end of the world? Remember—John preached long before the writing of the Book of Revelation. Was John's apocalypse cosmic or societal? What are the implications of each possibility?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics: