

ANNUNCIATION & NATIVITY OF JOHN

THE LIFE OF CHRIST WITH SAINT LUKE



LEARNING ABOUT SAINT JOHN IN ICONOGRAPHY

**Both an icon of St John and of the Nativity of St John are provided in full at the end of this lesson*

As we look at the icon of Saint John above, we see Christ blessing John. Saint John is the greatest and last of the Old Testament prophets. His hand holds both a scroll (indicating holy wisdom) and a cross (he was martyred). This scroll is unfurled, containing a quote from Saint John. When he is depicted with wings, this reminds us that John lived as the angels, meaning he lived a life of prayer, abstinence, and disregarded material needs. He lived in the body, like he didn't have a body. We also see his head at the bottom of the icon because he was

1

GOAL

Learn about St. John's parents and icons depicting him

2

AT CHURCH

St. John is our parish's patron saint. He is also depicted on our iconostasis twice.

3

AT HOME

St. John's family is an ex: We change our family dynamic by the lives we choose to live.



Annunciation:
an announcement

~

by Archangel
Gabriel



**Temple in
Jerusalem:**
central place of
worship for the
Jews



Forerunner:
a person who is
sent in advance to
announce the
coming of someone
~
St. John

beheaded as he preached a call to repentance. Saint John did not regard his own life as more important than his role of being the forerunner of Christ. We see the mountains of the Judean desert (*right*), where he lived, in the background. In the bottom corner of the icon is a tree and ax (*just like we studied in the icon of Theophany*) reminding us of Saint John's warning in Matthew 3:10 - And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.



ZACHARIAS & ELIZABETH

The temple is a central part of a Jewish person's life. This is where they go for feast days, rituals, and more. It is massive and stands prominently in the city of Jerusalem. The High Priest lives in Jerusalem and is part of the daily life of the temple. He cannot do all of the daily work required by himself alone. Therefore, thousands of priests also serve at the temple. These priests are divided into 24 divisions (groups) and each division serves two weeks a year, in addition to serving on the major feast days, such as Passover. Many of these priests do not live in Jerusalem and travel back home to the countryside when their time of service is completed.

Luke tells us that Zacharias is a priest in the temple and served under the division of Abijah. The priests would cast lots to see who would get to light the incense in the temple because this was a task that many wanted to do. This was a special privilege and you might only get to light the incense in the temple once in your life.

We also learn from Luke that Zacharias' wife, Elizabeth, is a descendent of Aaron. Both of the John's parents are from priestly families and are described as righteous and blameless. We recognize that the lives we choose to live impact those around us, as well as, the generations that follow. Saint John came from a holy family. Think about how hard someone has to work in order to overcome the difficulties of growing up in a family with drug, alcohol, or physical abuse. These

EXTENDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Luke
by Blessed Theophylact, pages 7-28

The Gospel of Luke: Good News for the Poor
by Fr. Lawrence Farley, pages 23-54

[*Annunciation of the Birth of the Forerunner John*](#) Podcast
by Dr. Jeannie Constantinou



choices affect the family for generations. Conversely, think about how we are strengthened when we grow up in a family who constantly strives to acquire a virtuous life for the glory of God.

Luke opens and closes his gospel with people praying in the temple. In Luke 1, we find Zacharias burning incense and praying in the temple as the Archangel Gabriel appears to him.

The angel announces to Zacharias that his prayers have been answered and he will have a son, named John, who “will be great in the sight of the Lord.”

Zacharias responds to the angel that they are too old to have children anymore.

And the angel answered and said to him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.”

Zacharias goes home, unable to speak, and not long after they have a son. When people came to

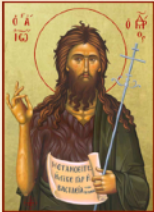
visit the new baby, they expected that he would be named after his father, but Elizabeth tells them no. They are surprised and want to know from Zacharias if this is true or not. He motions for a writing tablet and tells them, “His name is John.” Immediately, Zacharias was able to speak again and everyone marveled!

Luke has several themes throughout his gospel - two of them are prayer and joy. Zacharias and Elizabeth prayed for many, many years for a child. Indeed, John’s parents were filled with joy and gladness and many still to this day rejoice at his birth!

TIMELINE ACTIVITY

Write a brief summary about St. John’s parents:

- How did Zacharias learn that they would have a son in their old age?
- What happened to Zacharias when he questioned the angel?
- When was Zacharias able to speak again?



Timeline

Parents:
Zacharias &
Elizabeth

St. John & Christ

Written summary
of the lesson

The summary or bullet points can be written by the teacher, a student, or separating the students into groups and asking each group to write one important point about St. John from today's lesson.

Place the summary or bullet points (written on either a post-it note or a piece of paper cut lengthwise) at the beginning of the timeline on the strip that is labeled, "St. John and Christ." Place the icon of St. John above the summary.

This begins our year-long, visual project for the students to see the events that took place in Christ's life according to Luke's Gospel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- We learn from Zacharias and Elizabeth that we should **never give up**. Even when it appeared to be impossible for them to have children anymore, nothing is impossible for God. Sometimes we want God to answer our prayers immediately. God will answer our prayers - if our prayer is beneficial for our salvation. This does not necessarily mean we're ready for our prayer to be answered right then and there though. Sometimes we have to wait.
- John will be great in the sight of the Lord - We should **seek to be great in the eyes of God, not men. How does this apply to us today?** Should we be seeking likes, follows, or hope that our uploaded content "goes viral" or should we be seeking to learn self control, humility, and forgiving others? **How do we strive to acquire the virtues?**

ICON OF THE NATIVITY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

**Icon provided at the end of this lesson*

In this icon, we see Elizabeth on the left side. She is sitting on a bed and three midwives are tending

to her, while another midwife is tending to her son, John, in the cradle. Zacharias is at the bottom, right of the icon and is writing on a tablet to let everyone know, "His name is John." In the background, we see walls and doorways. The curtain hanging up tells us this is an indoor event which is happening inside their home.

SING: MORE HONORABLE THAN THE CHERUBIM / SAVE O LORD YOUR PEOPLE

Middle School: Save O Lord Your People...

High School: More Honorable Than the Cherubim...

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AT HOME

FOR PARENTS

When the elderly gathered at his house in the winter, Father Arsenios' first job was to light his open fireplace and then, as was noted above, to tell them a parable from the Gospel, the life of the Saint of the day (Synaxarion), or else read something from the Old Testament. And afterwards, the aged men would go home, or to neighboring houses where people gathered, and repeat these teachings to their children instead of reciting fairy tales. Thus, everyone benefitted spiritually.

Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian
by Saint Paisios

St. John's family is an example for ours: We change our family dynamic by the lives we choose to live and this affects our subsequent generations as well.

Oftentimes, when we read the lives of the saints, we see clusters of families. This is because we strengthen and teach one another through our living example - within our own homes or within our extended family, including our parish community.

Examples of families of saints:

- Joseph the Betrothed and his daughter, Salome the Myrrh-bearer and her sons, James and John (the Theologian)
- Macrina the Elder and her son, Basil the Elder, his wife, Emilia (and her martyred father), and their children - Basil, Gregory, Peter, Naucratis, Macrina, and Theosebia.

HOME ACTIVITY #3

Let's focus this week on one aspect of our family's spiritual life we'd like to improve:

- Prayer: Upon waking; before meals; before bed
- Reading the Bible together: as part of story time; before bed; as part of family prayer time
- Going to church services: Attend vespers; attend orthros; arrive on time for liturgy on Sunday
- Our interactions with one another: our tone of voice; being more patient, forgiving, and merciful



