



The Holy Prophet Zacharias

The prophet Zacharias was the son of Barachias, a priest of the Old Testament. He performed the priest's office in Jerusalem during the reign of Herod, and was of the daily course of Aiba. His duty was to burn incense in the temple, while performing the priest's office before God.

On one occasion, a large crowd of people was gathered to pray when an angel of the Lord appeared before him, standing on the right side of the altar. When Zacharias saw him he was afraid, but the angel spoke to him saying, "Fear, not Zacharias," and comforted him by assuring him that his prayer was well pleasing to God and it had inclined God to a great act of mercy: He visited Zacharias' wife Elizabeth and loosed the bonds of her barrenness. She would give birth to a son who shall be called John, whose name signifies grace. His birth would make a multitude of people rejoice. Furthermore, the angel said that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb and that he would turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

When Zacharias heard the word of the angel, he did not believe what he had been told, for Elizabeth was barren and they were both old. Zacharias said to the angel, "Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is well stricken in years." The angel answered, "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shall be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things be performed, because thou believes not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season." Zacharias waited in the altar as he spoke with the angel causing the people to wonder. When he came out he could not speak, and the people understood that he had seen a vision in the temple. He departed for his own house in Hebron, a city of Judah.

Then the prophecy was fulfilled and John was born from Elizabeth. After Zacharias had written John's name on a writing tablet, his mouth was opened and his tongue was immediately loosed, and he spoke, praising God and was filled with the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem and the Magi came from the East, they told Herod of the newborn king. Herod sent soldiers to slay all the children in Bethlehem, and remembering John, for he had been informed of all that had occurred at John's birth, since everyone who lived in the country spoke of the wonder, Herod laid up all he had in his heart concerning John, saying, "What manner of child shall this be? Will this child be the King of the Jews?" He decided to kill John and

sent executioners to Zacharias' house. The executioners did not find John there and the slaughter of children began. When Elizabeth heard these cries and the reason for them, she took John and fled into the mountains. At this time Zacharias was serving as a priest in Jerusalem. When she saw soldiers drawing near, she prayed to God and cried out to the rocky mount nearby and said, "O mountain of God, receive a mother and her child!" Immediately the mountain was split and she entered hiding herself and John from the executioners. The soldiers returned to Herod, having not found the child, and Herod sent word to Zacharias in the temple saying, "Surrender your son John to me." Saint Zacharias replied, "I serve the Lord God of Israel. As for my son, I do not know where he is."

Herod was enraged and sent word to Zacharias again ordering that he be killed if he did not surrender his son. The executioners made haste and demanded of Zacharias, "Where have you hidden your son? Give him to us and obey the King's command! If you do not give us your son, you shall be put to death immediately." Saint Zacharias replied, "You will kill my body, but the Lord will receive my soul." The executioners straightway fulfilled Herod's command and fell upon Zacharias between the temple and the altar. His blood was spilt on the floor and became hardened like rock as a testimony against Herod and a witness to his eternal condemnation. He is remembered on the 5th of September.

Troparion, Tone 4

Arrayed in priestly vestments, thou didst offer sacrifice according to God's law./ Thou wast a light and a seer of mysteries bearing the signs of grace within thee./ Thou wast slain in the temple of God,/ O Zacharias, Prophet of Christ./ Together with the Forerunner pray that our souls may be saved.

Kontakion, Tone 3

Zacharias, Prophet and Priest and father of the Forerunner,/ is preparing a feast for the faithful/ and is mixing a draught of righteousness./ Let us praise him,/ as a holy seer of the grace of God.