

# The Most Important Events of the World

## Part 4: John the Baptist

Dora Beck

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## John the Baptist



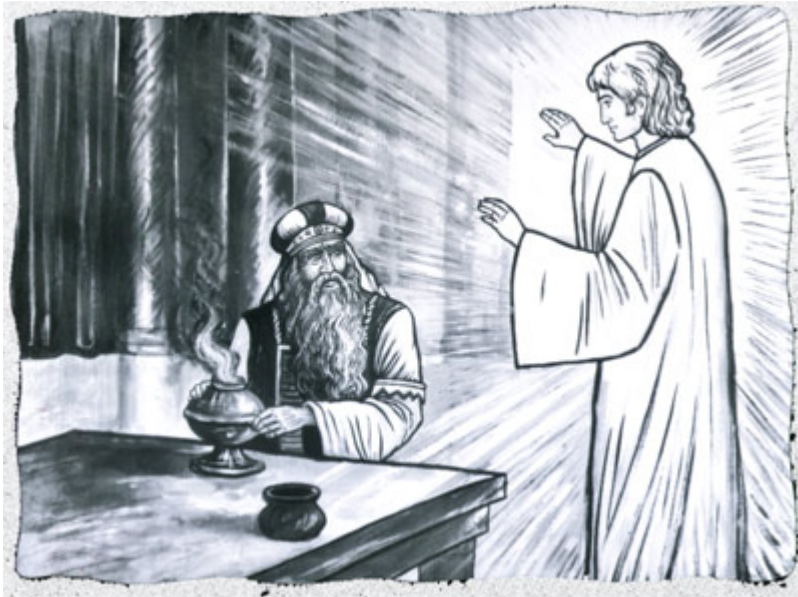
Zacharias, the priest, and his wife, Elizabeth, had no sons or daughters. Suddenly, however, God granted them a baby boy! But since they were both already quite old, no one could believe what had happened. What will be the fate of this child? the neighbours and relatives wondered.

The parents were very happy, because they had prayed to God for a child for many years. When they had almost given up all hope, their prayers were answered, and they finally had a son. But what

would the fate of this boy be?

The parents already knew the future of their son, because an angel of the Lord had appeared to Zacharias in the temple and told him: Your wish has been heard. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give birth to a boy and you will call him John.

And the angel went on to say: He will be a great servant before the Lord. From the womb of his mother he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will preach to the people about the imminent coming of the Lord. He will speak to their hearts so that they will turn from their evil ways and draw near to God. The angel also comforted Zacharias, saying: You will have joy and happiness in this child. Not only you, but others will be blessed through him as well.



This is what really happened. All the friends and neighbours rejoiced with Zacharias and Elizabeth, because God had given them all great joy. With his heart filled with praise, Zacharias sang a song of worship which he had composed to thank God.

When John was a lad, he loved to listen to what his father said, and he thought deeply about his words. Zacharias said to him, You will be a prophet of the Most High and shall go before the Lord to prepare His way. John wanted to be a servant of the Lord, preparing the way for Him. But how would he do this? When and where should he start? His father could not help him with these questions. God alone knew the answers.

When John became a young man, he left his home. He went to the desert where there are mountains, rocks, and sand. He lived in a cave and ate locusts and wild honey. He wore a garment of camel skin, with a leather belt around his waist.



John was not alone in the desert; God was with him, preparing him for a special job. Then God sent him to go and preach to the people: Repent and return to God, for the kingdom of heaven is near!.

John left the wilderness to do that for which he had been trained, and people came from all over to hear the words of this desert preacher. He said to them: "You cannot remain as you are. Confess your sins before God and man; give up your evil ways, because heaven's doors will be closed in your face if you do not repent. Many men and women were frightened by the words that John spoke, because they knew that their deeds were evil. They realised that their hearts were not clean.



The people grew anxious, and their consciences bothered them. So they came to John and confessed their sins. John accompanied them to the river Jordan and went with them into the water. He baptized them by submersing them in the water, explaining that God wanted to purify their hearts and wash away their sins in the same way that water cleanses the body. The people understood this symbol, and they longed to have pure hearts. John kept reminding them of God who takes away all sins and forgives completely. He said: I am baptizing you with water, but after me will come the One who is above me and is stronger than I . He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His baptism will give you real salvation and eternal life.





John did not baptise those who did not wholeheartedly regret their sins, however. He shouted in their faces: O you children of snakes, why did you come? You look as if you like God, but in reality you do not want to know Him. Change your ways and bear the fruits of repentance. Do not think that you have Abraham as a father. He cannot save you. Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Then they asked him, "What shall we do?"

John answered them: He who has two garments should give one to him who has none. The one who has food should share his food with him who is hungry.

Our behaviour will show whether we have truly left evil to follow God.



Those who had secretly stolen money and those known as tax collectors came to John, for they knew that what they had done was wrong. The people pointed at them accusingly, refusing to associate with them. When the consciences of these men began to bother them, and their sins weighed heavily upon them, they sought forgiveness. After they had confessed their sins and were baptized, they asked John, O teacher, what shall we do? And John replied, Do not ask the people for more money than is required by law.

To the soldiers who had asked the same question, he said, Do not steal or take money that you yourself have not earned. Do not treat anyone unjustly, and be content with your wages.



The priests and the servants of the temple also came - not to be baptized, but to know the truth about John.

They asked him, Who are you? Are you the Christ of whom the prophets have spoken? I am not the Christ. He answered, Who are you then? They asked, Are you Elijah? No, said John. Then they asked, Are you a prophet? John replied, I am a voice in the desert, preparing the way of the Lord.

Then the priests asked him, Why then do you baptise if you are not the Christ, Elijah, or a prophet? John answered: "I am baptizing with water. But among you there is One whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me. I am not worthy to carrying His sandals.



On the following day, John stood near the river preaching and baptising the people. Then came Jesus. John knew by the Holy Spirit who Jesus was, and he became very happy, calling to those around him: Look, this is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is the One I've spoken to you about, who will come after me.

Then Jesus asked John to baptise Him. John could not accept this; how could he, a mere man, baptise the holy Son of God? John asked: How can this be? I need to be baptised by You! How can You now come to me?

Jesus, who had no sin, did not need to be baptised, but he said to John, Do not refuse to baptise Me, because this must happen, so that the will of God can be fulfilled.

So John obeyed. Both of them went down to the river, and there Jesus was baptised like all the other people. But when Jesus came up out of the water, His true identity became clear. The heavens opened up and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove. A voice came from heaven and said, This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

Then John understood that Jesus was the Saviour who had come to save the world. A great joy overcame him, for God had chosen and honoured him to prepare a way for the Saviour of the world to the hearts of the people.



At that time, Herod, son of Herod the great, was king. As everyone knew, he had taken his brother Philip's wife, Herodia, as his own wife.

John the Baptist went to him in his palace and boldly said, It is not allowed that you should have your brother's wife as your own. The king got very angry and wanted to kill him immediately for speaking so boldly against him. But he did not have the courage to kill John the Baptist; he feared the people who loved John, for they considered him as a prophet of God. The king also knew that John was a holy and God-fearing man, so he ordered his servants to throw him in prison.





But the king was very disturbed in the depths of his heart, because he knew that John had spoken the truth. Certainly God disapproved of his action. From time to time, Herod would call John and ask for his advice. The king would listen to him and sometimes follow his instructions. This enraged Herodia, who hated John, because she did not agree that it was wrong for the king to take her as his wife. How could she possibly get rid of a preacher who weighed heavily on her conscience?

But instead of admitting her sin and submitting to the will of God, she made an evil plan and asked her daughter to help her carry it out.



One day, during a birthday party for the king, a good opportunity arose for Herodia to carry out her plan. All the officials and nobles of the state were invited to the celebration. To provide entertainment for the men, the daughter of Herodia came to dance. She moved beautifully, and the guests were enchanted by her gracefulness. Herod also enjoyed the show and called to the girl, saying, I will give you anything you ask, even half of my kingdom.



The guests were astounded. Could what they had heard be true? They wondered what she would ask for: gold? clothes? jewels? a palace? Everyone's eyes were fixed upon her.

I want the head of John the Baptist on a plate immediately, she demanded. The people could not believe what she had asked for. It was unbelievable! Horror showed on the faces of the guests. The king shivered and regretted his promise. He realised that he had not considered the consequences of his oath. But he had spoken before all of his guests, so he could not refuse her wish.

So Herodia had achieved what she wanted; John the Baptist was beheaded in prison as she had planned, according to the king's promise. O the things that people can do when they are consumed by hatred!

As soon as the Baptist's disciples heard what had happened, they got his body and buried it. They went to Jesus very sad and told Him what had happened.



This is how John sacrificed his life for the sake of truth. His life was not lived in vain, for it still speaks to us today. He led others to Jesus, the Light of the world. He was a faithful witness to his Lord until the end. His unjust death was a foreshadowing of what Jesus was to experience.



When Jesus heard what had happened, He said, "Among those born of women there was no greater prophet than John the Baptist." John was a witness to the coming of His Lord and had prepared the way for Him. Let's also be faithful witnesses and lead those around us to the One who alone can save us from sin and hatred.

## Quiz

We hope that you have enjoyed reading this story. Below are some questions about it. When you have answered them, mail them to us.

1. Why was John allowed to preach and baptise?
2. What were John`s requirements for baptism?
3. How should man show true repentance?
4. Why was John hesitant to baptise Jesus?
5. What kind of a prophet was John?

Do not forget to print your full name and address clearly on your answer sheet as well as on the envelope. Our address is:

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