

The 23rd Day of September

☩ The Conception of the Forerunner and Baptist, John.

Vespers

At “Lord, I call...,” 6 stichera in Tone 4: *To the melody, “Called from on high...”*

As Zachariah the godly, was sacrificing in the temple /
Offering petitions on behalf of the people /
To the merciful Benefactor of all /
He beheld a holy angel, who cried out to him: /
“Thy prayers and petitions have been heard, /
Take courage, O elder, and disbelieve me not! /
For thou shalt have a child, /
Who shalt be the forerunner of God, /
The greatest of all men born of a woman, /
And with the power of Elijah, he will go before Christ.” *(twice)*

“Thine appearance and manner seem strange to me /
And strange are thy words,”
Replied Zachariaiah, not trusting in these words, /
“For I have come to pray for the salvation of the people /
And not to obtain a child as thou dost state, /
What thou hast said is not in accord with my prayer. /
And I fear that thou art not being true with me /
For how can such a thing come to pass? ///
For Elizabeth is barren, and I myself am old, as thou dost know. *(twice)*

“**Why** dost thou not believe my words, O Zachariah? /
Why dost thou say I bring false tidings to thee? /
I am an archangel of God and here I stand before thee.
I do those things I am commanded to do /
And since thou art faithless and have not believed, /
Thou shalt be deaf and mute until thou shalt see the divine fulfillment of my words. /
And when Elizabeth gives birth to the forerunner and voice of the Word ///
Then shalt thy tongue be loosed and thou shalt bless the God of Israel” *(twice)*

Glory..., in Tone 6: *(The composition of Byzantium)*

Today hath the fruit of prayer, /
John the Forerunner of the Lord /
Taken root in a barren womb! /

Rejoice, O wilderness and be glad! /
 Rejoice and dance, O ye race of men! /
 Behold the herald of repentance takes flesh in his mother's womb! /
 Come, O ye lovers of the feasts of the Church, /
 And let us exalt in his conception and cry aloud: /
 O thou who art the greatest of those born of a woman, /
 Cease not to intercede for those who faithfully honor thy divine conception, ///
 That we may obtain the cleansing of sins and great mercy.

Now and ever..., Dogmatic Theotokion, in the same Tone:

Who will not bless thee, O Most Holy Virgin? /
 Who will not sing of thy most pure child-bearing? /
 The Only-begotten Son shone timelessly from the Father, /
 But from thee He was ineffably incarnate; /
 God by nature, yet man for our sake; /
 Not two persons, but one in two natures. /
 Entreat Him, O pure and all-blessèd Lady ///
 To have mercy on our souls.

Or the Dogmatic Theotokion in the Tone of the Week if a Resurrection service.

At the Aposticha, these stichera, in Tone 6: To the melody, "Having set all aside...."

The holy priest and prophet went into the Holy of Holies, /
 And before him stood the holy angel, as it is written, /
 Who addressed him saying: /
 "Thy supplication hath been heard /
 And the barrenness of Elizabeth is brought to an end /
 And she shall bear into thee a son, O Elder: /
 The Forerunner, John, /
 The beacon of the Sun, /
 The greatest of all the prophets, and the voice of the Word, ///
 Who shall shine forth from the virgin Maiden of God.

Verse: And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most High.

"Tell me plainly, how can I know this?" /
 Replied the elder to the archangel. /
 "For I am full of days and Elisabeth is barren. /
 How canst thou tell me words that are clearly beyond nature? /
 I am amazed and now suspect, O man, that thou dost not speak the truth! /

THE CONCEPTION OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

Depart, for I ask for the salvation of the people and not to acquire a son! ///
Such a thing I cannot believe.

Verse: To serve Him in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life.

“I am Gabriel, an archangel of Almighty God,” /
Said the bodiless angel to him, /
“Now, since thou didst not believe my words, be thou now deaf and mute, /
And when thy wife shall bring forth to thee /
The clarion trumpet of the Word /
The Holy Spirit will illumine thy tongue and thou shalt cry aloud: /
And thou child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most High, ///
To prepare His ways in grace, as is well pleasing to Him.

Glory..., in Tone 6: (to the usual melody)

Thou didst come forth an angel from a barren womb, /
O baptizer of Christ, /
On leaving thy swaddling clothes thou didst go to dwell in the wilderness, /
Revealing thyself as the seal of all the prophets; /
For the One whom they saw in various signs and ways foretold /
Thou wast counted worthy to baptize in the river Jordan; /
And thou didst hear the voice of the Father from heaven /
Bear witness of His divine Sonship; /
And thou didst see the Spirit in the form of a dove /
Drawing down the voice upon the One who was being baptized by thee. /
O thou who art the greatest of all the prophets, /
Cease not to intercede for us ///
Who with faith celebrate thy holy memory.

Now and ever..., Theotokion, in the same Tone.

No one who runs to thee, /
O spotless Virgin Theotokos /
Returns from thee confounded /
For he who asks for grace ///
Receives the gift which is expedient for him.

The Troparion of the Forerunner, in Tone 4:

Rejoice, O barren one /
Who had not given birth, /
For behold, today hast thou conceived the One who is the dawn of the Sun /

Who wilt illumine the whole world suffering in blindness, /
Shout for joy, O Zachariah, /
And boldly cry aloud: ///
Truly the One to be born is the prophet of the Most High.

Glory..., now and ever..., Theotokion, in the same Tone:

The mystery of all eternity /
Unknown even by angels /
Through thee is revealed on earth, O Mother of God, /
God incarnate by union without confusion. /
For our sake He voluntarily endured the Cross, /
By it He resurrected the first-created Adam ///
And saved our souls from death.

At Compline

After the Trisagion, the **Kontakion of the Forerunner** (*see below*).

Matins

At “God is the Lord...,” the Troparion of the Forerunner (*twice*), Glory..., now and ever, **Theotokion, Tone 4:** “The mystery of all eternity...”

After the 1st Kathisma, the Sessional Hymn, in Tone 5: *To the melody: The co-unoriginate Word...*

Elizabeth is freed from barrenness: /
And the Virgin preserves her virginity, /
When, at the words of Gabriel, she conceives in her womb; /
And John, the Forerunner leaps up in his mother’s womb /
Foreknowing that his Master and God ///
Becomes flesh or our salvation in the Virgin’s womb. (*twice*)

Glory..., now and ever..., Theotokion, in the same Tone:

Rejoice, O holy mountain, the place where God walked! /
Rejoice, O living and burning bush that remained unconsumed! /
Rejoice, O only ladder for the world to God /
Which leads us mortals to the eternal Life! /
Rejoice, O pure Maiden, who without knowing a man ///
Gave birth to the Savior of our souls.

After the 2nd Kathisma, the Sessional Hymn, in Tone 4: *To the melody, “Quickly go before...”*

THE CONCEPTION OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

The dove that loves the wilderness /
The holy forerunner who preaches repentance /
And reveals to all that Christ has become a man, /
The intercessor for all sinners is born, /
To help those struggling in the storms of life. ///
Through his intercessions, O Christ, save the world. (*twice*)

Glory..., now and ever... Theotokion, in the same Tone:

O thou who gavest birth to the Creator /
And by thy birthgiving has thus adorned mankind, /
Deliver me from the snares of the false Belial¹, O all-pure Lady, /
And set us upon the rock of the will of Christ, ///
Earnestly beseeching Him whom thou hast born to save our souls.

The Canon

**Both Canons from the Octoechos, excluding the stichera for the Martyrs;
and this Canon of the Forerunner with 6 Troparia.
The composition of John of Damascus.**

Ode 1

Tone 6

***Irmos:** When Israel passed on foot over the deep as if it were dry land, and beheld their pursuer Pharaoh drowning in the sea, they cried aloud: Let us sing to God a song of victory!*

***Refrain:** Holy great John, forerunner of the Lord, pray to God for us!*

O thou offspring of a barren woman, uproot the barren thoughts of my barren soul as I begin to praise thy holy conception in thy mother's womb.

When Zachariah the sanctified entered the temple, he beheld the divine angel who clearly proclaimed to him: In thine old age, O priest, thou shalt father a son, the forerunner of God.

The great forerunner, the radiant beacon of the Sun of glory is conceived to shine forth in his mother's womb, to lift the darkness of the passions and to loose her bonds of barrenness.

***Refrain:** Most Holy Theotokos, save us!*

***Theotokion:** Perceiving the Master borne within thy womb, O pure Theotokos, John, as His forerunner, leapt for joy in his mother's womb.*

¹ Belial, (grk. Βελίαρ; slv. Бѣліаръ) — a common synonym for Satan found in various translations of the Bible and Orthodox service books.

Katavasia: I shall open my mouth...

Ode 3

Irmos: There is none as holy as Thou, O Lord my God, who hast exalted the power of Thy faithful, O Blessed One, and hast established us upon the rock of thy confession.

Today the barren woman conceives the blessed fruit, who in these latter days will cut down the barren limbs of our souls with the axe of noetic grace.

Though struck deaf and mute in the temple for his unbelief, the great Zachariah heard the voice of the Word through the great announcement given him and cheerfully he magnifies the compassionate Lord.

The glorious forerunner of the Lord who showed the faithful the true path of repentance came forth from his mother's womb as was announced by the angel.

Theotokion: As he who was being carried in the barren woman's womb perceived Christ being carried in the Virgin's womb, he leapt up, heralding the joy which had come into the world to deliver it from despair.

Katavasia.

Sessional Hymn, in Tone 4: To the melody, "Joseph was amazed...."

Gabriel came down from heaven /
And stood before the saintly Zachariah as he was censuring in the temple /
And he said to him: "Thou shalt bear a right glorious fruit in thine old age, /
For the barrenness of Elizabeth has been loosed /
And she that was barren shall now give birth. /
And having conceived, she shall bear the herald and forerunner of Jesus." ///
By their prayers, O Savior of the world, save our souls. (*twice*)

Glory..., now and ever.... Theotokion:

O most pure Lady, /
O Virgin Mother who knew not man, /
Thou alone gavest birth in time /
To thy timeless Son and Word of God /
Entreat Him now together with all the honorable apostles, martyrs, prophets and all
the saints ///
That He grant us the remission of our sins and great mercy.

Ode 4

Irmos: Christ is my strength, my God and my Lord, the sacred Church sings in a manner befitting God, with a pure mind, keeping festival unto the Lord.

O blessed forerunner of the Lord, the voice of the angel announced thy coming from a

THE CONCEPTION OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

barren womb, in sacred proclamation to the elder priest, to be the herald of the coming of Christ.

Rejoice, O barren and childless woman; Rejoice, O wondrous Elizabeth, for most gloriously art thou now bearing thy fruit, the baptist and forerunner of the Lord.

O thou forerunner of the Lord, cut down the thorns of my passions with the axe of thy prayers, and remove the fieldstones of my evil thoughts, that by thy virtues, the fertile field of my mind may be increased.

Theotokion: **T**he womb of the Virgin held Thee, who holdest all things, O Christ; and the baptist leapt up when worshipped Thee from in his mother's womb.

Ode 5

Irmos: *With Thy divine light, O Good One, illumine, I ask Thee, the souls of those who in love keep vigil that they may know Thee, O Word of God as the true God Who recalls them from the darkness of sin.*

The angel appeared and announced the divine conception of the forerunner to the prophet who was entering the sanctuary, offering services to the Creator in accordance to the Law.

“How can this be happening to me, for I am an old man, as thou canst see, and my wife is barren. Thou art telling me things contrary to the laws of nature” said Zachariah to the archangel.

“Look at Sarah, the wife of Abraham and behold how she brought forth Isaac in her old age, O man, and believe that these things of which I speak are true,” replied the great angel to the elder.

Theotokion: **B**lessèd art thou amongst women, O thou who art full of the joy of God,” Elizabeth cried to thee when she knew thee to be the one to give birth without knowing a man, her, who alone would remain a virgin incorrupt after giving birth.

Ode 6

Irmos: *Beholding the sea of life surging high with the storm of temptations, I have fled to Thy tranquil haven and cry out unto Thee: Raise up my life from corruption, O greatly Merciful One!*

“I am full of doubts and I cannot believe thy words,” said the priest to the archangel, “for I am praying for the salvation of the people, not for the fruit of my loins.”

“The Creator of all nature, the King of the angels, is well pleased that thou shalt father the herald of His own coming,” the ministering angel replied. “Do not disbelieve my words, O man.”

“Fiery is thine aspect, awesome thy visage, and wondrous are thy words,” said Zachariah to the incorporeal servant and minister of God, “still I cannot believe the strange words thou sayest to me that surpass the order of nature.”

Theotokion: **T**he lamp of the Sun offered his worship in the darkness of the womb, and

leapt for joy when he recognized the One concealed within the light-filled expanse of His mother's womb.

Katavasia.

After the Sixth Ode, the Kontakion of the Forerunner in Tone 1:

Zachariah rejoices greatly /
With his wife Elizabeth, /
For she has rightly conceived the Forerunner, John, /
Whom the archangel announced with great joy. ///
Let us worthily honor him for he truly an initiate of the mystery of grace.

Ikos: Let us open the Holy Gospel which the sacred and honored Luke recorded for us and let us behold the radiant and glorious conception of the forerunner. For he records, that as the righteous elder Zachariah entered into the Holy of Holies in his turn to cense, that the archangel Gabriel stood before him and proclaimed saying: "O priest, in thine old age thou shalt father a son, the prophet and forerunner, the voice and herald, the ever-radiant beacon and initiate of the mysteries of grace."

Ode 7

***Irmos:** An angel made the furnace moist with dew for the godly children and the command of God consuming the Chaldeans made the tyrant cry out: Blessèd art Thou, O God of our fathers!*

"Since thou dost not believe my words, receive now thy penance of deaf muteness, and when thou wilt behold the voice of the Word born, receive again thine own voice and cry aloud: Blessèd art Thou, O God of our fathers!"

Zachariah, more resplendant than the sun clove to Elizabeth, more beautiful as the moon, and begat the light-bearing beacon of the Light that shineth down upon us that are cruelly held fast in the darkness of our passions.

Leaping in the womb with joy instead of singing, the great forerunner worshipped Thee while Thou wast still in Thy mother's womb, while he himself was carried in his mother Elisabeth's womb, O Christ Jesus: Blessèd art Thou, O God of our fathers!"

***Theotokion:** Elizabeth, more beautiful than the moon, bore within herself a star, the divine forerunner of the Lord, and bowed down before Mary, the radiant cloud, as she bore Christ, the Sun, who for our salvation had taken flesh of her.*

Ode 8

***Irmos:** Out of the flames Thou didst drop dew on the godly ones, and with water didst kindle the sacrifice of the righteous one, for Thou doest all things as Thou willest, O Christ; we exalt thee throughout all ages!*

The attendant of the Bridgroom has arrived, the voice of the Word has been conceived, the great warrior of the King of all is now being nourished in the womb

THE CONCEPTION OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

of the barren woman.

Be glad, O ye people, for husbandman has arrived to tend to the barren hearts; an axe is already forged to fell the passions; and honorable calf is being nourished on the food of abstinence. He is the great forerunner of the Lord!

Break thou the stone-hardness of my mind, O forerunner of the Lord, as thou didst loose the barrenness of thy mother, and cause me to increase the fruits of repentance and thus attain to life everlasting.

Theotokion: **E**lizabeth greatly rejoiced when she beheld thee with child, O Maiden, and her own babe leapt in her womb as he recognized the Master.

Katavasia.

Ode 9

Irmos: *It is not possible for men to see God upon Whom the ranks of angels dare not gaze, but through thee, O All-pure One, was the Word incarnate revealed unto men, Whom magnifying together with the heavenly hosts, we call thee blessed!*

Having opened wide the gate of the barren woman, the great and holy forerunner of Christ hath taken up his abode within his mother's womb, as within royal chambers, that he may issue forth as a warrior preparing the way for the King of all.

Rejoice, O elder and prophet of God, for thou shalt bring forth a son who shall be the greatest ever to arise among men, John, the Forerunner of the Lord. Be glad, Elizabeth! Rejoice, O earth, and offer praise to God the Creator of all.

O prophet and forerunner of the Lord, remember us now who praise thee with faith and deliver us from spiritual passions. Save us from misfortunes and guide us along the path to heaven, O ever-blessèd one!

Theotokion: **K**nowing that her barrenness was loosed and bearing the forerunner of Him who dwelt within thy womb, Elizabeth knew thee clearly to be the all-pure Mother, O Virgin Mary, full of the joy of God.

Katavasia.

Exapostilarion:

The glorious conception of the forerunner brightly heralds the King who is to be born of the Virgin; for he himself is the offspring of the barren Elizabaeth and the elder priest Zachariah. Through their prayers and those of the Theotokos and of John Thy Baptist, save us and have mercy on us, O Lord.

Glory..., now and ever.... Theotokion:

The pre-eternal Son hath truly wrought great things through thee by the counsel of the Father, O Mother of God, for thou gavest birth to immortal Life without pain and without travail, and hast remained a virgin after giving birth, O Theotokos.

At the Praises, 4 stichera, in Tone 1: *To the melody, “Joy of the ranks of heaven....”*

All creation rejoices at thy conception, /
O Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John, /
For thy divine birth foretells to us the nativity of the Master. ///
Therefore, the race of men worthily glorifies thee!

The conception by Elizabeth /
Was a truly wondrous sign /
Which the archangel gave to Mary as proof. /
Therefore, we praise the once barren Elizabeth ///
Together with Zachariah her husband and their offspring, John.

The lamp divinely-prepared for the eternal Light /
The attendant and friend of the Bridegroom, /
Who bears the light of the Sun of Glory, /
The living Voice of the Word of God,
And the forerunner of the coming of the Lord ///
Is now conceived as the angel proclaimed.

Thou art the golden altar on which burns the sweet incense /
Standing at the right hand of Christ, /
Which emanates the sweet-smelling aroma of the knowledge of Him /
Which is prefigured by the angels and all the saints ///
Who stand at the right hand of God.

Glory..., now and ever..., in Tone 6:

Elizabeth conceived the forerunner of grace /
And the Virgin conceived the Lord of glory; /
When both mothers embraced, the babe of Elizabeth leapt with joy /
For the servant within her was praising his Master. /
Marvelling at this, the mother of the forerunner cried aloud: /
“Why is this granted to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?” ///
That He that hath great mercy may save His despairing people.

The Great Doxology, ...,” the Troparion of the Forerunner (*twice*), Glory..., now and ever, Theotokion, Tone 4: “The mystery of all eternity...,” and the litanies and the rest.

Liturgy

At the Beatitudes, 8 troparia: from Odes 3 and 6 of the Canon of the Forerunner.

1. Today the barren woman conceives the blessed fruit, who in these latter days will cut

THE CONCEPTION OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

down the barren limbs of our souls with the axe of noetic grace.

2. Though struck deaf and mute in the temple for his unbelief, the great Zachariah heard the voice of the Word through the great announcement given him and cheerfully he magnifies the compassionate Lord.

3. The glorious forerunner of the Lord who showed the faithful the true path of repentance came forth from his mother's womb as was announced by the angel.

4. As he who was being carried in the barren woman's womb perceived Christ being carried in the Virgin's womb, he leapt up, heralding the joy which had come into the world to deliver it from despair.

5. "I am full of doubts and I cannot believe thy words," said the priest to the archangel, "for I am praying for the salvation of the people, not for the fruit of my loins."

6. "The Creator of all nature, the King of the angels, is well pleased that thou shalt father the herald of His own coming," the ministering angel replied. "Do not disbelieve my words, O man."

7. "Fiery is thine aspect, awesome thy visage, and wondrous are thy words," said Zachariah to the incorporeal servant and minister of God, "still I cannot believe the strange words thou sayest to me that surpass the order of nature."

8. The womb of the Virgin held Thee, who holdest all things, O Christ; and the baptist leapt up when worshipped Thee from in his mother's womb.

The Troparion of the Forerunner, in Tone 4:

Rejoice, O barren one /
Who had not given birth, /
For behold, today hast thou conceived the One who is the dawn of the Sun /
Who will illumine the whole world suffering in blindness, /
Shout for joy, O Zachariah, /
And boldly cry aloud: ///
Truly the One to be born is the prophet of the Most High.

The Kontakion of the Forerunner in Tone 1:

Zachariah rejoices greatly /
With his wife Elizabeth, /
For she has rightly conceived the Forerunner, John, /
Whom the archangel announced with great joy. ///
Let us worthily honor him for he truly an initiate of the mystery of grace.

23 SEPTEMBER

Prokeimenon, Tone 7: The righteous one shall rejoice in the Lord / and shall set his hope on Him. *Verse:* Hear my voice, O God, when I pray into Thee!

The Epistle: (210-ctr) Galatians 4:22-27.

The Alleluia, in Tone 4: The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree and shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. *Verse:* They that are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.

The Gospel: (2) Luke 1:5-25.

The Communion Hymn: The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings.

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