

# THE STORY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Jesus said, “Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.” We see this greatness as we study the story of John the Baptist.

by Joshua Travers

John the Baptist was a fascinating man. He ate locusts and honey in the desert. Crowds came to him, but he constantly told them that he was nothing—that the coming Messiah was everything. In the end, his life was cut short because he criticized a king for sinning.

John the Baptist was an unusual character for sure. But incredibly, Jesus Christ called him the greatest of men (Matthew 11:11).

## JOHN’S MIRACULOUS BIRTH

The story of the birth of the one who came to be known as John the Baptist gives signs of the greatness to come.

John’s parents were an older couple named Zacharias and Elizabeth. They were both descended from the priestly family of Aaron (Luke 1:5). The Bible says Elizabeth had not been able to have children. She was “barren, and they were both well advanced in years” (verse 7).

Then came the day when Zacharias, while burning incense at the temple, saw an angel (verse 11). Zacharias was startled by the appearance of the angel. But perhaps he was even more surprised by what the angel told him. Elizabeth would bear a child in her old age! They would name him John, and he would be set apart for a special purpose (verses 13-15).

The angel Gabriel told him, “And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (verses 16-17).

Zacharias was shocked! He asked, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years” (verse 18).

Because Zacharias had doubted the angel’s words, Gabriel gave him a sign. He wouldn’t be able to talk until the birth of his son. Of course, the angel proved to be correct, and after nine months the priest and his wife had a son (verse 57).

There’s much more to this story, including the fact that Elizabeth and Mary

### QUIZ TIME

Why was Zacharias surprised by what the angel told him?

### QUIZ TIME

How long after the birth of John the Baptist was Jesus Christ born?

the mother of Jesus were related and that in the womb John leaped for joy in recognition of Jesus (verse 41)! The [birth of Jesus](#) came about six months after John's birth.

God had performed a miracle and brought John into the world for a special purpose!

### QUIZ TIME

What was John's special mission?

## THE WORK OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

God had set John apart for a special mission. He was to preach about repentance and to baptize people in water. He was also to preach about the [Kingdom of God](#) and prepare a people for the Messiah's coming.

That is exactly what John did. Instead of serving at the temple as a priest, he dressed in a camel's hair garment and a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3:4). He told the crowds that came to see him that they needed to repent and that the Kingdom of God was at hand (verses 1-2). He preached the same message as Jesus Christ the Messiah (Mark 1:14-15) and prepared the way for Him (Matthew 3:3).

When the religious leaders of his time came to see him, John showed courage. He rebuked them for ignoring God's message of repentance. They believed that they didn't need to repent since they were directly descended from Abraham. But he told them, "And do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones" (Matthew 3:9).

### QUIZ TIME

Why did John rebuke the religious leaders?

John the Baptist knew that he had been called by God to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight'" (Matthew 3:3, quoting Isaiah 40:3).

John pointed the people to Christ regularly (John 1:6-8, 19-27, 29-37). When the time came for Christ to start His ministry, John pointed his disciples to Christ and encouraged them to follow Him (verses 35-37).

John even baptized His Lord and Savior. When Jesus was ready to start His public ministry, He came to John to provide an example for all mankind by being baptized. After John had baptized Jesus, he was privileged to see the Holy Spirit descend on Him. This confirmed to John that this was indeed the Son of God (verses 32-34).

## THE ARREST AND EXECUTION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist didn't pull any punches. He called sin, sin. He even criticized King Herod for marrying his brother's wife and was thrown in jail (Matthew 14:3; Mark 6:17). After spending some time in his prison cell, John sent some of his disciples to Christ. He wanted to receive confirmation about the work and mission of Christ (Matthew 11:2-6).

John believed that Jesus was the Lamb of God and the Son of God (John 1:29, 34). He also believed He was the Christ—the coming Messiah who will conqueror

and rule. But perhaps he was expecting Christ to start conquering then instead of letting him remain in jail. That was not to be, however.

While John was in prison, Herod threw a party. His wife's daughter danced and pleased him so much that he promised her whatever her heart desired.

“So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, ‘Give me John the Baptist’s head here on a platter’” (Matthew 14:8). Herod was sorry, but because of his oaths he felt trapped into ordering John to be killed.

## PURPOSES BEHIND THE STORY OF JOHN

There are many reasons the story of John the Baptist was recorded in the Bible. It still speaks to us 2,000 years later. His life story and his message point us to [Jesus Christ](#), show God’s miraculous power and teach the importance of [repentance](#) from sin and [baptism](#).

John the Baptist’s story also shows us an amazing example of humility. Throughout his life and ministry, John always directed people to Jesus Christ. When talking about Christ, he said, “He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry” (Matthew 3:11). The job of carrying sandals was the job of the lowliest slave. Yet John didn’t deem himself worthy of even this lowest of jobs in serving Christ.

### QUIZ TIME

What was the most important thing to John?

To John, everything was about the Messiah whom he had been commissioned to prepare for. John saw his own needs and status in life as unimportant. He was not jealous about the crowds going to see Jesus. Instead, he humbly said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

The work of John the Baptist also reminds us that God has a detailed plan that He is carrying out. Though we, like John the Baptist, may not understand everything about that plan or our assigned part in it, we can know that God has a plan for us. Herod might have killed John the Baptist physically, but John will be a king and priest reigning on the earth in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 5:10). We, too, can have a part of that plan if we respond to God’s calling, repent and humbly obey God.

For more about that conversion process, see the articles in the “[Christian Conversion](#)” section.



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