



ST. PATRICK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

4794 Curtis Blvd Port St John FL 32729

**Trinity 3/Nativity of St John the Baptist
June 16, 2024**

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.

The passage selected for the Sermon today is taken from the Gospel:

“And thou, child, shall be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” St. Luke 1:76-79

Today we celebrate Father’s Day. Of course, we know the perfection of the love we receive from God the Father, “that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to the end that all who believe on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”. That love is so overwhelming and powerful that it is difficult for us to understand, much less attempt to imitate.

Fortunately, we also have models of fatherly love that share our humanity and our weaknesses. We can look to those great Saints, who also were fathers, and begin to understand the path to emulating the incredible love of God the Father.

Of course, we have St Joseph, the husband of the Blessed Virgin, who raised Jesus as his own son. He withstood criticism of family and community, hardship at the birth of his son, exile in Egypt and yet persevered to be a model that we should all aspire to imitate.

We also have Zacharias, the father of St. John the Baptist. It is his story that is the subject of the Gospel passage. These verses make up the canticle we say at Morning Prayer in our daily office. It is the

proclamation of the fulfillment of the prophecy that John, who would be known as the Baptist, would be the Herald of the Messiah, the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

But the story of Zacharias starts 9 months earlier than this beautiful canticle. He was an elder and priest. The elders took turns, based on seniority, to say the prayers within the Tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, which held the tablets of Moses, the Ark of the Covenant, and the rod of Aaron. It was Zacharias’ turn, and he would be alone with the Ark in the holiest part of the Temple. It was the epitome of a long and dedicated career as a rabbi and priest.

And it had been a long career. In fact, Zacharias had become an old man. Like Abraham when the Angel visited he and Sarah, Zacharias was well past the age of any hope of a child. His wife, Elizabeth had despaired of ever having a child, and she was grieved that God had not answered her prayers. While he was doing his ministrations alone in the temple, the Angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias.

Your prayers have been heard, the Archangel Gabriel announced. You and Elizabeth will have a son, and he will be the precursor of the Messiah, who will announce His arrival to the world. Zacharias was incredulous. He blurted out to the angel, How can that be? I am an old man, and my wife is past child bearing. Even the presence of the Angel wasn’t enough to convince him that this miracle could possibly happen for him.

Gabriel was not happy that he expressed his doubts, and reminded Zacharias that this was God’s will, and that he, as an Archangel, should be trusted. He made

Zacharias dumb, unable to speak, until the miraculous birth would be fulfilled.

As Zacharias left the sacred portion of the Temple to rejoin his colleagues, the other elders and priests, he was in shock and unable to talk to them. They knew he had seen a vision, but the nature of that vision was locked in his heart for he and Elizabeth. When he returned home to her, they did conceive the child that had been promised by Gabriel. Elizabeth hid her condition for five months before she had the confidence to reveal their miracle. Her niece, Mary, herself carrying a miraculous child, came to attend her during her last 3 months.

When the child was born, the expectations were high. What kind of child would this be that had been delivered to this elderly couple? How did the conception relate to the vision Zacharias was unable to share? Eight days after conception, and according to requirements of the Law, the infant was brought to be circumcised and named. The priests asked Elizabeth what they would name the child. When she answered that his name would be John, the priests argued with her. Was she using her husband's inability to speak to go against his wishes. After all, there was no one named John in their family. Before they would continue, they gave Zacharias pen and paper and asked him what the name should really be.

It was then that Zacharias' tongue was loosed. For the first time in almost a year, he could speak, and what he had to say would matter. Would he be obedient to the commands issued by Gabriel in the name of God, or would he make his own decision? Without hesitation, and with firm resolve, Zacharias pronounced, "His name is John." With that pronouncement, came the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the canticle of the herald of the Messiah, and the Messiah Himself, who would follow shortly.

In that single year, the essence of fatherhood was lived out completely. Zacharias went from despair that he

would never have a child, to the pronouncement that he would have a miraculous child. Like every father-to-be, he faced doubt that he could pull it off, that he could have the child at that age, that he could provide what the child would need to fulfill its destiny. Despite the doubts, he accepted his responsibility and set about to do his best, despite the limitations of age and inability to speak. And at the crucial moment, when the identity and character and destiny of his child was in the balance, he spoke with clarity and resolve what the child, the family and the world needed to hear. He set his boy, John, on the path to his Godly mission, with support and love and absolute dependence on God's grace to help him raise that child.

That is the way it is for all of us. We are awed by the miracle of becoming a father. We are terrified of the difficulties ahead. We are in doubt about our ability to live up to the demands of our position. We make mistakes. We are not always able to speak with the wisdom we desperately crave. Hopefully, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, at the critical moment, when the identity, the destiny and the proclamation of love that our children need to set them on the right path is required, we will speak with the clarity and purpose of Zachariah, and we will see the fulfillment of our hopes and God's desire for our children.

It is never easy, even for the best of us, like St Joseph and Zacharias, but there is no blessing for a man that can compare. If you have your father with you, embrace him. Even he is already in his reward, remember him with forgiveness and understanding. If he has failed you, give him the benefit of the doubt, that though he was wrong, he ached to be right and to do right. He still aches and prays that there can be healing. Appreciate and love him, as the giant you look up to and the man with feet of clay. But above all, give him your prayers and love. He needs them and nothing makes him more proud or happy.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen