

**THE ORTHODOX WEEKLY BULETIN . . . . VESTAL, CLIFFWOOD, NEW JERSEY**

**THE GREATEST AND LAST OF THE PROPHETS**

Through the words of the Prophet Malachi, God foretold that before the Messiah would come, a **FORERUNNER** would be sent to His people, preparing them for the arrival of the Saviour. He would truly be the **VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS** of whom the Prophet Isaiah would also speak centuries before his birth.

This “Messenger of God” is better known to us at **ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST**. His nativity is documented in the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke. A pious, but childless couple, the priest **ZACHARIAS** and his wife **ELIZABETH**, were chosen by God to be the parents of the Forerunner. While serving in the Temple in Jerusalem one day, Zacharias was visited by the Archangel Gabriel, who announced to him what was about to occur. When the elderly priest questioned the Archangel, he was punished by losing his ability to speak!

True to God’s promise, Elizabeth soon conceived. Eight days after their child was born, Zacharias and Elizabeth hosted a gathering of their friends and relatives for the purpose of naming their son. While the popular opinion was to name the infant after his father, Zacharias wrote these words on a tablet: ‘**HIS NAME SHALL BE JOHN!** After this, his speech was immediately restored. Zacharias boldly proclaimed that his son “. . . **WILL BE CALLED THE PROPHET OF THE HIGHEST, FOR HE WILL GO BEFORE THE FACE OF THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS.**” (Luke 1: 76) From the Day of his birth, John, which means “the grace of God,” was destined to play a major role in the story of mankind’s salvation.