

The Nativity of St. John the Baptizer

The account of the miraculous conception and birth of John the Baptizer is recorded in the Gospel according to St. Luke, the first chapter. There we learn that Elizabeth, the mother of John, was barren and was “well advanced in years”. Zacharias was “an old man”. Still, God gave a child to Zacharias and his wife, the archangel Gabriel prophesying the birth, and explaining that “nothing is impossible with God.” The name “John” was given to Zacharias by Gabriel, who appeared to him as he was serving as priest before God according to his division in the Temple. Zacharias was stricken mute until the birth of the promised son, at which time, yet unable to speak, he asked for a writing tablet and wrote “His name is John”. Zacharias’ tongue was loosed, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, speaking the words known as the *Benedictus*, words used by the Church as a liturgical canticle in the Office of Matins.

On the cover of this Ordo Elizabeth can be seen having just given birth, and the baby being presented to Zacharias, who holds the writing tablet and has just written “His name is John.”

Cover Art – *The Nativity of St. John the Baptist*
c.1455-1460 A. D.

By Rogier van der Weyden, an early Flemish painter.
Oil on panel. *St. John Altarpiece. Left wing.*
Gemaldegalerie, Berlin, Germany.

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