

THE 23rd DAY OF THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER
COMMEMORATION OF THE CONCEPTION
OF THE HONORABLE GLORIOUS PROPHET,
FORERUNNER AND BAPTIST JOHN
AT VESPERS

On “Lord, I have cried ...,” 6 Stichera of the holy conception, in Tone IV:

Spec. Mel: “Called from on high ...”:

While the godly Zechariah was officiating as priest * within the most divine temple, * offering up the petitions of the people * to the most compassionate Benefactor, * he beheld a most divine angel, who cried out to him: * “Thy supplication and entreaty hath been heard! * Be of good cheer, O elder, and disbelieve not; * for thou shalt have a child, the Forerunner of God, * the greatest of all born of women, * who, with the power of Elijah, ** will go before Christ!” (Twice)

“**S**trange dost thou appear to me in aspect and discourse; * strange also in thy words and proclamations,” * Zechariah objected. * “For I have come to ask for the salvation of the people, * not for the reception of a child, * as thou dost state. * I find thee contrary to my requests * and am minded to place no credence in thee. * For how can such a thing as that of which thou speakest come to pass? * For Elisabeth is barren, ** and I, as thou knowest, am an elderly man.” (Twice)

“**W**hy believest thou not my words, O Zechariah? * Why sayest thou that I offer thee false tidings? * I am the archangel of God; * and those things which I am commanded, * these do I relate to thee, standing here before thee. * But inasmuch as thou hast not believed, and hast not faith, * thou shalt be deaf and mute * until thou shalt see the divine fulfillment of my words. * And when Elisabeth will give birth for thee * unto the voice of the Word, the great Forerunner, who will illumine the nation, ** thou shalt bless the God of Israel!” (Twice)

Glory ..., the composition of Byzantius, in Tone VI:

Today hath John the Forerunner, the fruit of prayer, sprung forth from a barren womb. Make merry, O desert, and join chorus with mankind; for, lo! the preacher of repentance cometh forth to be incarnate in his mother’s womb. Come, O ye who love the feasts of the Church, and, rejoicing in his glorious conception, let us form a choir, crying aloud: O thou who art the greatest born of woman, cease not to make supplication on behalf of those who celebrate thy divine conception, that we may find cleansing of our sins and great mercy.

Both now ..., the Dogmaticon, in the same tone.

Who doth not call thee blessed, O most holy Virgin? * Who will not hymn thy most pure birthgiving? * For the only-begotten Son Who hath shone forth timelessly from the Father, * came forth, ineffably incarnate, from thee, O pure one; * By nature he is God, by nature for our sakes, he hath become a man * not divided into two Hypostases, * but known in two natures without commingling. * Him do thou beseech, O pure and most blessed one, ** that our souls find mercy!

On the Aposticha, these Stichera of the holy conception, in Tone VI:

Spec. Mel: "Having set aside all ...":

When the sacred prophet * reverently entered the Holy of Holies, * a holy angel, standing before the saint, * as it is written, announced, saying; * "Thy supplication hath been heard, * and the barrenness of Elisabeth is now loosed; * and she will bear thee a son, O elder: * John the Forerunner, * the beacon of the Sun, * the greatest of the prophets, * the voice of the Word ** Who will shine forth from the divine Virgin Maiden!"

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

"Tell me more plainly * why I should believe this," * the most blessed elder said again to the angel; * "As thou seest, I am full of days, * and Elisabeth is barren. * How, then, dost thou declare unto me * words which are beyond nature? * I am amazed, and now think that thou in no wise speakest the truth. * Depart from me, O man! * For I am asking deliverance for the people, * and not to receive a child, ** a thing hard to accept!"

Verse: That we might serve Him in holiness and righteousness before Him * all the days of our life.

"I am the archangel of the Almighty! * Gabriel is my name", * the incorporeal one said to the elder. * "And now be thou mute, * and learn silence, * for not believing what I have said; but when thy spouse will give birth for thee * unto the trumpet of the Word, * thou shalt cry out most plainly, * the Spirit enlightening thy tongue * O child Thou shalt be called the prophet of the Most High, * who by grace shalt make ready His path, ** as is His good pleasure!"

Glory ..., in Tone VI:

Thou didst come forth from a barren womb as an angel, O Baptist; from thine earliest childhood thou didst make thine abode in the wilderness, and hast shown thyself to be the seal of all the prophets; for Him Whom they foresaw many times and proclaimed in indistinct images, wast thou deemed worthy to baptize in the Jordan; and thou didst hear the voice of the Father from heaven, bearing witness to His Sonship; and thou didst see the Spirit in the form of a dove, drawing down the voice upon the One Who was being baptized. O thou who art the greatest of all the prophets: cease not to pray on behalf of us who faithfully celebrate thy memory.

Both now ..., Theotokion, in Tone VI:

No one that fleeth unto thee, O most pure Virgin Theotokos, * departeth from thee ashamed; * for those that asketh grace of thee, ** ever receiveth a gift for their profitable petition.

Troparion of the holy conception, in Tone IV:

Make merry, O barren woman, * who before wast unable to bear a child! * For, lo! thou hast manifestly conceived the lamp of the Sun, * who will enlighten all the world, which suffereth from blindness. * Dance thou, O Zechariah, crying out with boldness: * He who will be born ** is the prophet of the Most High!

AT COMPLINE

After the Trisagion, the Kontakion of the Forerunner.

AT MATINS

After the 1st chanting of the Psalter, the Sessional Hymn, in Tone V:

Spec. Mel.: “The co-beginningless Word ...”:

Elisabeth hath been freed from barrenness; and the Virgin hath remained a virgin, even when she conceived in her womb at the cry of Gabriel. Yet John the Forerunner leapeth up in his mother’s womb, foreknowing his God and Master, Who had become incarnate for our salvation within the Virgin’s womb. (Twice)

Glory ..., Both now ..., Theotokion, in Tone V:

Rejoice, O holy and divinely trodden mountain! Rejoice, animate and unburnt bush! Rejoice, thou only bridge from the world to God, leading mortals to life eternal! Rejoice, unblemished maiden who, without a man, hast given birth unto the Salvation of our souls!

After the 2nd chanting of the Psalter, the Sessional Hymn, in Tone IV:

Spec. Mel.: “Go thou quickly before ...”:

The dove that loveth the wilderness, the sacred Forerunner, who preached repentance and who revealed that Christ the intercessor for all sinners, had been born and become a man, ever helping all who are tempest-tossed. By his supplications, O Christ, save Thou Thy world.

Glory ..., Both now ..., Theotokion, in Tone IV:

O Bride of God who alone hast given birth unto the Creator of all, adorning mankind by thy birthgiving, deliver me from the snares of the alien one, and set me upon the rock of Christ’s will, earnestly entreating Him to Whom thou gavest flesh.

Both canons from the Oktoechos, without the martyria; and the canon of the Forerunner, with 6 Troparia, the composition of John of Damascus, in Tone VI:

ODE I

Irmos: When Israel walked on foot in the sea as on dry land, * on seeing their pursuer Pharaoh drowned, * they cried: * Let us sing to God * a song of victory.

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

The sacred Zechariah, entering the temple, beheld the divine angel, who manifestly proclaimed to him: O priest, in thine old age thou shalt receive a son, the Forerunner.

The great Forerunner, the radiant beacon of the Sun of glory, is conceived to shine forth in his mother’s womb, by whom the darkness of the passions hath been rent asunder and the bonds of barrenness have been loosed.

Theotokion: Perceiving the Master borne in thy womb, O most pure Theotokos, John, as His Forerunner, manifestly leapt for joy in his mother’s womb.

ODE III

Irmos: **T**here is none as holy as Thou, * O Lord my God, * who hast exalted the horn of Thy faithful O good One, * and strengthened us upon the rock * of Thy confession.

Today the barren one conceiveth the sacred fruit, who in later times will cut down all the barrenness of souls with grace, the noetic axe.

Having been struck dumb within the temple, the great Zechariah receiveth the yoke of the Word by an awesome announcement, and radiantly magnified the compassionate Lord.

The glorious Forerunner, who hath shown the faithful the firm path of repentance, by divine counsel surpassing hope hath at the angel's command sprung forth in his mother's womb.

Theotokion: **A**s he who was born of the barren woman perceived Christ borne in the Virgin's womb, he leapt up, heralding the Joy which had come into the world, delivering all from grief.

Sessional Hymn of the holy conception, in Tone IV:

Spec. Mel.: "Joseph marveled ...":

From heaven Gabriel came down and stood before the sacred Zechariah as he was censuring in the temple; and he said unto him: "In thine old age thou shalt bear a right glorious fruit, and the former sterility of Elisabeth shall now straightway be loosed, and the barren one shall give birth. And having conceived, she shall bear the Forerunner and herald of Jesus." By their entreaties, O Savior of the world, save Thou our souls. *(Twice)*

Glory ..., Both now ..., Theotokion, in Tone IV:

O pure and all-immaculate one who knewest not wedlock, thou who alone hast given birth in time to the timeless Son and Word of God: with the holy and honorable apostles, martyrs and prophets, and the venerable, do thou beseech Him to grant us cleansing and great mercy.

ODE IV

Irmos: **C**hrist is my power, * my God and my Lord, * the holy Church divinely singeth, * crying with a pure mind, * keeping festival in the Lord.

O blessed Forerunner, the voice of the angel proclaimed thee in a sacred manner to the priest as the herald of the coming of Christ, who wast to spring forth from a barren womb.

O barren one, who before wast childless and hadst not given birth, be thou now glad, for all-gloriously wilt thou bring forth as fruit the Baptist and Forerunner, O right wondrous Elisabeth.

O Forerunner, with the axe of thy prayer hew down the thorns of my passions and remove the stumbling block of mine evil thoughts; and by thy virtues render my mind fertile, O all-blessed one.

Theotokion: **T**he womb of the Virgin held Thee Who holdest all things, O Christ; and when the Baptist, borne in his mother's womb, worshipped Thee, he rejoiced, leaping up.

ODE V

Irmos: **I**lluminate with Thy divine light, I pray, O Good One, * the souls of those who with love rise early to pray to Thee, * that they may know Thee, O Word of God, * as the true God, * Who recalleth us from the darkness of sin.

To the prophet who entered the sanctuary and was offering up to the Creator the services of the Law, the holy angel appeared, announcing the divine conception of the Forerunner.

“How can this happen to me, for I am an old man, as thou seest, and I have a barren wife?” Zechariah said to the archangel. “Thou dost utter to me words which are contrary to nature!”

“Look at Sarah, the wife of Abraham, and behold how she brought forth Isaac in her old age, O man; and believe thou those things which have been justly spoken,” the great angel exhorted the elder.

Theotokion: **“B**lessed art thou among women, O thou who art full of the joy of God,” Elisabeth manifestly cried to thee when she knew thee to be her who would give birth without having known a man, her who alone would remain incorrupt after giving birth.

ODE VI

Irmos: **B**eholding the sea of life surging with the tempest of temptations, * I run to Thy calm haven, and cry to Thee: * Raise up my life from corruption, * O greatly Merciful One.

“My thoughts are filled with doubt, and I shall not believe thy words,” the priest said to the archangel, “for I am asking for the salvation of the people, not for the fruit of my loins.”

“The Creator of nature, the King of angels, hath been well pleased that thou give birth unto 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 thy discourse,” said Zechariah to the servant of God; “yet I will not believe thee who utterest words strange to me, and which surpass nature!”

Theotokion: In the dark abode of the womb, the lamp of the Sun offered worship and leapt up, rejoicing, recognizing the One concealed in the cloud of His Mother's womb.

Kontakion of the holy conception, in Tone I:

Spec. Mel.: "The choir of the angels ...":

Rejoice with splendor, O great Zechariah * and all-glorious Elisabeth, his spouse, * in conceiving John the Forerunner as is meet, * whom the archangel announced, rejoicing. * O ye mortals, let us right worthily honor him ** as the initiate of the mystery of grace.

Ikos: Let us open the hallowed Gospel which the sacred and wondrous Luke hath recorded for us, and let us behold the radiant and honorable conception of the Forerunner. For he saith that, as the righteous elder Zechariah entered into the Holy of Holies to cense when it was his turn so to do, Gabriel stood before him, proclaiming and saying: "O priest, in thine old age thou shalt have a son, the prophet and Forerunner, the voice and herald, the ever-radiant beacon and initiate of the mysteries of grace!"

ODE VII

Irmos: An Angel made the furnace bedew the holy Children. * But the command of God consumed the Chaldeans * and prevailed upon the tyrant to cry: * O God of our fathers, blessed art Thou.

"Since thou dost not believe my words, receive thou manifest muteness; and when thou shalt see the voice of the Word born, receive again thy voice, crying out: 'Blessed art Thou, O God of Israel!'"

As radiant as the sun, Zechariah, cleaving unto Elisabeth, the moon, begat the light-bearing beacon of the Light, which shineth upon us who are cruelly held fast in the darkness of the passions.

Using leaps instead of words, the great Forerunner worshipped Thee in the Virgin's womb, O Christ Jesus, while he himself was borne in the womb of Elisabeth. O God of our fathers, blessed art Thou!

Theotokion: Elisabeth, the moon, bearing within herself a star, the divine Forerunner, bowed down before Mary, the radiant cloud, who was bearing Christ, the Sun, Who had taken flesh of her for our salvation.

ODE VIII

Irmos: Thou didst make flame bedew the holy children, * and didst burn the sacrifice of a righteous man with water. * For Thou alone, O Christ, dost do all as Thou willest, * Thee do we supremely exalt throughout all ages.

The friend of the Bridegroom hath been prepared; the voice of the Word receiveth his beginning; the great warrior of the King of all is now nourished in the womb of the barren one.

A husbandman hath come forth to tend barren hearts; an axe is already forged to fell the passions; an honorable bullock is nurtured on abstinence: the great Forerunner. Be glad, O ye people!

Break thou the stoniness of my mind, O Forerunner, as of old thou didst loose the bonds of the barren woman; and cause me to increase the fruits of repentance that I may live forever.

Theotokion: **A**s Elisabeth beheld thee pregnant, O Maiden, she rejoiced in a godly manner, while within her the babe leapt as he recognized his Master.

ODE IX

Irmos: **I**t is impossible for mankind to see God * upon Whom the orders of Angels dare not gaze; * but through thee, O all-pure one, * did the Word Incarnate become a man * and with the Heavenly Hosts * Him we magnify and thee we call blessed.

Now having thrown wide the gate of the barren one, the great and divine Forerunner of Christ taketh up his abode within his mother's womb, as within a royal chamber, that he may issue forth as a warrior, preparing the way for the King of all.

Dance thou, O prophet of God and elder, for thou shalt bring forth a son, of whom none greater shall arise among mankind: John, the Forerunner of the Lord! Leap up, O Elisabeth! Rejoice, all the earth, and offer praise to God, the Creator of all!

O prophet and Forerunner of the Lord, remember us now who praise thee in faith, and deliver us from spiritual passions. Save us from misfortunes, and guide us in a godly manner along the path to heaven, O ever-blessed one.

Theotokion: **S**ensing herself loosed of the bonds of barrenness and bearing the Forerunner of Him Who dwelt within thy womb, Elisabeth manifestly acknowledged thee to be the pure Mother, O pure Virgin Mary, full of the joy of God.

Exapostilarion of the holy conception:

Spec. Mel: "With the disciples ...":

The glorious conception of the Forerunner heralds the King Who is to be born from the Virgin; for he will be born from Elisabeth, barren and childless, and the great Zechariah, the elder and priest. Through their prayers and those of the Theotokos and of John, Thy Baptist, O Lord, save and take pity on all. (**Twice**)

Theotokion: **B**y the counsel of the Father the pre-eternal Son hath in truth wrought great things through thee; for without pain thou hast given birth to immortal Life and remained as thou wast before birthgiving, escaping the pangs of motherhood; and thou didst remain a virgin even after childbirth, O Virgin.

On the Praises, 4 Stichera, in Tone I:
Spec. Mel.: “Joy of the ranks of heaven ...”:

Creation rejoiceth in thy conception, * O prophet and Forerunner, * John the Baptist, * for thy divine birth * doth foretell the nativity of the Master for us. ** Wherefore, together, we on earth praise thee as is meet.

The angel, finding the conception of the barren * to be a wondrous witness, * reciteth it to Mary, * offering it to her as confirmation. * Wherefore, we praise the barren Elisabeth, ** Zechariah, her spouse, and John.

The divinely wrought lamp of the everlasting Light, * the friend of the Bridegroom, * the great luminary of the glory of the Sun, * the living voice of the Word of God, * the Forerunner of the coming of the Lord, ** is now conceived at the angel's announcement.

O Forerunner, thou art manifestly known * to be the divine altar of the sweet-smelling incense of Christ, * stationed at His right hand, * pouring forth the fragrance of the knowledge of Him * prefigured by the angels and saints ** standing at His right hand.

Glory ..., Both now ..., in Tone VI:

Elisabeth conceived the Forerunner of grace, and the Virgin conceived the Lord of glory. When both mothers embraced in greeting, the babe of the one leapt up, for the servant within her was praising his Master. Marveling, the mother of the Forerunner began to cry aloud: “Why is this granted to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?” May He that hath great mercy save His despairing people.

Great Doxology. Troparion of the holy conception, in Tone IV:

Make merry, O barren woman, * who before wast unable to bear a child! * For, lo! thou hast manifestly conceived the lamp of the Sun, * who will enlighten all the world, which suffereth from blindness. * Dance thou, O Zechariah, crying out with boldness: * He who will be born ** is the prophet of the Most High!

Glory ..., Both now ..., Theotokion, in Tone IV:

The mystery hidden from all ages * and unknown to the ranks of Angels, * hath been revealed to those on earth through thee, O Theotokos: * God incarnate in an uncommingled union, * Who willingly accepted the Cross for our sake, * and through it hath raised up the first-formed man, ** and saved our souls from death.

The Ektenias, and the rest.

AT LITURGY

On the Beatitudes, 8 Troparia, 4 from ODE III, and 4 from ODE VI of the canon of the holy conception of the forerunner.

Today the barren one conceiveth the sacred fruit, who in later times will cut down all the barrenness of souls with grace, the noetic axe. (Twice)

Having been struck dumb within the temple, the great Zechariah receiveth the yoke of the Word by an awesome announcement, and radiantly magnified the compassionate Lord.

The glorious Forerunner, who hath shown the faithful the firm path of repentance, by divine counsel surpassing hope hath at the angel's command sprung forth in his mother's womb.

"My thoughts are filled with doubt, and I shall not believe thy words," the priest said to the archangel, "for I am asking for the salvation of the people, not for the fruit of my loins."

"The Creator of nature, the King of angels, hath been well pleased that thou give birth unto the herald of His own coming," the ministering angel replied; "Do not disbelieve my words, O man!"

"Fierly is thine aspect, awesome thy visage, and wondrous thy discourse," said Zechariah to the servant of God; "yet I will not believe thee who utterest words strange to me, and which surpass nature!"

Theotokion: In the dark abode of the womb, the lamp of the Sun offered worship and leapt up, rejoicing, recognizing the One concealed in the cloud of His Mother's womb.

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Kontakion of the holy conception, in Tone I:

Rejoice with splendor, O great Zechariah * and all-glorious Elisabeth, his spouse, * in conceiving John the Forerunner as is meet, * whom the archangel announced, rejoicing. * O ye mortals, let us right worthily honor him ** as the initiate of the mystery of grace.

Prokeimenon: The righteous man shall be glad in the Lord, * and shall hope in Him.

Verse: Harken, O God, unto my prayer, when I make supplication unto Thee.

THE EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO THE GALATIANS (4:22-27).

Brethren: Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Hagar. For this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath a husband.

Alleluia, in Tone IV: The righteous man shall flourish like a palm tree, and like a cedar in Lebanon shall he be multiplied.

Verse: They that are planted in the house of the Lord, in the courts of our God shall they blossom forth.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE (1:5-25)

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zechariah, of the course of Abijah: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren; and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zechariah saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zechariah: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall 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. And Zechariah said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. And,

behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. And the people waited for Zechariah, and marveled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.

Communion Verse: In everlasting remembrance shall the righteous be; he shall not be afraid of evil tidings.