

DECEMBER 23 2025 FATHER JOHN BERTAIO

When I discovered that I'd been asked to celebrate this Mass of this December 23rd, I remembered going back 12 months that, last year, at the same time, I was asked to celebrate and to preach on this very same day, the very same topic: the birth and naming of John the Baptist. The events are the same; however, this time, I invite you to go on—or come on—a spiritual journey with me if you can. Let's start.

First, have you been blessed with the birth of a child? Or do you know of someone who has been blessed with the birth of a child? The excitement must've been overwhelming in that household, maybe even perhaps in a hospital, as is more common these days.

Elizabeth, as we hear in the gospel, is getting on in years, and this could be a very dangerous time for her, again, because of her advanced age. And then in those days, as I'm sure you can imagine, there were no phones, no place to call 9-1-1, maybe not even a doctor or midwife, or anybody—a “professional,” as you might call it—to give her a hand with the childbirth.

Yet, as you watch Mary, also pregnant, she is calm, knowing that with God all is possible, and that Elizabeth, although with birth pains, is grateful for that beautiful gift of the child who has already been baptized. Yes, he's already been baptized by his cousin, Jesus, when both were in their mothers' womb. Should I repeat that, or did you get it? Yeah, you got it. Okay, I'm sure. A very, very special baptism indeed, being baptized in the mother's womb.

And of course, Zechariah—what's his role in all this? My mother, God bless her. My mother told me that when, uh—she said, “Oh, when I was with birth pains, about to give birth, your dad was sent out to feed the

chickens. The man was not allowed in the house at that time.” Let's keep in mind that Zechariah's calling, or vocation, was to pray in the temple and verbally proclaim the coming of the Messiah. He was out there somewhere doing something until they called him back.

You see, it must've been very difficult for Zechariah to lose his voice for nine months. It must've been really devastating. I mean, after all, uh, well then, to be surrounded by the pressures of friends and neighbours around him, attempting to fill the gaps of silence of the father-to-be with their own opinions about traditional rights of a newborn son—it must've been excruciating, admittedly, speaking for poor Zechariah.

And then, he pumps up. He pumps up and just in time, and by the only means available to him, he, uh, recommits himself to God, fully to God, and to be his beloved son, and by inscribing his beloved, his son, and his name, and to be insistent of the name, so he asks for—the only thing available was a writing tablet. So, Zechariah goes against the tradition in naming his son, and is fully committed to doing God's will, not the traditional one that was all around him.

So, I ask you a question. Are you surprised to see the relatives, Zechariah and Elizabeth, disagreeing over what name to name the child, this brand new baby, newborn child? Don't we do the same thing as well? Let's remember if you can that this child has been named from above and Elizabeth is firm in her faith, and determined to see that God be glorified through this very special child.

By the way, the name “John,” now get this one—(Laughing) The name “John” means “the Lord is gracious.” Wow. The Lord is gracious, through—in the name John. In the birth of John the Baptist, and in the birth of the Messiah, we see the grace and favour of God break forth into

a world broken by sin, corruption, and death, a world that has lost its hope.

John the Baptist fulfills the role of Elijah. His miraculous birth shows the mercy and favour of God in preparing his people for the coming of its saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Dear friends, when—when God acts to save us, He graciously fills us with His Holy Spirit, and makes our faith come alive to fulfill what He wants us to do to fulfill His promises. So, when we respond to His word—to this world—with trust, the Lord fills us with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and renews our hope and gratitude for the mercy and gift of new life, and salvation that He gives us, again, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you make your life an offering of thanksgiving to God each day? God wants to fulfill each one of us with the joy of the saving presence all the days of our life, from birth to natural death. Perhaps, perhaps, this Advent and Christmas, you can renew the offering of your own life to God and give Him thanks for His mercy and favour towards you and your loved ones.

In short, are you being tempted to put Jesus second this Christmas to please some family members and friends who want to go with tradition as opposed to attending Mass, and celebrating, and celebrating and living Christmas? The question I'll leave you with is: “Who is first in your life? Who are you trying to please?”

Let me give you an idea as we pray: Lord Jesus, you are gracious and forgiving toward us. Renew in me the gift of faith, that I may believe your promises, and obey your word with joy and thanksgiving. Amen.