
John the Baptist - 24 June

John the Baptist was born to Zachariah, a Temple priest, and Elizabeth, who was a cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus. John was born when his mother was advanced in years, and after the foretelling of his birth and the choice of his name by an angel, we hear nothing more of him until he began his mission of preaching and baptising in the river Jordan c27.

John was a lot like an Old Testament prophet: he lived simply on locusts and honey in the wilderness, and his message was one of repentance and preparation for the coming of the Messiah and his Kingdom. He went on to baptise Jesus, at Jesus' firm request.

John went on to denounce the incestuous union of Herod Antipas with his niece and brother's wife, Herodias, he was imprisoned and eventually beheaded at the demand of Salome, Herodias' daughter.

John is the only saint to be remembered three times in the Christian calendar, in commemoration of his conception, his birth (June 24), and his martyrdom. When John saw Jesus he said that Jesus was the "Lamb of God", and he is the only person to use this expression of Jesus. In art John is often depicted carrying a lamb, or with a lamb near him.

Feast of SS Peter & Paul – 29 June

St Peter (d. c. 64AD), originally called Simon, was a married fisherman from Bethsaida, near the Sea of Galilee. He met Jesus through his brother, Andrew. Jesus gave him the name of Cephas (Peter) which means rock. Peter is always named first in the list of apostles. He was one of the three apostles who were privileged to witness the Transfiguration, the raising of the daughter of Jairus, and the Agony in the Garden.

When Peter made his famous confession of faith, that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus recognised it as being the result of a revelation from the Father. He in turn told Peter that he would be the rock on which his Church would be built, that the 'gates of hell' would never prevail against it. Peter and the apostles would have the power of 'binding and loosing', but Peter would be given 'the keys of the kingdom of heaven'. Jesus also forewarned Peter of his betrayal and subsequent strengthening of the other apostles. After his Resurrection, Jesus appeared to Peter before the other apostles, and later entrusted him with the mission to feed both the lambs and the sheep of Christ's flock.

Peter played a big part in the early Church, and is mentioned many times in the Book of Acts, where in the early chapters he organised the choice of Judas' successor, preached with stirring authority at Pentecost; and was the very first apostle to work a miracle. Peter went on to defend the apostles' right to teach at the Sanhedrim, and to condemn Ananias and Sapphira. It was Peter who first realised that Christianity was also for the gentiles, after his meeting with Cornelius. Later he took a prominent part in the council at Jerusalem, and went on to clash with St Paul at Antioch for hesitating about eating with gentiles.