

### **Synaxis of St. John the Forerunner**

“Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’ ” (Mk. 1:2-3) “For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.” (Lk. 7:28) In many triptych icons where Christ is portrayed as seated in the center icon, the Holy Theotokos is portrayed praying to Him on His left and St. John the Forerunner is portrayed praying to Him on His right. After Christ and the Holy Theotokos, St. John the Forerunner is the most venerated Saint in the Church. He is the greatest of the prophets and the greatest of the ascetics. He perfectly fulfilled the role of prophet, not so much in predicting the future, but in calling people back to God. He preached a message of repentance calling the lost sheep back to the Good Shepherd, Christ. He knew that he was only the friend of the Bridegroom and pointed his disciples to Christ, the Bridegroom, when Christ appeared before him to be baptized.

St. John the Forerunner is also the model for ascetics because he retreated into the desert away from the noise and distractions of the world to focus solely on God and God’s calling in his life. He was not concerned about worldly comforts or possessions and lived simply with simple clothing and a simple diet. In icons, sometimes, he is portrayed as an angel with wings because while on Earth, he lived like an angel in the flesh. Yet, despite his simple clothing and humble appearance, people came out to him in the middle of nowhere in the desert to hear the Word of God preached and to hear his message of repentance and preparing oneself to meet God. Even Herod the tetrarch when he heard about Jesus thought that Jesus was John the Forerunner raised from the dead, because even Herod thought John was a great prophet. The same Herod who had beheaded him.

Today, then, we celebrate St. John the Forerunner on this his Synaxis feast because he was the one found worthy by God to baptize the Saviour of the world, Jesus. Even, though, by his own admission, he was not worthy to bend down and loosen the straps on Jesus’s sandals. St. John’s humility allowed him to attain great heights. May he also pray for us on this his feast day that we too may attain great heights through his prayers!