

Luke: 1:57–80

From Catena Aurea:

57. Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

58. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

AMBROSE. If you carefully observe, you will find that the word signifying fulness is no where used except at the birth of the righteous. Hence it is said, Now Elisabeth's full time came. For the life of the righteous hath fulness, but the days of the wicked are empty.

CHRYSOSTOM. And for that reason the Lord kept back the delivery of Elisabeth, that her joy might be increased, and her fame the greater. Hence it follows, And her neighbours and cousins heard, &c. For they who had known her barrenness were made the witnesses of the Divine grace, and no one seeing the child departed in silence, but gave praise to God, Who had vouchsafed him beyond their expectation.

AMBROSE. For the bringing forth of saints causes the rejoicing of many; it is a common blessing; for justice is a public virtue, and therefore at the birth of a just man a sign of his future life is sent beforehand, and the grace of the virtue which is to follow is represented, being foreshadowed by the rejoicing of the neighbours.

1:59–64

59. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

60. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

61. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

62. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

63. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

64. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

CHRYSOSTOM. (in Gen. Hom. 39.) The rite of circumcision was first delivered to Abraham as a sign of distinction, that the race of the Patriarch might be preserved in unmixed purity, and so might be able to obtain the promises. But now that the promise of the covenant is fulfilled, the sign attached to it is removed. So then through Christ circumcision ceased, and baptism came in its place; but first it was right that John should be circumcised; as it is said, And it came to pass, that on the eighth day, &c. For the Lord had said, Let the child of eight days be circumcised among you. (Gen. 17:13.) But this measurement of time I conceive was ordered by Divine mercy for two reasons. First, because in its most tender years the child the more easily bears the cutting of the flesh. Secondly, that from the very operation itself we might be reminded that it was done for a sign; for the young child scarcely distinguishes any of the things that are around him. But after the circumcision, the name was conferred, as it follows, And they called him. But this was done because we must first receive the seal of the Lord, then the name of man. Or, because no man except he first cast aside his fleshly lusts, which circumcision signifies, is worthy to have his name written in the book of life.

AMBROSE. The holy Evangelist has especially remarked, that many thought the child should be called after his father Zacharias, in order that we might understand, not that any name of his kinsfolk was displeasing to his mother, but that the same word had been communicated to her by the Holy Spirit, which had been foretold by the Angel to Zacharias. And in truth, being dumb, Zacharias was unable to mention his son's name to his wife, but Elisabeth obtained by prophecy what she had not learnt from her husband. Hence it follows, And she answered, &c. Marvel not that the woman pronounced the name which she had never heard, seeing the Holy Spirit who imparted it to the Angel revealed it to her; nor could she be ignorant of the forerunner of the Lord, who had prophesied of Christ. And it well follows, And they said unto her, &c. that you might consider that the name belongs not to the family, but to the Prophet. Zacharias also is questioned, and signs made to him, as it follows, And they made signs to the father, &c. But since unbelief had so bereft him of utterance and hearing, that he could not use his voice, he spoke by his hand-writing, as it follows, And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John; that is, we give no name to him who has received his name from God.

ORIGEN. (non occ.) Zacharias is by interpretation "remembering God," but John signifies "pointing to." Now "memory" relates to something absent, "pointing to," to something present. But John was not about to set forth the memory of God as absent, but with his finger to point him out as present, saying, Behold the Lamb of God.

CHRYSOSTOM. But the name John is also interpreted the grace of God. Because then by the favour of Divine grace, not by nature, Elisabeth conceived this son, they engraved the memory of the benefit on the name of the child.

THEOPHYLACT. And because with the mother the dumb father also agreed as to the name of the child, it follows, And they all marvelled. For there was no one of this name among their kinsfolk that any one could say that they had both previously determined upon it.

GREGORY NAZIANZEN. (Orat. vi.) The birth of John then broke the silence of Zacharias, as it follows, And his mouth was opened. For it were unreasonable when the voice of the Word had come forth, that his father should remain speechless.

AMBROSE. Rightly also, from that moment was his tongue loosed, for that which unbelief had bound, faith set free. Let us then also believe, in order that our tongue, which has been bound by the chains of unbelief, may be loosed by the voice of reason. Let us write mysteries by the Spirit if we wish to speak. Let us write the forerunner of Christ, not on tables of stone, but on the fleshly tablets of the heart. For he who names John, prophesies Christ. For it follows, And he spake, giving thanks.

1:65–66

65. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judæa.

66. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

THEOPHYLACT. As at the silence of Zacharias the people marvelled, so likewise when he spoke. Hence it is said, And fear came upon all; that from these two circumstances all might believe there was something great in the child that was born. But all these things were ordained, to the end that he who was to bear witness of Christ might also be esteemed trustworthy. Hence it follows, And all they that heard them laid them up in their heart, saying, What manner of child, &c.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Metaphrastes.) For God worked miracles in John which he did not himself, but the right hand of God in him.

GLOSS. (ordin.) But mystically, at the time of our Lord's resurrection, by the preaching of the grace of Christ, a wholesome dread shook the hearts not only of the Jews, (who were neighbours, either from the

place of their dwelling, or from the knowledge of the law,) but of the foreign nations also. The name of Christ surmounts not only the hilly country of Judæa, but all the heights of worldly dominion and wisdom.

1:67–68

67. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

68. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people.

AMBROSE. God in His mercy and readiness to pardon our sins, not only restores to us what He has taken away, but grants us favours even beyond our expectations. Let no one then distrust Him, let no one from consciousness of past sins despair of the Divine blessing. God knoweth how to change His sentence, if thou hast known how to correct thy sin, seeing he that was long silent prophesies; as it is said, And Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit.

CHRYSOSTOM. That is, “with the working of the Holy Spirit;” for he had obtained the grace of the Holy Spirit, not in any manner, but fully; and the gift of prophecy shone forth in him; as it follows, And he prophesied.

ORIGEN. Now Zacharias being filled with the Holy Spirit utters two prophecies, the first relating to Christ, the second to John. And this is plainly proved by those words in which he speaks of the Saviour as present and already going about in the world, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited, &c.

CHRYSOSTOM. Zacharias, when he is blessing God, says, that He hath visited His people, meaning thereby either the Israelites in the flesh, for He came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; (Matt. 15:24.) or the spiritual Israel, that is, the faithful, who were worthy of this visitation, making the providence of God of good effect towards them.

1:69

69. And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

THEOPHYLACT. God seemed to be asleep, disregarding the sins of the multitude, but in these last times coming in the flesh, He hath risen up and trodden down the evil spirits who hated us. Hence it is said, And he hath raised up an horn of salvation to us in the house of his servant David.

ORIGEN. Because Christ was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh, it is said, A horn of salvation to us in the house of his servant David; as it has also elsewhere been said, A vineyard hath been planted in a horn, (Is. 5:1.) i. e. in Jesus Christ.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Serm. de Anna. IV.) Now by a horn he means power, glory, and honour, deriving it metaphorically from the brute creatures, to whom God has given horns for defence and glory.

1:70

70. As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began.

THEOPHYLACT. That Christ was born of the house of David, Micah relates, saying, And thou, Bethlehem, art not the least in the city of Juda, for out of thee shall come a governor who shall rule my people Israel. (Micah 5:2.) But all the prophets spoke of the Incarnation, and therefore it is said, As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Victor Presbyter.) Whereby he means that God spoke through them, and that their speech was not of man.

1:71

71. That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us.

ORIGEN. Let us not suppose that this refers to our bodily enemies, but our ghostly. For the Lord Jesus came mighty in battle (Ps. 24:8) to destroy all our enemies, that He might deliver us from their snares and temptation.

1:72–74

72. To perform the mercy promised to our forefathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

73. The oath which he swore to our father Abraham,

74. That he would grant unto us.

ORIGEN. I think that at the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, both Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were partakers of His mercy. For it is not to be believed, that they who had before seen His day, and were glad, should afterwards derive no advantage from His coming, since it is written, Having made peace through the blood of his Cross, whether in earth or in heaven. (Coloss. 1:20.)

THEOPHYLACT. The grace of Christ extends even to those who are dead, because through Him we shall rise again, not only we, but they also who have been dead before us. He performed His mercy also to our forefathers in fulfilling all their hopes and desires. Hence it follows, And to remember his holy covenant, that covenant, namely, wherein he said, Blessing, I will bless thee, and multiplying, I will multiply thee. (Gen. 22:17.) For Abraham was multiplied in all nations, who became his children by adoption, through following the example of his faith. But the fathers also, seeing their children enjoy these blessings, rejoice together with them, just as if they received the mercy in themselves. Hence it follows, The oath which he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us.

BASIL. (Hom. in Ps. 29. et in Ps. 14. App. op.) But let no one, hearing that the Lord had sworn to Abraham, be tempted to swear. For as when the wrath of God is spoken of, it does not signify passion but punishment; so neither does God swear as man, but His word is in very truth expressed to us in place of an oath, confirming by an unchangeable sentence what He promised.

1:74

74. That we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear.

CHRYSOSTOM. Having said that a horn of salvation had risen up to us from the house of David, he shews that through it we are partakers of His glory, and escape the assaults of the enemy. As he says, That being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve him without fear. The two things above mentioned will not easily be found united. For many escape danger, but fail of a glorious life, as criminals discharged from prison by the king's mercy. On the other hand, some reap glory, but are compelled for its sake to encounter dangers, as soldiers in war embracing a life of honour are oftentimes in the greatest peril. But the horn brings both safety and glory. Safety indeed as it rescues us from the hands of our enemies, not slightly but in a wonderful manner, insomuch that we have no more fear, which are his very words; that being delivered from the hand of our enemies, we might serve him without fear.

ORIGEN. Or in another way; Frequently are men delivered from the hands of the enemy, but not without fear. For when fear and peril have gone before, and a man is then plucked from the enemies' hand, he is delivered indeed, but not without fear. Therefore said he, that the coming of Christ caused us to be snatched from the enemies' hands without fear. For we suffered not from their evil designs, but He suddenly parting us from them, hath led us out to our own allotted resting place.

1:75

75. In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

CHRYSOSTOM. Zacharias glorifies the Lord, because He hath made us to serve Him with full confidence, not in the flesh as Judah did with the blood of victims, but in the spirit with good works. And this is what he means by in holiness and righteousness. For holiness is, a proper observance of our duty towards God, righteousness of our duty towards man; as, for example, when a man devoutly performs the Divine commands, and lives honourably among his fellow men. But he does not say “before men,” as of hypocrites desirous to please men, but “before God,” as of those whose praise is not of men, but of God; (Rom. 2:29.) and this not once or for a time; but all the days of their life, as it is said, all our days.

1:76

76. And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.

AMBROSE. In prophesying of the Lord he rightly addresses the prophet, shewing that prophecy also is a gift of the Lord, in order that he might not, while enumerating public benefits, seem to be so ungrateful as to be silent of his own. Hence it is said, And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest.

ORIGEN. The reason I suppose that Zacharias hastened to speak to his son, was because he knew that John was shortly about to be a sojourner in the wilderness, and that he himself should see him no more.

AMBROSE. Now perhaps some may think it an absurd extravagance of the mind to address a child of eight days old. But if we keep our eyes fixed upon higher things, we surely can understand that the son might hear the voice of his father, who before he was born heard the salutation of Mary. The Prophet knew that there were certain organs of hearing in a Prophet which were unclosed by the Spirit of God, not by the growth of the body. He possessed the faculty of understanding who was moved by the feeling of exultation.

CHRYSOSTOM. But as kings have their companions in arms, who stand nearest to them, so John, who was the friend of the Bridegroom, went before Him nigh unto His coming. And this is what follows, For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways. For some prophets have preached the mystery of Christ at a distance, but he preached it nearer the time, that he might both see Christ, and declare Him to others.

1:77

77. To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.

THEOPHYLACT. For the manner in which the forerunner prepared the way of the Lord he explains, adding, To give knowledge of salvation. The Lord Jesus is salvation, i. e. of Christ, was given in John, who bore witness of Christ.

THEOPHYLACT. For in no other way was He known to be God, but as having forgiven the sins of His people. For it is of God alone to forgive sins.

1:78

78. Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us.

THEOPHYLACT. Because God hath forgiven our sins not for our works' sake, but through His mercy, it is therefore fitly added, Through the tender mercy of our God.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xiv. in Matt.) Which mercy we find not indeed by our own seeking, but God from on high hath appeared to us, as it follows; Whereby (i. e. by His tender mercy) the dayspring from on high (that is, Christ) hath visited us, taking upon Him our flesh.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Severus.) Abiding on high yet present upon the earth, suffering neither division nor limitation, which thing neither can our understanding embrace, nor any power of words express.

1:79

79. To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) By darkness he means not material darkness, but error and distance from the faith, or ungodliness.

BASIL. (sup. Esai. c. ii) For in thick darkness were the Gentile people sitting, who were sunk deep in idolatry, until the rising light dispersed the darkness, and spread abroad the brightness of truth.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ut sup.) He rightly says sitting, for we were not walking in darkness, but sitting down as having no hope of deliverance.

THEOPHYLACT. But not only does the Lord at His rising give light to those who sit in darkness, but he says something further as it follows, to direct our feet in the way of peace. The way of peace is the way of righteousness, to which He has directed our feet, i. e. the affections of our souls.

AMBROSE. Mark also, in how few words Elisabeth prophesies, in how many Zacharias, and yet each spoke filled with the Holy Spirit; but this discipline is preserved, that women may study rather to learn what are the Divine commands than to teach them.

1:80

80. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

THEOPHYLACT. i. e. in bodily stature, and waxed strong in spirit, for together with his body at the same time his spiritual gift increased, and the workings of the Spirit were more and more manifested in him.

ORIGEN. Or he increased in spirit, remaining not in the same measure in which he had begun, but the Spirit was ever growing in him. His will ever tending to better things, was making its own advances, and his mind ever contemplating something more divine, while his memory was exercising itself, that it might lay up more and more things in its treasury, and more firmly retain them. But he adds, And he waxed strong. For human nature is weak, as we learn, the flesh is weak. (Matt. 26:41.) It must therefore be made strong by the Spirit, for the Spirit is ready. Many wax strong in the flesh, but the wrestler of God must be strengthened by the Spirit that he may crush the wisdom of the flesh. He retires therefore to escape the noise of cities, and the thronging of the people. For it follows, And he was in the deserts. Where the air is purer, the sky more clear, and God a closer friend, that as the time had not yet arrived for his baptism and preaching, he might have leisure for praying, and might hold converse with the angels, calling upon God and fearing Him, saying, Behold, here am I.

THEOPHYLACT. Or, he was in the deserts that he might be brought up beyond the reach of the malice of the multitude, and not be afraid of man. For if he had been in the world, perchance he had been corrupted by the friendship and conversation of the world. And secondly, that he who was to preach Christ might also be esteemed trust-worthy. But he was hid in the desert until it pleased God to shew him forth to the people of Israel, as it follows, till the day of his shewing forth to Israel.

AMBROSE. And rightly is the time noted during which the prophet was in the womb, in order that the presence of Mary might not be passed over, while they are silent about the time of his childhood, because

being strengthened in the womb by the presence of the Mother of the Lord, he knew not the struggles of childhood.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

1:57–58 Elizabeth Bears a Son

The Parallels Between John and Jesus.

Ephrem the Syrian: The elderly Elizabeth gave birth to the last of the prophets, and Mary, a young girl, to the Lord of the angels. The daughter of Aaron gave birth to the voice in the desert, but the daughter of David to the strong God of the earth. The barren one gave birth to him who remits sins, but the Virgin gave birth to him who takes them away. Elizabeth gave birth to him who reconciled people through repentance, but Mary gave birth to him who purified the lands of uncleanness. The elder one lit a lamp in the house of Jacob, his father, for this lamp itself was John, while the younger one lit the Sun of Justice for all the nations. The angel announced to Zechariah, so that the slain one would proclaim the crucified one and that the hated one would proclaim the envied one. He who was to baptize with water would proclaim him who would baptize with fire and with the Holy Spirit. The light, which was not obscure, would proclaim the Sun of Justice. The one filled with the Spirit would proclaim concerning him who gives the Spirit. The priest calling with the trumpet would proclaim concerning the one who is to come at the sound of the trumpet at the end. The voice would proclaim concerning the Word, and the one who saw the dove would proclaim concerning him upon whom the dove rested, like the lightning before the thunder. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 1.31.

1:59–63 The Circumcision and Naming of John

1:64–66 Zechariah's Tongue Loosed

1:67 Zechariah, Filled with the Holy Spirit, Prophesied

Zechariah's Prophecy is a Hymn.

Niceta of Remesiana: That which was spiritual in the Old Testament, for example, faith, piety, prayer, fasting, patience, chastity and psalm singing—all this has been increased in the New Testament rather than diminished. Therefore you will find in the Gospel Zechariah, the father of John, who uttered a prophecy in the form of a hymn after his long silence. Liturgical Singing 9.

The Holy Spirit Opens John's Ears.

Ambrose: Some might consider it ridiculous that [Zechariah] spoke to an eight-day-old infant. But if we hold the truth, we will understand that the child who heard the salutation of Mary before his birth could hear the voice of his father. The prophet knew that a prophet has other ears that are opened by the Spirit of God despite bodily age. He who had the disposition to rejoice had the perception of understanding. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 2.34.

1:68–70 God's Visitation and Redemption as Foretold

The Horn is for Power and Royalty.

Jerome: The sound of the horn represents the man of God in all his sovereignty. In Scripture, the horn properly signifies kingship and power, just as it is written: "He has raised up a horn of salvation for us." Homilies on the Psalms 25.

Redemption Through David's Seed.

Origen: Over the course of three months Zechariah kept receiving spiritual nourishment from the Holy Spirit. Although he did not realize it, he was being instructed. Then he prophesied about Christ and said, "He redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David," because Christ was "descended from David according to the flesh." He was truly "a horn of salvation in the house of David," since the following passage reinforces it: "For a vineyard was planted on the horn-shaped ridge." Which horn was it planted on? On Christ Jesus, of whom Scripture now says, "He raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old." Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 10.2.

1:71–75 Remembering God’s Covenant of Deliverance and Mercy

Christ is Mercy and Justice.

Cyril of Alexandria: Christ is mercy and justice. We have obtained mercy through him and been justified, having washed away the stains of wickedness through faith that is in him. Commentary on Luke.

God’s Oath Demonstrates Certainty.

Cyril of Alexandria: No one should swear just because God swore to Abraham. For just as God’s anger is not anger, nor does anger imply passion but signifies power exercised in punishment or some similar motion. So neither is an oath an act of swearing. For God does not swear but indicates the certainty of the event—so that which he says will necessarily come to pass. For God’s oath is his own word, fully persuading those that hear and giving each one the conviction that what he has promised and said will certainly come to pass. Commentary on Luke.

Deliverance in Heaven and on Earth.

Origen: “Deliverance from our enemies.” We should not think that this means corporeal enemies, but rather spiritual ones. For the Lord Jesus came, “mighty in battle,” to destroy all our enemies and free us from their snares, namely, from the hand of all our enemies “and from the hand of all who hate us.” “To bring about mercy for our fathers.” I believe that, when our Lord came, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were blessed with God’s mercy. Previously they had seen his day and rejoiced. It is not believable that they did not profit from the later, when he came and was born of a virgin. And why do I speak of the patriarchs? I will boldly follow the authority of the Scriptures to higher planes, for the presence of the Lord Jesus and his work benefited not only what is earthly but also what is heavenly. Therefore the apostle too says, “Making peace by the blood of his cross, whether on earth or in heaven.” But if the Lord’s presence was beneficial in heaven and on earth, why do you hesitate to say that his coming also benefited our ancestors? What Scripture said is fulfilled, “To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham,” to grant us deliverance “without fear from the hand of our enemies.” Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 10.3.

1:76–77 John to Prepare the Way of the Lord

Zechariah Teaches John as an Infant.

Origen: So John heard Jesus while he was still in his mother's womb, and he leaped up and rejoiced when he heard him. Why might you not believe that John could understand his father's prophecy once he was born, as Zechariah said to him: "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways." So I suppose that Zechariah hastily spoke to the infant because he knew John would soon be living in the desert, and therefore he would no longer enjoy John's presence. "For the boy was in the wilderness up to the day of his revelation to Israel."

Moses also lived in the desert. After turning forty years old, he fled from Egypt and pastured Jethro's herds for another forty years. But John went out to the wilderness as soon as he was born. Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 10.6–7.

Prophet of the Highest Comes from God.

Cyril of Alexandria: Know that Christ is the Most High.... What do those who neglect his divinity have to say? And why will they not understand that when Zechariah said "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, he meant "of God," of whom the rest of the prophets also belonged. Commentary on Luke.

1:78–79 The Visitation of Peace on Those in Darkness

John as the Lamp Preceding Christ.

Cyril of Alexandria: For those under the law and dwelling in Judea, John the Baptist was a lamp preceding Christ. God also spoke of him in a similar way: "I have prepared a lamp for my anointed." And the law also typified him in the lamp. In the first tabernacle it was necessary for the lamp to always remain lit. But the Jews, after being pleased with him for a short time, flocking to his baptism and admiring his mode of life, quickly made him sleep in death, doing their best to extinguish the ever-burning lamp. Therefore the Savior also spoke of him as "a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light." Commentary on Luke.

The Dayspring is the Son of the Most High.

Gregory of Nazianzus: What greater destiny can befall man's humility than that he should be intermingled with God, and by this intermingling should be deified, and that we should be so visited by the "dayspring from on high"? Further, that even the holy thing that should be born should be called the Son of the Most High and that he should be given "a name that is above every name"? And what else can this be but God? That every knee should bow to him that was made of no reputation for us, that mingled the form of God with the form of a servant, and that all the house of Israel should know that God has made him both Lord and Christ? For all this was done by the action of the begotten One, and by the good pleasure of him that begot him. Oration 30.3, On the Son.

Christ Brings Peace.

Cyril of Alexandria: For the world was wandering in error, serving the creation in the place of the Creator and was darkened over by the blackness of ignorance. Night, as it were, that had fallen upon the minds of all, permitted them not to see him, who is truly and by nature God. But the Lord of all rose for the Israelites, like a light and a sun. Commentary on Luke.

1:80 John Grows Strong in Spirit

How John Became Strong in the Spirit.

Origen: John, while still a little boy, grew and became stronger. But it is exceedingly difficult, and very rare among mortals, for one who is still a little child to grow in spirit. "But the boy grew and was strengthened in spirit." It is one thing to "grow," another to "be strengthened." Human nature is weak. It needs divine help to become stronger. We read, "The flesh is weak." What forces can strengthen it? The Spirit, of course, "for the spirit is quick to respond, but the flesh is weak." Someone who wants to become stronger should be strengthened only in spirit. Many are strengthened in the flesh, and their bodies become more powerful, but an athlete of God should become more powerful in spirit. Thus strengthened, he will crush the wisdom of the flesh. Spiritual activity will subject the body to the soul's command. We should not think that, when Scripture says, "he grew and was strengthened in spirit," what was written about John was just a narrative that does not pertain to us in any way. It is written for our imitation. We should take "growth" in the sense we have explained and be multiplied spiritually. Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 11.3.