A New Life of John the Baptist (Mingana translation)

Syriac and Arabic apocrypha (anonymous) (medieval, from Syriac and Garshuni manuscripts)

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Prefatory Note and Translation

I give in the following pages the text and the translation (accompanied by a critical apparatus) of an unknown life of John the Baptist. I have edited the text from two MSS. of my own collection, numbered Mingana Syr. 22 and Mingana Syr. 183, in the custody of the Rendel Harris Library, Birmingham. (Hereafter M. 22 and M. 183). In spite of a thorough search I have failed to discover the existence of a third MS. in the public libraries of Europe the catalogues of which are at my disposal. The MSS. exhibit short lacunæ, but fortunately these lacunæ do not affect identical passages, and by collating the two I was able to establish a complete, continuous, and unbroken text. M. 22 is also in many places in a bad state of preservation, and some words and occasionally whole lines have disappeared from it, apart from the lacuna of one leaf referred to in the present edition. This deficiency has, however, been supplied from M. 183 and the words that are missing in the former MS. are inserted between parentheses and marked (a a). M. 22 is dated 1838 of the Greeks (A.D. 1527) and M. 183 has no colophon, but on palæographical grounds it may be ascribed to about A.D. 1750. In spite of some important variants, there is reason to believe that both MSS. represent a single recension of the story, although M. 22 may be supposed to have been written for the use of Egyptian Christians and M. 183 for that of Syrian Christians.

If we are to believe the contents of the story, it was written by Serapion, bishop of a town in Egypt, during the Patriarchate of Theophilus who governed the sea of Alexandria in 385-412. But from the mention of Theodosius the Great in connection with some events of the narrative, it may be affirmed with a good deal of probability that Serapion was writing in one of the years falling within A.D. 385-395. If the story is a translation from Greek, as in many passages it appears to be, the translator must have used his proper names such as 'Ain Kārim, Assuan and Homs in the form in which they were known in his day. Without entering into minute details, I may state, however, that the text seems to contain sentences that have been interpolated by authors or copyists who might have lived at a date much later than that of Serapion. Some notes that I have ventured to add to the narrative will, I hope, help the reader to form his own opinion on the value of the story in the domain of history, exegesis, and Apocryphal literature.

In the edition I placed in the main body of the page the text of M. 22 and in the footnotes the various readings exhibited by M. 183, but in the translation I followed the text of either

of the two MSS. that appeared to me to be more genuine and archaic. I have transcribed the text in Garshūni (Arabic in Syriac characters) as it is found in the MSS., and given a facsimile of each MS. to show the reader its palæographic peculiarities. The Arabic style used in the story is in correctness and excellency of diction about equal to that used in the "Apocryphal Jeremiah" published above.

Translation.

With the assistance of God and His divine guidance we begin to write the life of the holy Man John the Baptist, son of Zacharias: may his intercession be with us. Amen! There was an aged priest-Levite from the tribe of Judah, whose name was Zacharias. He was a prophet who rose among the children of Israel in the days of Herod, King of Judaea. He had a God-loving wife, called Elizabeth, and she was from the daughters of Aaron, from the tribe of Levi. She was barren and had no children, and she and her husband were advanced in years. They were both righteous and pious people, guiding their steps by all the commandments and ordinances of God. And Zacharias was officiating constantly in the Temple of the Lord. When it fell to him, during the turn of his division, to burn incense to the Lord, he entered the Temple according to his habit, at the time of the burning of the incense, and the angel of the Lord appeared to him immediately, standing on the right of the altar. When Zacharias saw him he was frightened and startled. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, but rather rejoice, O Zacharias! God has heard your prayer, and your wife Elizabeth shall conceive and bear you a son, who shall be called John; you shall have joy and delight, and many shall rejoice over his birth. He shall be great before the Lord, and he shall not drink any wine or strong drink, and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in the womb of his mother, and shall reconcile many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He shall go before Him in the spirit and with the power of Elijah, in order to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him."

Zacharias was astonished at these words, and doubt overtook him, because no child had been born to him. He did not remember Abraham, the head of the Patriarchs, to whom God gave Isaac, after he had reached the age of a hundred years, nor his wife Sarah who was also barren like his own wife. Zacharias said, therefore, to the angel: "How can this happen to me while I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years?" And the angel answered and said to him: "I am the angel Gabriel. I have been sent to speak to you and bring you this news. And from now you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when this takes place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in due course." And he disappeared from his sight. Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zacharias wondering at his remaining so long in the Temple. When he came out he was unable to speak to the people, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the Temple, and he kept making signs to them. And as soon as his term of service was finished, he returned home. And Elizabeth got information of the affair (from God).

In those days Elizabeth conceived, and lived in seclusion till the fifth month, because she felt somewhat ashamed. She feared to appear in her old age while pregnant and milk dripping

from her breasts. She lived in a secluded room of her own house, and Zacharias also lived likewise. Between them stood a locked door, and they did not speak at all to anyone in all those days. When she reached her sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, from the house of David; and the name of the virgin was Mary. When the angel came into her presence he said to her: "Rejoice, O Mary, because you have been favoured with a grace from God. You shall be with child and shall give birth to a son, who shall be called Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called 'Son of the Most High.'" And Mary said to the angel: "How can this happen to me while I have not known any man?" And the angel said to her: "The Holy Spirit shall descend upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you, because the child that is born of you is holy and shall be called 'Son of God,' and lo Elizabeth who is related to you is also expecting a child in her old age, and it is now the sixth month with her who is called barren, because with God there is nothing impossible." And she had no doubt on the matter but said to the head of the angels: "I am the servant of the Lord, let it be with me as you have said." He then greeted her and disappeared.

Mary was astonished at the fact that Elizabeth was expecting a child, and kept saying in her heart: "Thy acts are wonderful and great, O God Omnipotent, because Thou hast given descendants to an old and barren woman. I shall not cease walking until I have met her and beheld the wonderful miracle which God has performed in our times: a virgin giving birth to a child, and a barren woman suckling." In those days she rose up in haste and went into the hill-country, to the town of Judah, and she entered the house of Zacharias, and the fact that both of them may be referred to the end of the fifth month. The particle ila "till" may designate either the beginning or the end of a specified time. M. 22 takes this "till" to imply all (or the end of) the fifth month, and M. 183 uses the same "till" to mean only the beginning of the sixth month, or in other words the end of the fifth.

1 Syr. Kaitona. 2 Presumably Elizabeth. 3 Presumably Mary herself. greeted Elizabeth. The latter went to her with great joy and delight, and greeted her, saying: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb." The holy and pious virgin embraced then the true turtle-dove, and the Word baptised John while still in the womb of his mother. And David appeared in the middle and said: "Mercy and truth have met together, and righteousness and peace have kissed each other." And immediately after John moved in the womb, as if wishing to come out and greet his master. After they had finished their mutual greetings, the Virgin stayed with Elizabeth three months, until the latter's time was near, and then returned to her home. When the holy Elizabeth gave birth (to her son) there was a great joy and delight in her house, and after eight days they went to circumcise him, and wished to call him Zacharias. His mother, however, said: "No, call him John." And they said to her: "You have no relation of that name." And she said to them: "Ask his father about his name." And he asked for a writing-tablet and wrote thus: "His name is John." When he had written this he recovered the use of his tongue forthwith, and he glorified God who had granted him this great mercy, and uttered prophecies concerning his son John the Baptist, and was cognisant of the gift that he had received from God.

John grew up in a beautiful childhood and sucked his mother two years. The grace of God was on his face, and he grew up fortified by the Spirit. When Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, behold magians came from the East saying: "Where is he that is born, the King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East and are come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard these words he was troubled by what he had heard from the magians that (that child) was the King of the Jews, and he immediately desired to kill him. Then the angel of the Lord appeared forthwith to Joseph and said to him: "Arise and take the child and his mother and flee into the land of Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word."

Then Herod sought the Master in order to destroy Him, but he did not find Him, and he began to kill all the children of Bethlehem. And Elizabeth feared that her son John might be killed like them, and she took him immediately to Zacharias in the Temple, and she said to him: "My lord, let us go with our son John to some other countries, in order to save him from Herod the unbeliever, who is murdering children because of Jesus the Christ. Mary and Joseph have already gone to the land of Egypt. Get up quickly that they may not kill our son, and change our joy into grief." And Zacharias answered and said to her: "I must not leave the service of the Temple of the Lord and go to a foreign land the inhabitants of which worship idols." And she said to him: "What should I do in order to save my infant child?" And the old man answered and said to her: "Arise and go to the wilderness of 'Ain Kārim, and by the will of God you will be able to save your son. If they seek after him, they will shed my blood instead of his."

How great was the amount of grief that occurred at that time when they separated from each other! The holy Zacharias took the child to his bosom, blessed him, kissed him and said: "Woe is me, O my son John, O glory of my old age! They have impeded me from having any access to your face which is full of grace." He then took him and went into the Temple, and blessed him, saying: "May God protect you in your journey!" Immediately after Gabriel, the head of the angels, came down to him from heaven holding a raiment and a leathern girdle, and said to him: "O Zacharias, take these and put them on your son. God sent them to him from heaven. This raiment is that of Elijah, and this girdle that of Elisha." And the holy Zacharias took them from the angel, prayed over them and gave them to his son, and fastened on him the raiment which was of camel's hair with the leathern girdle. He then brought him back to his mother and said to her: "Take him and bring him into the desert, because the hand of the Lord is with him. I have learnt from God that he will stay in the desert till the day of his showing unto Israel."

The blessed Elizabeth took the child while weeping and Zacharias also was weeping, and the latter said: "I know that I shall not see you again in the flesh. Go in peace. May God guide you." Elizabeth walked then away with her son, and went into the wilderness of 'Ain Kārim, and stayed there with him. It happened that when King Herod sent troops to Jerusalem to kill its children, they came and began to kill children till the evening. That day was the seventh of September. When they began to return to their king, behold, Satan came to them

and said: ”How did you leave the son of Zacharias without killing him? He is hidden with his father in the Temple. Do not spare him but kill him in order that the king may not wax angry with you. Go for him, and if you do not find the son, kill the father in his place.”

The troops did what Satan taught them, and went to the Temple early in the morning, and found Zacharias standing and serving the Lord, and they said to him: ”Where is thy son whom thou hast hidden from us here?” And he answered them: ”I have no child here.” They said to him: ”You have a child whom you have hidden from the king.” And he answered and said: ”O cruel ones whose king drinks blood like a lioness, how long will you shed the blood of innocent people?” They said to him: ”Bring out your child so that we may kill him; if not, we shall kill you in his place.” And the prophet answered and said: ”As to my son, he has gone with his mother to the wilderness, and I do not know his whereabouts.” Now when Zacharias has said goodbye to Elizabeth and his son John, he had blessed him and made him a priest, and afterwards delivered him to his mother, who said to him: ”Pray over me O my holy father, so that God may render my path in the wilderness easy.” And he said to her : ”May He who made us beget our child in our old age, direct your path.” Then she took the child and went into the wilderness in which no soul lived.

”O blessed Elizabeth, your story is truly wonderful and praiseworthy. You did not ask for an adult to accompany you, and you knew neither the way nor a hiding place. You did not care to provide food nor a little drinking water for the child. You did not say to his father Zacharias : ’To whom are you sending me in the wilderness?’ At that time there was neither a monastery in the desert nor a congregation of monks so that you may say : ’I shall go and stay with them with my son.’ Tell me, O blessed Elizabeth : whom did you trust, inasmuch as the evangelist testifies to the fact that you were advanced in years without having had any child, and now you have been suckling this child of yours for three years?” Listen now to the answer of the blessed Elizabeth :

”Why are you astonished at me that I am going alone into the wilderness? What should I fear while a kinsman of God is in my arms? Behold Gabriel is accompanying me and paving the way for me.” And she said : ”I have confidence in the kiss that Mary, His mother, gave me, because when I greeted her the babe leaped with joy in my womb, and I heard both babes embracing each other in our wombs.” And Elizabeth added : ”I went and put on my son a raiment of camel’s hair and a leathern girdle in order that the mountain of the holy wilderness may (in future) be inhabited, and in order that monasteries and congregations of monks may increase in it and that sacrifice may be offered in it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. If God assisted Hagar and her son when they wandered in the desert, and they were only slaves, how will He not apply to us the precedent that He has himself established beforehand?”

In the above words we have described to you the merits of the holy Elizabeth. Let us now proceed and commemorate the holy Zacharias, the martyr, and relate to you a few of his numerous merits: ”I should wish to praise your true life, but I fear to hear a reproof from you, similar to that you made to the blessed Elizabeth. I am full of admiration for you, O

pious Zacharias! In the time when the soldiers of Herod came to you and asked you saying: Where is your infant son, the child of your old age?"—You did not deny the fact and say: "I have no knowledge of such a child," but you simply answered: "His mother took him into the desert." And when Zacharias uttered these words to the soldiers concerning his son, they killed him inside the Temple, and the priests shrouded his body and placed it near that of his father Berechiah in a hidden cemetery, from fear of the wicked (king); and his blood boiled on the earth for fifty years, until Titus son of Vespasian, the Emperor of the Romans, came and destroyed Jerusalem and killed the Jewish priests for the blood of Zacharias, as the Lord ordered him.

As to the blessed John he wandered in the desert with his mother, and God prepared for him locusts and wild honey as food, in accordance with what his mother was told about him not to let any unclean food enter his mouth. After five years the pious and blessed old mother Elizabeth passed away, and the holy John sat weeping over her, as he did not know how to shroud her and bury her, because on the day of her death he was only seven years and six months old. And Herod also died the same day as the blessed Elizabeth. The Lord Jesus Christ who with His eyes sees heaven and earth saw His kinsman John sitting and weeping near his mother, and He also began to weep for a long time, without anyone knowing the cause of His weeping. When the mother of Jesus saw Him weeping, she said to Him: "Whay are you weeping? Did the old man Joseph or any other one chide you?" And the mouth that was full of life answered: "No, O my mother, the real reason is that your kinswoman, the old Elizabeth, has left my beloved John an orphan. He is now weeping over her body which is lying in the mountain."

When the Virgin heard this she began to weep over her kinswoman, and Jesus said to her: "Do not weep, O my virgin mother, you will see her in this very hour." And while he was still speaking with his mother, behold a luminous cloud came down and placed itself between them. And Jesus said: "Call Salome and let us take her with us." And they mounted the cloud which flew with them to the wilderness of 'Ain Kārim and to the spot where lay the body of the blessed Elizabeth, and where the holy John was sitting.

The Saviour said then to the cloud: "Leave us here at this side of the spot." And it immediately went, reached that spot, and departed. Its noise, however, reached the ears of Mar John, who, seized with fear, left the body of his mother. A voice reached him immediately and said to him: "Do not be afraid, O John. I am Jesus Christ, your master. I am your kinsman Jesus, and I came to you with my beloved mother in order to attend to the business of the burial of the blessed Elizabeth, your happy mother, because she is my mother's kinswoman." When the blessed and holy John heard this, he turned back, and Christ the Lord and His virgin mother embraced him. Then the Saviour said to His virgin mother: "Arise, you and Salome, and wash the body." And they washed the body of the blessed Elizabeth in the spring from which she used to draw water for herself and her son. Then the holy virgin Mart Mary got hold of the blessed (John) and wept over him, and cursed Herod on account of the numerous crimes which he had committed. Then Michael and Gabriel

came down from heaven and dug a grave; and the Saviour said to them: "Go and bring the soul of Zacharias, and the soul of the priest Simeon, in order that they may sing while you bury the body." And Michael brought immediately the souls of Zacharias and Simeon, who shrouded the body of Elizabeth and sang for a long time over it.

And the mother of Jesus and Salome wept, and the two priests made the sign of the cross on the body and prayed over it three times before they laid it to rest in the grave; then they buried it, and sealed the grave with the sign of the cross, and went back to their own places in peace. And Jesus Christ and His mother stayed near the blessed and the holy John seven days, and condoled with him at the death of his mother, and taught him how to live in the desert. And the day of the death of the blessed Elizabeth was the 15th of February. Then Jesus Christ said to His mother; "Let us now go to the place where I may proceed with my work." The Virgin Mary wept immediately over the loneliness of John, who was very young and said: "We will take him with us, since he is an orphan without anyone." But Jesus said to her: "This is not the will of My Father who is in the heavens. He shall remain in the wilderness till the day of his showing unto Israel. Instead of a desert full of wild beasts, he will walk in a desert full of angels and prophets, as if they were multitudes of people. Here is also Gabriel, the head of the angels, whom I have appointed to protect him and to grant to him power from heaven. Further, I shall render the water of this spring of water as sweet and delicious to him as the milk he sucked from his mother. Who took care of him in his childhood? Is it not I, O my mother, who love him more than all the world? Zacharias also loved him, and I have ordered him to come to him and inquire after him, because although his body is buried in the earth, his soul is alive.

"As to Elizabeth his mother, she will constantly visit him and comfort him, as if she was not dead at all. Blessed is she, O my mother, because she bore my beloved. Her mouth will never suffer putrefaction, because she kissed your pure lips; and her tongue will not be dismembered in the earth, because she prophesied concerning you and said: Happy is she who believed that the promise that she received from the Lord would be fulfilled"; nor will her womb decay in the earth, because her body, like her soul, shall suffer no putrefaction. And my beloved John will last for ever, and he will see us and be comforted." These words the Christ our Lord spoke to his mother, while John was in the desert. And they mounted the cloud, and John looked at them and wept, and Mart Mary wept also bitterly over him, saying : "Woe is me, O John, because you are alone in the desert without anyone. Where is Zacharias, your father, and where is Elizabeth, your mother? Let them come and weep with me to-day."

And Jesus Christ said to her : "Do not weep over this child, O my mother. I shall not forget him." And while he was uttering these word, behold the clouds lifted them up and brought them to Nazareth. And He fulfilled there everything pertaining to humanity except sin. And John dwelt in the desert, and God and His angels were with him. He lived in great asceticism and devotion. His only food was grass and wild honey. He prayed constantly, fasted much and was in expectation of the salvation of Israel. And Herod the Younger who

reigned over Judea, lived with his brother's wife, in the second year of his reign. He did not marry her openly, but he used to find an opportune moment to send after her and usher her in his bedchamber which was full of corruption, and there perpetrate their abomination. At that time Gabriel, head of the angels, taught John in the desert to say : "O King, you have no right to live with the wife of your brother, while he is still alive." And he repeated this, crying in the desert, as the angel had taught him. In the night people could hear his voice, and Herodias used to light a lamp and search the bedchamber, believing that somebody may have intruded into it, but found nobody, and only heard the voice.

The two began then to have misgivings on account of this happening, and Herodias said to Herod: "Arise and despatch troops to the desert of 'Ain Kārim, in order that they may kill John, because the voice we hear is his." God, however, was with the lad, and delivered him from their hands. When she ascertained that through him there would be no peace for her in her (iniquitous) act, she persuaded the wicked king who gave her the following promise: "If we happen to hear this voice again, we shall summon the magicians and inform them to take hold of John and kill him secretly." And the voice did not cease to worry them. And the wicked Herodias said: "How can this John, a wanderer in the desert and in the wilderness, a man whose body is not fit to wear the clothing of men, but a raiment of camel's hair, rebuke the king of his own country, whose authority extends to his own region?" Then Herodias said to the king: "What pleases you to do, do it openly, and do not believe that anyone in this region will blame you for it, except John, and when opportunity offers itself we shall get rid of him." It is in this way that the adulteress set the heart of Herod on their sin, and persuaded him to deliver his brother to death, and to marry her openly.

And John did not cease to rebuke Herod every day in the desert until he was thirty years old. As to Jesus, He increased in wisdom, stature, and grace with God and men, and did not show any deeds of His Divinity, but acted with humility towards all men. And when He was twelve years old, He began to rebuke the Teachers and deceivers of the people. And in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, who reigned after Augustus, when Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and when Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, in that year the word of God came unto John, son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. He came into the countries that surround the Jordan preaching and saying: "Repent ye for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." And people from all the region of Judæa and Jerusalem went out to him and were baptised by him in the Jordan confessing their sins.

In those days the Saviour came to him from Galilee to the Jordan and said to him: "Baptize me." When John saw God standing before him and wishing to be baptized by him, he was seized with great fright and said to him : "He who made the children of Israel walk in the Red Sea and drink sweet water from a solid rock, stands before His servant who is in need to be baptized with His Divine hands, and says 'Baptize me'! And he began to turn away from Him. But (Jesus) said to him : Stop now ; it is thus that we must fulfil all righteousness." Then both of them went down into the water, and the holy John baptized Him, saying : "I baptize the One Whom the Father has sent to establish a great sacrament."

And immediately after the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, like a dove. And John saw it face to face, and the Father cried saying : "This is my beloved Son in whom I delight, obey Him." And our Saviour came out of the water and went forthwith into the desert. As to John, he remained near the Jordan, baptizing all those who came to him.

In that time Herod rose against Philip his brother and intrigued against him with the Emperor Cæsar, saying : "The one whom you have appointed to be the ruler of Trachonitis, who is Philip, has misgoverned your region, and said : I shall not pay tribute to the king because I am also a king." Cæsar waxed greatly angry and ordered Herod to dispossess him of his region and to confiscate all his estate and his house, and not to have any pity, not even on his soul. Herod acted on the orders of the Emperor and plundered the region of his brother Philip with his house and all his possessions, and reigned over his region. And Philip had a wife called Herodias, who had a daughter by the same Philip, called Arcostiana. The mother was even more adulteress than the daughter. When Philip became poorer than anybody else, Herodias hated him greatly, and said to him : "I shall not remain with you any more, but shall go to your new lord Herod who is better than you." Then she wrote immediately to Herod saying : "Herodias writes to Herod as follows : 'Now that you have all Syria under your sway and you reign over all the earth, you have not taken me as your wife. I am very beautiful and better than all the women of Judæa. I have also a daughter the like of whom I have never seen in all the world for beauty and stature. I wish to be your wife. I hated your brother very much in order to strengthen your kingdom.'"

When these cunning words reached the wicked (king), he was pleased with them, and he immediately gave orders that she and her daughter be taken out of the house of Philip. When Philip saw that his wife was being taken from him by force, he wept bitterly and said to his daughter: "You stay with your father in case your mother is taken from me." But the adulteress said to him: "I shall not stay with you, but shall accompany my mother wherever she goes." They were, therefore, taken both of them and presented to Herod, who was greatly pleased with them, because he was an adulterer. They performed marvels of diabolical cunning, and the wicked king lived daily with both of them in adultery. Some people, however, brought their story to the knowledge of John the Baptist on behalf of Philip, Herodias' husband. Now John was considered by all as a prophet, and everybody praised him because he was teaching the people and saying: "Bring forth fruits meet for repentance, because every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."

When John heard the news from Philip he was much afflicted at the perdition of Herod and Herodias, and he immediately sent a message to Herod and said to him: "John the Baptist, son of Zacharias, tells you, O Herod, that you have no right to marry the wife of your brother, while he is still alive." When Herod heard these words he was much frightened and perplexed, and he went to Herodias and said to her: "O Herodias, what shall we do? It is the end of our sinful union as it has been brought to the knowledge of John the Baptist, and behold he has rebuked me. Woe to us, because our sins have increased greatly and reached the ears of the prophets." The wicked woman said then to him: "Long live you, O

king! Who is John, the wearer of camel's hair, to contradict and rebuke a mighty monarch like you? He surely deserves that somebody should pull out and cut off his tongue." And he said to her: "What can we do? We cannot bear the rebuke of that great (prophet)." And she answered and said to him: "Summon him here and I will kill him, and we shall continue our mutual relations in peace." And she performed before him obscene acts and immoral artifices, and Satan filled his heart against the holy and just man Mar John the Baptist, and he dispatched soldiers against him, who seized him and cast him in prison.

Then Herodias summoned him out of prison to her presence and said to him: "What is your business with me, O chaste man, that you wish to separate me from the king? I conjure you by the God of your father not to do this with me again. To tell you the truth, if you are silent concerning me and do not rebuke me another time, I shall deliver you from prison and bestow great favours upon you." And the holy Mar John the Baptist said to her: "I say to you, O Herodias, not to live with Herod while your husband Philip is alive." When the wicked woman heard this, she was incensed with anger against him and said to him: "You will surely die at my hands, and I shall put the hair of your head in the pillow on which I lay my head with Herod, and I shall bury your head in the place where I wash after having enjoyed myself with the king." John then said to her: "The Lord will allow you to kill me but my head you will not see. It will remain after me, and proclaim your iniquity and shame to all the world. Woe to you for my unjust murder, because your end is at hand."

She then said to his keepers: "Take him and keep him in prison with fetters, and if he escapes, you shall lose your souls." And the soldiers took him and kept him in prison with chains. And Herodias tried to induce Herod to kill him, but he said to her: "I cannot kill him in this way. People will rise against me, drive me out, and bring accusation against me to the Emperor, who will take my kingdom from me as he took that of my brother Philip." And he said to her: "Show me a better method of doing away with him." And she said to him: "I will tell you a word, and if you listen to it, you will have an opportunity of killing him." And he said to her: "Tell it to me." And she said to him: "Behold the envoys of the king are with you, arise and prepare a dinner for them, to which you will invite all your high officials; and your birthday falls also in these days. When people become hilarious and begin to get drunk with wine, I shall send in my daughter dressed in her best clothes, and she will dance before you, O king, with her sweet face. When she has done this ask her, saying, 'Desire of me whatever you like,' and you will swear to her by the life of the Emperor that you will give her whatever she wishes. She will then ask for the head of John, and you will have an opportune moment to cut off his head."

Herod was circumvented by the reasoning of the adulteress, and began to fulfil her desires, as he loved her because of her beauty and diabolical artifices. In that very day he prepared the dinner, and the messengers of the Emperor were sitting next to him. When they began to get drunk the accursed Uxoriana entered the room, and on her were strings of gold and silver, perfumes and jewellery of high value, and presented herself to all the company. She danced with a diabolical passion, and Satan filled the hearts of the guests with evil and

passion through her iniquitous artfulness. All were pleased with her, and Herod was proud and said to her: "Ask me for whatever you like, and by the life of the Emperor Tiberius Cæsar, I will give it to you, even if it be the half of my kingdom and my possessions." And she said what she was taught by her mother: "I wish here to have the head of John the Baptist, on a dish." The king began to be very sad, on account of the oath he had taken by the life of the Emperor, and he owned to the guests that he was unable to break his oath.

He therefore dispatched an executioner, who went to the prison and there cut off John's head on a dish, on the second of the month of September, and he brought it to Herod, who handed it to the girl, and the girl handed it to her mother. Now, before the messengers of the king and the executioner had gone to him, to behead him, John had said to his disciples: "Behold the king has sent men to cut off my head. They have already left with unsheathed swords in their hands, and with lanterns, lamps, and weapons. What is happening in this hour will happen in the night in which Christ will be betrayed. As to me, my head will be cut off and be shown on a dish, but the Christ will be lifted up on the cross, in order that He may purify all with His pure blood; as to me I am going to my place, but woe to the king who ordered my head to be cut off; many calamities will befall him, and the people of Israel will be scattered because of him. As to you, do not be afraid, because no one will be able to do you any harm." He then opened his mouth and blessed and glorified God for his incomprehensible gifts, saying: "I bless Thee and praise Thee, O invisible Father, O visible Son, and O comforting Holy Spirit."

Let us now proceed to describe the story of the head of the blessed Mar John the Baptist. When it was brought before Herodias, the eyes of the holy John were open and his ears were hearing as in his lifetime. The adulteress spoke then with ire before the head as follows: "O accursed one, who were not ashamed to look at the king in the face and answer him, I shall put out your eyes with my hands and place them on a dish, and I shall cut off the tongue which used to say to the king that it was unlawful for him to marry Herodias, his brother's wife. As to the hair of your head and of your beard I shall pluck it and place it under the feet of my bedstead."

She said all this with malice and wickedness, and she stretched her hand to hold the head of Mar John the Baptist and do with it what she had said. But immediately after the head of the blessed John let the locks of its hair rise from the dish, and it flew to the middle of the convivial room before the king and his high officials. In that very moment the roof of the house was opened and the head of John flew in the air. As to Herodias her eyes were put out and fell on the floor and the roof of her room fell upon her, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed her up to her neck, and she went alive to the depth of hell. As to her daughter she became mad and broke all the utensils of the dinner party. In her madness she went to the icy pond and danced on it, and by order of the Lord the ice broke under her and she sank to her neck. In vain did the soldiers endeavour to pull her up, because the Lord did not wish her deliverance. Then they cut off her head with the very sword that was

used to kill John the Baptist. Then a fish cast her out of the pond, dead. May God not have mercy upon her!

In that moment Herod also had a sudden stroke before his guests. When his agent noticed these great miracles, he repaired quickly to the prison, took the body of the saint and gave it to his disciples, who took it to the town of Sebaste where they buried it, near the body of the prophet Elisha. As to his head, it flew over Jerusalem, and cried for three years to the town, saying: "It is not lawful for you, O Herod, to marry the wife of your brother while he is still alive." After it had cried for three years, it went to all the world shouting and proclaiming the horrible crime of Herod, and repeating the words: "It is not lawful for you, O Herod, to marry the wife of your brother while he is still alive." Fifteen years after it had been cut off it ceased proclaiming, and rested on the town of Homs. The faithful who were in that town took it and buried it with great pomp. A long time after, a church was built on it, which is still standing in our time. And the head of the holy John the Baptist was buried there fifteen years after the resurrection of Christ, the Lord, and it remained there down to our own days.

As to the body of the holy John the Baptist, the saint whose feast we are celebrating today, it remained in Sebaste—which is Nabulus of Samaria—for four hundred years. Then a pagan king, whose name was Julian, reigned over the world. He had been a Christian at the beginning of his reign, but after that Satan filled his heart and he forsook the faith of our Lord the Christ and worshipped fire. He ordered temples and places of worship to be built in every place where idols could be worshipped, and intimated that such a temple should be erected in the town of Sebaste where lay the body of the holy Baptist. People, however, were unable to comply with the order and to worship idols in that place, on account of the (holy) bodies that were buried there.

They, therefore, assembled and informed the Emperor that as bodies of holy men were buried there, they had been delayed in their building of the temples. Then he said to them: "Go and burn (the bodies) with fire." The Lord, however, did not allow the fire to come near the place where lay the coffins of the prophets, but the same fire consumed a great number of the pagans who had kindled it, and great treasures were brought to light there. Above one of the coffins was seen a vessel containing a leathern girdle, a raiment of camel's hair, a frock, and two leathern belts. The faithful who were in that place understood immediately that the coffins belonged to John the Baptist and to the prophet Elisha, and they wished to remove them from there, but from fear of the wicked Emperor they were not able to do so. When, however, God destroyed him with a death more wretched than that of any other, pious men assembled there and carried the two coffins to the sea with the intention of bringing them to Alexandria, to the holy Father, the Patriarch Athanasius, because they said: "There is in these days no one in the world worthy to take care of these except Father Athanasius, the Patriarch of Alexandria."

When they reached the sea they found a boat bound for Alexandria, and they boarded it with the coffins. They journeyed on the sea and landed on the shores of Alexandria, but as

they were unable to disclose their affair to any one because the time was not convenient for that, they went direct to the Patriarch and related to him all that had occurred, and how they were moved by the Holy Spirit to bring the coffins to him. He was greatly pleased with them and went by night to the boat with his brother, and they took the remains in a kerchief and brought them with them, and (the Patriarch) placed them with him in a place in his dwelling, and he did not disclose their whereabouts to anyone. And this Father wished to build a church to John the Baptist, and he was not able to do so because of the troubles caused by the wicked ones.

The bodies remained therefore hidden in the place in which Father Athanasius had secretly placed them, until the time of his death. After his death he was succeeded by Father Peter, whose throne was occupied after his death by Father Timothy, who ordained my humble self, your Father Serapion, to this see, without merits on my part. After his death, he was succeeded by Father Theophilus who is now sitting on the (Patriarchal) see. In his time the grace of God increased, and the faith was strengthened through the pious Theodosius and God united the Emperor and the Patriarch with ties of love. The former threw open the temples in which were treasures, and especially the great temple of Alexandria, in which there was great quantity of gold and silver. And the pious Theodosius honoured the Patriarch, made him superintendent of all the treasures, and said to him: "O Father Theophilus, take these and enrich the churches with them, from this town to Aswan, for the glory of God and His saints." After this he began to build churches. The first church to be built was one under the name of the holy Mar John the Baptist in the great city of Alexandria. He adorned it and made it a great church and wished to place in it the body of the holy Mar John the Baptist. When he had finished it completely, he thought of consecrating it, and he sent immediately to all the bishops under his jurisdiction to congregate for the consecration of the church.

The invitation was also sent to my weakness, and I went with the rest of the bishops to the Pope, the Father Theophilus of Alexandria. When it came to his knowledge that all the bishops were nearing the city of Alexandria, he was pleased with us, like one who had found much booty. He came out to meet us accompanied by all the (clergy) who were in the city. We entered the city and stayed some days with him. After this he began to consecrate the church, and he took us and showed it to us, and we found in it wonderful buildings, and he said to us: "O my children, this is the place designated for the purpose by Athanasius, whom time did not favour." And Father Theophilus added: "I was walking with them while I was a simple acolyte at that time and serving him. And when he came to this place, he said to me: O my son, Theophilus, if you can find opportunity, build in this place a church to Mar John the Baptist and place his bones in it, and after I had built this place, I remembered the saying of the man of God, the Father Athanasius, especially when I bethought me that my Father was like the prophet David, who wished to build a house to God, but was not favoured with it, on account of wars in which he was continually engaged, and God said to him: Thou shalt not build a house for me, but the one who comes out of thy loins shall build it for me," and this was Solomon. Since I have finished with the wars against the pagans, I

considered myself worthy of building this church which is under the name of the holy Mar John the Baptist, the morning star."

When the second of the month of June came, he took us to the place where the body was placed, and we did not know the right spot, but after praying nocturns God showed it to him. And when he brought it out, he called all the inhabitants of the town and they assembled to him with many lanterns and lamps so that the night shone like day. He let the bishops carry the coffin on their heads and the Patriarch preceded them, and the deacons were singing with majesty and splendour, until we brought the coffin to the church in great pomp. When we entered the church, the Patriarch took hold of the coffin, embraced it, and allowed all the people to be blessed by the holy body, which he placed afterwards inside the church on a chair at a corner of the altar. He then prepared to consecrate the church in that day, and we said mass, and all of us received the sacrament from the Patriarch, and it was the second day of the month Baouna.

After this the Patriarch said goodbye to us, and we left the town, each one of us going to his own country, in the peace of God. Amen. And the body of the holy Mar John the Baptist wrought miracles, prodigies, and wonders of healings in the people of the Lord Jesus Christ. The miracles (which we will mention below) will bear witness to this. Praise, glory, and power are due to you, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who is one in nature, now, always, and for ever and ever. In the name of God, one in nature, and three in persons and attributes, and by the help and assistance of God we will narrate the miracles of the precursor, Saint John the Baptist, which God wrought through him on the day of the consecration of his Church. May his intercession be with us! Amen.

The First Miracle.

There was in the town a girl of a respectable family, the pangs of whose labour had lasted three days without having been delivered of her child, as it was her first babe. The midwives who were present said to her parents: "The babe has died in her womb, and she cannot live." All began to weep over her because she was much loved by them. When men who were carrying the body of Mar John the Baptist to the church reached the house of the girl singing, she asked her parents: "What are these voices?" They answered her: "A Christian was martyred for the name of Jesus Christ, and the Christians are carrying his body and observing a feast for him." Now the girl and her parents were pagans. And she said to them: "Carry me to this window so that I may see the body." And four attendants carried her and brought her to the spot she had desired. When she looked down she saw a great and indescribable pomp, and she cried aloud: "O my Lord Jesus Christ for whose holy name this man has been martyred, deliver me from this calamity of mine, through the intercession of this holy man, in order that all may know that you, Jesus Christ, are the only God." While she was saying these words, the babe who was in her womb came out while she was being carried, and he was found to be alive. People were amazed and cried, saying: "Jesus Christ, the God of this martyr, is the only God." And all of them believed and gave to the infant

the name of John, and were baptised in the Church of Mar John the Baptist, and remained Christian till the day in which they passed away in the peace of the Lord. Amen.

A rich official of the town had a daughter betrothed to a man. A great wedding was prepared for her because she was very rich. On the night in which her husband was to be with her, the holy Mar John, the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, appeared to her in great glory, and she was frightened, but he said to her: "Do you know who I am?" And she answered: "No, my lord." And he said: "I am John the Baptist, the precursor of Christ. When you rise to-morrow go to my church, and take the sign and abundance of your salvation from what you will see on my grave where my body lies." And he disappeared from her sight. And she rose in the night and went and sat near the door of the church till the morning. When the door of the church was opened she made haste and entered and went to the place in which the coffin was buried. She immediately saw on the grave of the holy Mar John the Baptist a garment of sackcloth, a belt of leather, and a veil. When she noticed them she was amazed and said: "This garment is not for a worldly life," and she ascertained that God wanted her to be a virgin. She then threw immediately in the church the garment of gold that she was wearing, and put on that which she saw on the grave, and went out glorifying God and His saint, Mar John the Baptist, and she became a virgin till the day of her death through the intercession of John the Baptist. May this intercession be with us! Amen.

The Third Miracle.
There was in the town a cripple who worshipped idols. Everyone knew him, children and grown ups. When he walked he used to drag his feet on the ground and wrap tightly on them a piece of leather in order that they might not move to and fro. He used to sit every day at the door of the church in order to receive alms from the church-goers. One day he made bold to enter the church, in order to put oil on his feet from the lamp of the martyr Mar John the Baptist. For this purpose he loosened the leather that was wrapped on his feet and oiled them from the oil of the lamp. Immediately after his limbs became strong. When he noticed the miracle he raised himself up and cried, saying: "The God of Mar John the Baptist is the one true God." He then received the baptism and became a Christian till he died in the peace of the Lord. Amen.

The Fourth Miracle.
There was in the town a woman afflicted with dropsy, and her body was swollen all over. She was very rich, but no physician was able to heal her. She rose up and went to the church of the holy Mar John the Baptist and was oiled with the oil of the lamp which burns before the body of the saint, towards the sanctuary; and she slept there. While she was asleep her body was torn open and all the foul matter went out of it, and she awakened from her sleep sound and in good health. And she went home glorifying God—to whom be everlasting glory! Amen.

The Fifth Miracle.
There were two blind men in the town who were friendly to each other and ate jointly from the same alms. They went to the church of the holy Mar John the Baptist and oiled their

eyes with the oil of the lamp that burns over the body of the saint. The eyes of one of them saw but not those of the other. The latter had a heavy heart, stood up and confessed to God, saying: "O my Lord Jesus have pity on the weakness of my faith, and give light to my eyes as Thou gavest to those of my friend, because to Thee belong power, glory, and honour for ever and ever. Amen." He recited this prayer to the Lord on the grave of the blessed saint Mar John the Baptist, and he immediately saw, and he and all the onlookers glorified God. Glory, power, and majesty be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who is consubstantial, One God, now, always, and for ever and ever! Amen.

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