

## Was John the Baptist sinless like Mary?

I facilitate a Bible Study class at our parish. A gentleman said he read in a book that John The Baptist was born without sin like The Blessed Virgin Mary. I asked him to bring the book. My understanding: John The Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his Mother's womb. Mary was conceived without sin. What is the actual understanding and difference?

You've actually explained the distinction quite well.

Mary was conceived without sin and was sinless for the entirety of her life. Like the rest of us, Mary was saved by the grace of Christ. Most of us receive this grace by way of remedy, at our Baptism. Mary was preserved free from sin by way of inoculation, in anticipation of the merits of her Son, the Divine Physician. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception is explained in more detail in [\*Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 490-93.\*](#)

Meanwhile, though it was a miracle that Elizabeth was able to conceive John in her old age, the Church does not believe that he was conceived without original sin. However, as you note, the common belief of the Church is that he was filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb (cf. Lk. 1:44). That doesn't mean that he was conceived without original sin, and it doesn't mean that he never committed any sin.

The Church's liturgy is instructive in this regard. The Church rarely celebrates birthdays, because people are born into the world in a state of alienation from God. Saints' feast days typically fall on or near the date of their deaths, because death was their entrance into eternal life.

However, the Church does celebrate three birthdays. First, there's Christmas (December 25th), celebrated nine months after the solemnity of the Annunciation (March 25th). Second, there's the Birth of Mary (September 8th), celebrated nine months after the solemnity of her Immaculate Conception (December 8th).

The third birthday the Church celebrates is the Birth of John the Baptist, which suggests that when he leaped for joy he was justified in the sight of God such that he emerged from his mother's womb in God's friendship. So the Church not only celebrates John's martyrdom (August 29th), but also his birth (June 24th).

Note, too, the cosmic dimension of all this. John's birth is celebrated exactly six months before Christmas. After John's birth, the days in the northern hemisphere start getting shorter, calling to mind John's famous saying: "He must increase; I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30).