He was naming his son, or he was unable to speak.

While he was born into a priestly family, John did not take his father's name, nor his work.

Luke 1:59-63 (NLT)

⁵⁹ When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. ⁶⁰ But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John!" ⁶¹ "What?" they exclaimed. "There is no one in all your family by that name." ⁶² So they used gestures to ask the baby's father what he wanted to name him. ⁶³ He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John."

