

The Birth of John The Baptist

Luke 1: 5-25; v.36, v.39-80

prepared by Mark Smith

1. *Announcing The Birth of John*

- John's father, Zechariah (*also spelled Zacharias*), was visited by an angel foretelling John's birth.
- Zechariah was selected by a lottery system to burn incense on the altar in the holy place; a special honor received only once in a priest's life time.
- Zechariah, though a godly priest, doubted the angel's message because he and his wife, Elizabeth, were more than 60 years old.¹
- God saw his doubt and made him unable to talk until after the birth.
- The worshippers waiting for Zechariah to come out of the temple were in a prostrate position.² Their growing discomfort would have stirred questions as to why he was staying so long in the temple.
- Many Jerusalem Jews become aware of the angel visit, an extremely rare event, and were stirred with questions.

2. *Awaiting The Birth of John*

- Elizabeth went into seclusion back home until his John's birth. Their home was in the rough hill territory south of Jerusalem. The precise town they lived in cannot be determined.
- John was to be a Nazarite before the Lord (Num.6). He would eat or drink no product of the grape vine, never touch a dead body, and never cut his hair.
- John's parents meditated on the fact that he was going to be a man of great spiritual power - powerful³, preparing, and prophetic. (Lk.1:15-17)
- **Powerful** - he would have spiritual power like Elijah, the famous prophet of old. John was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.
- **Preparing** - he would prepare the hearts of many Jews for the coming Jesus Christ, the Messiah.
- **Prophetic** - John's birth was a sign to the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to a son through the power of God. (Lk.1:36)
- While initially stirring much interest, Zacharias' visit by the angel had little effect on the Jews over the next 9 months. He would have been referred to by the more educated and elite Jewish scholars by a Hebrew word that means "country bumpkin", ignoramus, illiterate, or even idiot.⁴ If God were going to send a message to the Jews, He certainly would give it to the high priest rather than to a country hick.

3. *Aware of The Birth of John*

- Six months into Elizabeth's pregnancy, Mary is visited by the same angel announcing that she would be the mother of Messiah.
- Mary is betrothed to Joseph. Jewish culture had a betrothal time of about one year. It was a recognized legal marriage agreement between the two families. The year period allowed for moral chasteness to be proven plus time for a house to be built. Breaking this agreement required a legal divorce procedure.
- Mary's arrival prompted a fresh re-assurance from God to both Mary and Elizabeth that both their pregnancies were heaven ordained ministries. Elizabeth's baby (John) was already filled (controlled) by the Holy Spirit and he moved in her womb at the arrival of Mary.

- The unique, prenatal movement by John affected Elizabeth so that she also became Spirit filled. The Spirit gave her the ability to recognize both Mary's unique calling plus the caliber of person in Mary's womb.
- Mary stayed until the time of Elizabeth's delivery and then returned to face the scrutiny of Joseph, her parents, and her town. But the Lord had already gone before her to prepare hearts.

4. Arrival of the Birth of John

- As their only child and being born in their old age, John's birth stirred much interest among all who knew them.
- Eight days after his birth came John's circumcision and naming ceremony. Elizabeth interrupted the ceremonial prayer in which the baby's name would be used for the first time.⁵
- When asked about the boy's name, Zechariah confirmed the name John and immediately his inability to speak ended. All this stirred those present to ponder what this child's life purpose would be. (Lk.1:62-66)
- The first words Zechariah spoke were very closely related to the prayers said by the priests during the act of burning incense. Zachariah seems to have been mediating on these special benedictory prayers during the 9 months of muteness. He now turns these prayers requesting God's aid into prayers of praise to God that He has come to the aid of Israel.⁶
- Zechariah went on to publicly declare John's role as a prophet and forerunner of Messiah. John's life would turn hearts away from sin and complacency toward forgiveness of sin, toward truth and holy living.

1- Edersheim - *"Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah"* vol.1;pg.134, footnote 1

2- *ibid* - pg.137

3- Samson was a Nazarite. His great power was manifested in his physical strength. Elijah had great power seen in his miracles. John's power would be seen in his preaching.

4- Edersheim - vol.1, pg.141, foot note 1

5- *ibid* - pg.157-58

6- *ibid* - pg.158-59

Discussion Questions

1. Who else had in the Bible was born due to a miraculous or special birth?

- Which of these came as an answer to specific prayers?
- How did God use these people as they grew up?

2. Who else in the Bible, like Elizabeth, waited a long time for God to answer their prayers?

- Why does God allow some prayers to go unanswered for so long?

3. How can parents today use their children's names to promote a godly life purpose?

4. If you knew for certain your child was to be mightily used of God, how would you raise them?

- How does this compare with what is generally practiced by present day Christian parents?

5. How significant should children's ministry be in our church in light of this story?

- Are each of us involved in effecting children for Christ in some way?
(*Zacharias and Elizabeth were involved in children's ministry in their retirement years.*)

Lessons to Learn

1 - The earnest prayers of the Jews for their Messiah were answered through a baby. A nation's spiritual and moral needs are often met through the next generation.

What young people are you praying for that God would use them to impact our nation?

2 - John the Baptist was mighty in Spirit from his youth up. His parents would surely have used the words received from God to challenge their son to be mighty in Spirit. God desires that our children be mighty in Spirit.

Are we using God's Word, the Bible, to impact our children?

3 - Doubting God's Word, as Zacharias did, when it is clearly given, brings repercussions.

How would we like it if we were unable to talk every time we failed to act on God's Word?

What has God, from His Word, been prompting you to do?

Are you doubting or are you ready to obey?

4 - God does call some to full-time, vocational service while they are young. John's ministry ended with a beheading.

Does God have my permission to send my child anywhere for His name's sake?

Even to places full of physical peril?

Did You Know ...

Angels:

The word angel means messenger. There are two groups of angels
– good and evil. Good angels serve God and His people. Heb.1:13,14

Filled with the Spirit:

This Bible term refers to a person who is controlled or led in their actions by the Holy Spirit – Eph.5:18.

The evidence of it is the presence of The Spirit's fruit in a person's life – Gal.5:22,23.

Unanswered Prayers:

Almost every godly servant in Scripture endured a time of unanswered prayer - *Abraham & Sarah, Joseph, Daniel, Jeremiah, Simeon & Anna*, and others. Are you being a great servant?