

## The Birth of John the Baptist and Zechariah's Prophecy

Luke 1:57-80

*Luke 1:57-80: Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. 58 When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. 59 So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. 60 His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." 61 But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." 62 So they made signs to his father—what he would have him called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. 65 Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. 66 And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him. 67 Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: 68 "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, 69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, 70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, 71 That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, 73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: 74 To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. 76 "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, 78 through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; 79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace." 80 So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.*

### Background Notes

After the birth of John the Baptist, his parents Zechariah and Elizabeth brought the baby up to Jerusalem to be circumcised. This would have taken place on the eighth day after his birth, according to the Law. Leviticus 12:3 reads, "...on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." Medical studies have shown that on the eighth day one of the clotting agents in the blood peaks, so that the eighth day is the ideal day for circumcision. God incorporated many directives into His Law that we now know protected His people from disease and sickness. This is another stamp of the supernatural of the Word of God.

Until the birth of John the Baptist, his father Zechariah not only couldn't speak, but he couldn't hear as well. The people had to make signs to Zechariah to ask what name he wanted for the child (v62). So Zechariah was both deaf and dumb for nine months. In writing, Zechariah confirmed Elizabeth's word that the baby should be named John. The choice of this name was highly unusual in that time and culture (v61). Normally the male child would be named after his father, or at least named after a male relative. When Zechariah followed the will of the Lord and named the baby John, his deaf and dumb condition was instantly removed. This certainly shows that Zechariah's condition was not just coincidence - it was a disciplinary condition because of his lack of faith when he asked the angel for a sign (v18-19).

In verse 80 we read that John the Baptist grew and became strong in spirit, and that he lived in the desert until the day that he appeared publicly to the nation of Israel. Probably John did not live as a hermit out in a wilderness cave, but rather he lived with others in one of the Essene wilderness communities. The Essenes were an ascetic sect within Judaism. They wanted nothing to do with the corrupt priesthood in Jerusalem, and they didn't want to worship in the Temple that King Herod, that despicable unbeliever, had enlarged and beautified. So the Essenes (and others) separated themselves from Judaism's religious system in Jerusalem, and many of them moved out to live in wilderness communities. Qumran, the community where the Dead Sea Scrolls were hidden, may have been an Essene community. John the Baptist probably lived in one of these wilderness communities until "the day of His manifestation to Israel."

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The arrival of John the Baptist inspired great awe.

When John the Baptist was born, there was great rejoicing! Elizabeth and Zechariah rejoiced, and so did all their friends, neighbors and relatives. *"When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with Elizabeth"*(v58). Remember, Elizabeth gave birth in her old age, and I'm sure there was great concern for her welfare and the baby's health throughout her pregnancy. But now the baby had arrived, and mother and child were fine, so there was great rejoicing!

There was great rejoicing – and there was great awe as well! Verses 65-66: *"Then fear came on all who dwelt around them and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, 'What kind of child will this be?' And the hand of the Lord was with him."* Already the groundwork was being laid for the ministry of John the Baptist. Probably many of those who responded later to John's baptism of repentance were these people of the Judean hill country, who knew of the supernatural and unusual events surrounding his birth.

Verse 66 indicates that even as a child, it was obvious that John the Baptist was special in the eyes of the Lord, and the hand of the Lord was upon him. All who knew of his birth realized that God had special plans for this boy. John was to be the forerunner of the Messiah! The arrival of John the Baptist inspired great awe.

## 2. The arrival of John the Baptist anticipated great blessings.

When Zechariah was able to speak again, he began to praise the Lord (v67-79). Zechariah's psalm of praise is known as the "*Benedictus*," and it is filled with quotations and allusions from the Old Testament Scriptures. In this psalm, Zechariah anticipated the salvation for Israel that was about to come with the advent of the Messiah.

From what the angel Gabriel told him, he knew that his son, John, would be the forerunner of the Messiah. There was no confusion in Zechariah's mind as to who would be the forerunner and who would be the Messiah. John the Baptist, the forerunner, was from the priestly line of Levi. The Messiah would be from the line of David of the tribe of Judah.

*"He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David"(v69).* Zechariah knew that the Messiah would bring salvation. That was promised by the prophets and in the covenant that God made with Abraham: *"the oath which he swore to our father Abraham"(v73).* This salvation would ultimately bring deliverance from all Israel's enemies, and it would bring Holiness and righteousness to God's people. *"...To grant us that we be delivered from the hand of our enemies that we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all of the days of our life"(v74-75).* All of this anticipated great blessing will not be fully realized until the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, returns to this earth and Israel turns back to the Lord.

In verses 76-79, it is obvious that Zechariah realized the great role that his son John would play in preparing the way for the Messiah and God's salvation. Zechariah's former unbelief had been replaced with wonderful faith as he anticipated God's great blessings of the future with the coming of the Messiah. The coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is likened to the sunrise (v78). Dawn was about to break for those who sat in darkness! The arrival of John the Baptist anticipated great blessings.

## Practical Application

### 1. Have you seen the *Sonrise* -- or are you still in darkness?

Verse 78-79: *"because of the tender mercy of our God by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the path of peace."*

Verses 78 and 79 certainly have an application to personal salvation, don't they? Verse 79 is a quote from Isaiah 9, and in the context this quote refers to Israel (as we've seen). But just as the sunrise of the Messiah's arrival dispelled the darkness for Israel, so each one of us needs the sunrise of the Lord Jesus to dispel the darkness in our lives. Without Jesus Christ, we sit in spiritual darkness. There is no light apart from Christ. **He is the "Sonrise"!** Have you received the Lord Jesus Christ as your own personal Savior? Have you seen the **Sonrise** -- or are you still in darkness?

## 2. Let's encourage our children to be strong in Spirit.

Verse 80: *"So the child grew and became strong in Spirit and was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel."* This practical application is especially for Christian parents. As good parents, we spend all kinds of time and money encouraging our children in all kinds of areas: in academics, in music, in athletics, in drama, etc. Think of the time and energy we spend, requiring our children to practice a musical instrument and encouraging them to improve and to become more proficient!

There's nothing wrong with encouraging our children to strengthen their abilities in these different areas - but do we also encourage them to be **strong in Spirit**? I don't mean just requiring them to go to church and Sunday school each week - I mean encouraging them to be strong in **Spirit**! Encouraging our children to be strong in the Spirit means to encourage them to be bold in their faith and to stand up for Christ. At school, for example, even though it may mean being unpopular, or possibly receiving a lower grade - or with their friends, even though it may mean losing some friends.

Encouraging our children to be strong in Spirit means to let them know **by word and example** that time spent reading and studying the Bible and praying is not a waste of time, but it is more important than time spent reading other books, or watching TV, or being involved in sports or hobbies. Encouraging our children to be strong in Spirit means to fan the flame of any desire they have to serve the Lord in another country or culture, or in some other full-time Christian service capacity. Let's be very careful not to quench the Holy Spirit's work in our children's lives and hearts in any way. Let's encourage our children to be strong in Spirit!