

The Birth of John the Baptist Luke 1:5 – 25, 57 – 80

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah.

- 1 Chronicles 24: King David divided all the descendants of Aaron into 24 courses or divisions, which rotated each week, serving at the Temple.

His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

- One of the requirements for a high priest was that his wife had to be also from the clan of Aaron.

And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

- Twice a day, a priest was selected by lot to trim the wicks on the ten seven-branched candlesticks and to remove the ash and add fresh incense to the altar of incense.

And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.

- The faithful of Jerusalem took a break from working at 3 pm to go to the Temple and pray as the priest was performing his duties. *Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to*

the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

- Numbers 6: Nazarite vow.

- Malachi 4:5 – 6 The "spirit and power of Elijah" and "turning the hearts of the fathers to the children".

And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the

temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

- Zacharias could not give the traditional blessing which had been recited twice each day for more than a thousand years, from Numbers 6:24 – 26, "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."

So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

What does this tell us about the nature of God?

- God keeps the faithful informed.
- God is not playing catch-up; the brokenness is part of the plan to identify the faithful.
- Jesus, Paul, and Peter all said the end would come "as a thief in the night." Just be ready all the time.
- Look for the promises in the New Testament so as to know what is expected, to produce joy.
- Understanding is promised to the ordinary faithful.

57 Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. 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. His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." So they made signs to his father—what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. 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 kept them in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him.

- The custom of circumcising a male child on the eighth day comes from Genesis 17:12, from God's instructions to Abraham about the beginning and future of the practice.
- John was not an unusual name in that day. A famous grandson of Mattathias Maccabee, the one who started the revolution that overthrew Syrian rule, John Hyrcanus, who was himself a priest and a great general, only a century before Jesus, became the namesake of many in Israel. Of course, that is the name specified by the angel, Gabriel, to Zacharias in verse 13.

What does this tell us about the nature of God?

- God allows time for His events to sink in, grow, and produce fruit.
- The way God chose blessed the faithful with decades of joy before John actually began his ministry.
- God expects us to think, not just react.
- God gives us a lifetime to find the gaps in our own understanding.
- Question our beliefs. The goal is to prove ourselves wrong.
- Do not fear the discovery of a hole in our thought processes; rather, rejoice at our growth in faith.

67 Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,

For He has visited and redeemed His people,

- Redeemed = purchased from captivity

And has raised up a horn of salvation for us

In the house of His servant David,

- The Messiah is on the way

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,

Who have been since the world began,

That we should be saved from our enemies

And from the hand of all who hate us,

To perform the mercy promised to our fathers

*And to remember His holy covenant,
The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:
To grant us that we,
Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,
In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.
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,*

- Isaiah 40:3 about the forerunner

*To give knowledge of salvation to His people
By the remission of their sins,
Through the tender mercy of our God,
With which the Dayspring from on high shall visit us;*

To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,

To guide our feet into the way of peace."

So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

What does this tell us about the nature of God?

- God deals in big pictures, not bits and pieces.
- Read the Bible to create those big pictures.
- The universe is an incubator for faith.
- The objective is a big family that will last.