

7] The Joyful Birth and Amazing Naming of John (Sunday, November 7, 2021)

Scripture: Ten Commandments; Luke 1:56-66

INTRODUCTION

Listen to Psalm 68:19.

Blessed *be* the Lord, *Who* daily loads us *with benefits*, The God of our salvation!

Especially in November we consider or should consider all that our faithful God has given to us.

Psalm 103:2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits:

We must think on all that God has given to us in His mercy and grace, but most of all we see God's mercy in delivering us from our sin and judgment and providing us a Savior!

It is not that we discount or dismiss anything that God gives, but truly this is the greatest blessing.

You could have absolutely nothing in this life and yet you are still blessed beyond measure if you know the Lord Jesus Christ in a saving way.

The word mercy is used only **six** times in the book of Luke and **five** times it is found in chapter 1.

Look back to verses 50 and 54.

The reason why so much attention is focused on Zacharias and Elizabeth and the birth of John is because John would prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke is not writing for *People* magazine. Salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ is his concern.

We should recognize God's mercy in a variety of ways, **but most importantly we see God's mercy in delivering us from our sin and judgment and providing us a Savior!**

We will look at our text in three parts:

- 1] Verses 56-58: The Joyful Birth of John
- 2] Verses 59-64: The Marvelous Naming of John
- 3] Verses 65-66: Fear - What Is God Doing?

1] THE JOYFUL BIRTH OF JOHN, vv. 56-58

Two weeks ago, I didn't spend much time on verse 56.

Look back to verse 36 - this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.

After Gabriel's appearance to Mary, she went quickly or eagerly to visit Elizabeth after Gabriel left.

Mary then spent three months with Elizabeth.

Here is the question - did she stay for the birth or leave before Elizabeth gave birth?

In my reading, it appears like she left before the birth.

Leon Morris suggests that because of the excitement and the fact that there were many visitors, Mary in her condition might have wanted to get back home.¹

John Calvin and John MacArthur suggest that Mary would have stayed for the birth.

Clearly Luke wants us to see the connection of John and Jesus in these first two chapters.

But certainly, he is not trying to give all the details.

Whether Mary stayed for the birth or not is not what is important for us to see now as the **focus shifts back** to Elizabeth, Zacharias, and John.

Look back again to verse 25.

Luke 1:25 “Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among people.”

We talked before about the shame that Elizabeth and Zacharias would have endured for being childless.

Likely there were those who speculated that they were guilty of some sin, that God was punishing them for something.

What an incredible time for Elizabeth.

¹ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 94.

And we also see from verse 58 that this was a time of celebration for her neighbors and relatives.

They recognized the **magnified mercy** that the Lord had shown to Elizabeth.² And they rejoiced with her.

Look back to verse 14.

Luke 1:14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

There should always be incredible joy in the birth of a baby.

Even more we rejoice in the greater miracle of the new birth.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

2] THE MARVELOUS NAMING OF JOHN, vv. 59-64

As we look at these verses, it is interesting to note that the focus is not on **circumcision** as important as that it is in terms of God’s covenant.

The focus is on the **name** of this amazing child born to Zacharias and Elizabeth.

Again, we must consider that Luke is not writing simply about human interest but the fulfillment of God’s promise.

And because Gabriel told Zacharias what he must name his son, therefore Luke provides us with the detail that we have here.

² BDAG, s.v. “μεγαλύνω,” 623. NET - to magnify mercy is the idea here.

Another thing to observe is that Luke gives what is the earliest witness to the tradition that developed of naming a child in connection with circumcision.³

This was not the pattern that we see in the OT. Sometime around the time of the NT this practice started.

According to one source, it is not until the 8th century that we see this tradition reflected in Jewish writings.⁴

Look ahead to Luke 2:21.

Luke 2:21 And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

As God's Law prescribed, John was circumcised on the 8th day.

This was not just a private ceremony, but was a gathering that likely included many people in this case.

I have mentioned several times already Luke is not writing a human-interest story, but he does detail things that we see today.

It is a somewhat strange phenomenon, but sometimes other people have strong opinions about what name should be given for a child.

Look at verse 59 again, "they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias."

³ Morris, 94-95.

⁴ Morris was citing the commentators SB, 94-95.

And in verse 61 this unnamed group, they, state, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name."

We probably should not judge these people too harshly. They have not been made aware of all that has taken place.

Elizabeth speaks first to those who gathered. "No; he shall be called John."

Look back to verse 13.

Luke 1:13¶ 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.

We noted earlier the meaning of John's name - to whom Jehovah is gracious (others whom Jehovah has graciously given).⁵

Both meanings really do fit the person and work of John.

Not satisfied with Elizabeth's declaration, the gathered throng appeal to Zacharias.

Notice in verse 62 that they made signs to him as if he could not hear.

I remember many years ago, Mr. Sherman mentioning this detail to me in a Bible class.

Leon Morris writes here:

⁵ Thayer, s.v. John.

In their excitement they forgot that the old priest could hear, or else Zechariah was deaf as well as dumb (the word *kōphos* which described his ailment in v. 22 can mean 'deaf and dumb'.⁶

Zacharias's response is significant.

Asking for some sort of a writing tablet, perhaps a wood board covered with wax, he wrote, "**John is his name.**"

This is the literal reading from the Greek.

In other words, Zacharias is saying, we are not naming our son. **He has already been named by God.**⁷

Everyone who was gathered was astonished or marveled. They had assumed this child would be called Zacharias.

Immediately in connection with his statement of faith and obedience, Zacharias was given back the gift of speech.

I think we can say that Zacharias was sufficiently rebuked and corrected by Gabriel and 9 months of silence.

Some commentators mention that Zacharias probably made good use of the writing tablet mentioned in verse 63.

We assume this is how Elizabeth was so certain of the name for their son.

⁶ Morris, 95.

⁷ Morris, 95.

But now with the gift of speech restored, Zacharias is filled with praise for God.

The verb **praised** is sometimes translated as **blessed**.

Luke 2:28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

Luke 24:53 and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.

[Luke begins and ends with words of praise to God.]

James 3:9 With it [the tongue] we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.

John Calvin wrote of Zacharias's response of praise:

He did so, not only for the purpose of testifying his gratitude, but to inform his relatives and neighbors, that this punishment had been inflicted on him, because he had been too slow to believe: for he was not ashamed to unite with his own dishonor the praises of the divine glory. Thus it became universally known, that the birth of the child was not an accidental or ordinary event, but had been promised by an announcement from heaven.

3] FEAR - WHAT IS GOD DOING? vs. 65-66

Luke has written this account very carefully.

We go back again in this chapter to verse 12 – when Zacharias saw Gabriel, he was troubled and fear fell upon him.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds of the Bethlehem and the glory of the Lord shone around them, they were greatly afraid.

Fear is often the response of not trusting God as we should.

Fear or reverence is also the appropriate response when we properly consider God and His work.

God was doing something truly incredible. The birth of John was part of the great preparation for this work of God.

Notice the full response that Luke presents to all this:

- 1] Wonder or marvel over the name John
- 2] Fear
- 3] Discussion of all that was connected with the birth of John
- 4] People kept thinking about what kind of child John would be

All of this is because John was given the most amazing calling of preparing the way for the coming of Jesus.

While in the womb, at his birth, and as he grew, John was carrying out this calling according to God's provision.

The end of verse 66 is also very important – the hand of the Lord was with John.

Sproul's commentary on this section of Luke is very short, but he ended with this profound reflection on this statement.

The hand of the Lord was with John the day he was born. It was with him before he was born, when he leaped in his mother's womb. It was with him when he came to

the Jordan River to baptize and to call Israel to repentance. It was with him when he was in prison, and it was with him when he was martyred.”⁸

We often think that the Lord is with us when things go how we want them to.

We know the Lord is with us when we do what God wants us to do!

God’s presence is not reflected in ease or in joy as the world measures it, but in the determination to serve God wherever He places you!

CONCLUSION

We should recognize God's mercy in a variety of ways, but most importantly we see God's mercy in delivering us from our sin and judgment and providing us a Savior!

Hebrews 13:15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name.

Transition to the Lord’s Supper:

Col. 2:11 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

Even in the OT, the circumcision made with hands was not God’s ultimate purpose. The physical act was to represent God’s work of regeneration.

⁸ Excerpt From Luke: An Expositional Commentary R.C. Sproul

Deut. 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

What the OT longed for was this true work of God in circumcising our hearts so that we could love the LORD with heart and soul and truly live.

This is the work that you also need! You need God to circumcise your heart so that you will love Him.

God has done this great work in Jesus Christ.

In union with Jesus Christ we have the true circumcision that God demands!

Prayer

Hymn 365

BENEDICTION - HEBREWS 12:1-3

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.