

## The Birth of John the Baptist

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Advent: The Unexpected King / Birth; Advent; King; Jesus; John the Baptist / Lk 1:57-66  
The birth of John the Baptist in Luke 1:57-66 shows us how God fulfills his promise.

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## Introduction

There is usually great excitement when a couple conceives a child. This is very true if the couple has had difficulty conceiving.

Then, after the conception, there are the months of preparation and excitement as the couple waits for the arrival of the child.

Finally, the child is born, and there is further joy at the birth of that child.

Parents love to celebrate with others following the safe arrival of their newborn child.

Luke devotes a significant portion of his Gospel to the conception and birth of two boys. The reason he does so is because both mothers conceived these boys in unusual ways.

Elizabeth conceived her son John when she was old and well beyond the age of bearing children.

And Mary conceived her son Jesus when she was a young teenager without the involvement of a human father.

Both boys were given to their mothers by the promise of God.

In the account regarding the birth of John the Baptist, as he will become known, Luke shows us how God fulfills his promise.

## Scripture

Let us now read about the birth of John the Baptist in [Luke 1:57-66](#):

**<sup>57</sup> Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. <sup>58</sup> And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. <sup>59</sup> And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, <sup>60</sup> but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” <sup>61</sup> And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” <sup>62</sup> And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. <sup>63</sup> And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. <sup>64</sup> And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. <sup>65</sup> And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, <sup>66</sup> and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.**

## Lesson

The birth of John the Baptist in [Luke 1:57-66](#) shows us how God fulfills his promise.

Luke shows us that God fulfills his promise:

1. At the Birth of John (1:57-58)
2. By the Naming of John (1:59-65a)
3. Through the Destiny of John (1:65b-66)

### I. At the Birth of John (1:57-58)

First, God fulfills his promise at the birth of John.

Luke set out to write an orderly account concerning the things regarding the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

He understood that in the Old Testament God had promised his people that he would send them a Savior, someone who would deliver them from their sins.

But for four hundred years God had been silent. There had been no word or no action from God.

Then, without warning, God sent his angel Gabriel to Zechariah while he was serving in the Temple in Jerusalem. Gabriel told Zechariah that God was going to give him and his barren old wife Elizabeth a son who would be the forerunner to the Savior.

For more than four centuries it had seemed as if God's plan of redemption had come to a grinding halt.

But now God was taking action to send a Savior for sinners.

And Zechariah's son would be the messenger, the Savior's forerunner, the one who would announce his arrival.

Unfortunately, Zechariah doubted Gabriel's promise that God would give him and Elizabeth a son in their old age.

And so the angel struck Zechariah with muteness and told him that he would not be able to speak until the day that these things took place (1:20). And so for nine long months Zechariah was unable to hear or speak to anyone.

Luke was very conscious that what he was writing was the fulfillment of God's eternal plan of salvation.

In a very real sense, he believed that he was simply recording the continuation of God's covenant plan with his people, which began in the Old Testament.

Bible scholar I. Howard Marshall puts it this way:

The writings of Luke are plainly indebted to the Old Testament tradition. This is to be seen in the way in which Luke also sees the working out of a divine plan in history, and may even be held to have regarded his work as depicting the continuation of the history recorded in the Old Testament. (I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* [Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1970], 56).

God had promised his people in the very last book of the Old Testament, before the four hundred years of silence, that he would send a messenger, a forerunner, who would prepare the way for the Savior.

He said in [Malachi 3:1a](#), "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me."

And Zechariah's son would be that promised messenger.

So, Zechariah went home after his service at the Temple in Jerusalem.

His wife Elizabeth conceived a child. When she was in her sixth month of pregnancy her relative Mary came to visit her. By this time Mary herself was pregnant with Jesus.

They had a wonderful greeting during which both mothers sang praise to God, Elizabeth singing the *Benedicta* and Mary singing the *Magnificat*.

Finally, **the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son** (1:57). While Elizabeth's conception was miraculous, the birth of her son was normal and natural.

Elizabeth's **neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her** (1:58a).

God's **mercy** was shown to Elizabeth in that she had conceived a child well beyond the age of conceiving and bearing children.

Understandably, everyone in her community **rejoiced with her** (1:58b).

Although Luke states the birth of John in a typically Lucan and rather matter-of-fact manner, we must not miss his point.

Luke's point is that the birth of John is proof that God was fulfilling his promise to send a messenger.

The old covenant was about to come to a close, and the new covenant was about to begin.

John's birth confirmed God's promise to Zechariah through the angel Gabriel that God's messenger had arrived.

Of course, God always fulfills his promises. Listen to the following verses about God's promises and his word:

- [Joshua 21:45](#): "Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass."
- [2 Corinthians 1:20a](#): "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him."

- [Hebrews 10:23](#): “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”
- [Numbers 23:19](#): “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”
- [Titus 1:2](#): “...God, who never lies....”
- [Hebrews 6:18](#): “...it is impossible for God to lie.”

You and I should never doubt God’s ability to fulfill his promises.

God has made thousands of promises in the Bible. Every single promise has or will come true.

So, when you encounter trial or difficulty or struggle in your life, go to the word of God and read his sure promises to you.

For example, when you are anxious, God promises you peace ([Philippians 4:6-7](#)).

When you need help, God promises to help you ([Psalm 121:1-2](#)).

When you are lonely, God promises his presence ([Matthew 28:20](#)).

When you are weary, God promises you rest ([Matthew 11:29](#)).

When you need guidance, God will give it to you ([Proverbs 3:5-6](#)).

When you ask God for mercy, he will justify you ([Luke 18:13-14](#)).

And many more.

So, God fulfills his promise at the birth of John.

## II. By the Naming of John (1:59-65a).

Second, God fulfills his promise by the naming of John.

Luke said that **on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child** (1:59a).

Since the time of Abraham, God required all Jewish males to be circumcised eight days after birth ([Genesis 17:9-14](#); [Leviticus 12:3](#)). Circumcision was the Old Testament sacrament of entry into God’s covenant community. The whole

community gathered together **to circumcise the child** and welcome him into the fellowship of the covenant community of God's people.

There is no requirement that the child should be named on the eighth day. But, by the time Luke wrote his Gospel it had become common practice to name a child on the eighth day.

Apparently, the people who had gathered together assumed that the child would be named **Zechariah after his father** (1:59b).

John MacArthur notes that "naming firstborn sons after their fathers was not unknown, though naming them after their grandfathers was more common" (John F. MacArthur, Jr., [Luke 1-5](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009], 89).

I am sure that the people would have been taken aback when the child's **mother answered, "No"** (1:60a).

In the Greek text, the word for **"No"** (*ouchi*) here is emphatic, and could be translated as, "Absolutely not!" or, "No way!"

And then Elizabeth said, **"He shall be called John"**(1:60b).

Elizabeth was so emphatic because she knew that God himself had named the child. You may recall that the angel Gabriel told Zechariah in the Temple that he "shall call his name John" (1:13). That is why Elizabeth was so emphatic.

But the people **said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name"** (1:61). No one in Elizabeth or Zechariah's family tree was named **John**. It was therefore contrary to local custom to name a child that was not shared by a relative.

Not satisfied with Elizabeth's answer, the people turned to Zechariah, thinking that he would surely want a son named after him.

Zechariah was still mute, suffering the consequences of his lack of faith at Gabriel's announcement that God would give him and Elizabeth a son.

So the people **made signs to him, inquiring what he wanted the child to be called** (1:62).

Zechariah **asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John"** (1:63a).

I am not sure why most Bible translations give Zechariah's answer in this form, "**His name is John.**" The reason I am puzzled is because in the Greek text the word **John** is first so that Zechariah's answer literally reads, "John is his name." Zechariah was emphatic, "*John* is his name."

This is clear evidence that Zechariah now believed God's promise that came to him through the angel Gabriel. He no longer doubted God's word.

Gabriel said that the child's name was to be John, Zechariah now believed God's promise, and so **John** it was.

All the people **wondered** (1:63b) about Zechariah's answer.

They **wondered** because of the meaning of John's name. **John** means "God is gracious."

The people **wondered**, "In what way will God be gracious? What does this child have to do with the grace of God?"

They did not yet understand that John was the messenger coming before the Savior, through whom God's grace would come to all who would receive it.

There were two immediate responses to Zechariah's answer.

First, Luke said that **immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God** (1:64). At last he could speak again! And what did he do? He blessed and praised God.

Commentator Philip Ryken says:

Given this prophecy [by Gabriel that Zechariah would be unable to speak until the day that these things take place], we might have expected the man to get his voice back the day the baby was born. Yet strangely Zechariah was speechless for another week. He did not find his voice until he named his son John. Only then did the angel's promise fully come true. Or to put it another way, God waited until Zechariah acted on his faith. By calling him John, the priest showed that he truly believed what the angel had said. For nine months he had been alone with his thoughts, pondering the angel's message. He had come to believe that his son would prepare the way for the Savior. By naming the boy John—in obedience to God—Zechariah was proving his faith

in God's promise (Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Volume 1 [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009], 57).

When Zechariah first heard God's promise of a son, he doubted God.

So God disciplined him.

God disciplined Zechariah so that he would come to trust him.

After nine months Zechariah had finally come to trust God fully and completely.

We should remember that God disciplines those whom he loves. When we doubt God's word, he may sometimes bring difficulty and suffering and hardship into our lives to teach us to trust him fully and completely.

And the second response to Zechariah's answer was that **fear came on all their neighbors** (1:65a). Understandably, the people were astonished at what had just happened.

For nine months, Zechariah had been mute. Now, he was able to speak and bless God. Something unusual was happening.

And this brought **fear** on the community.

And so the naming of John was another way in which Luke was demonstrating that God fulfills his promise.

### III. Through the Destiny of John (1:65b-66)

And third, God fulfills his promise through the destiny of John.

Luke said that **all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?"** (1:65b-66a).

People talked about all the details surrounding John's birth.

The angel Gabriel appearing to Zechariah in the Temple in Jerusalem, the promise of a son made to Zechariah by Gabriel, Zechariah becoming mute as a result of his doubt, Elizabeth conceiving a child even though she was barren and well beyond the age of bearing children, the birth of the child who was to be the Savior's messenger, and Zechariah being suddenly and miraculously healed of his muteness were now the talk of **the hill country of Judea**.



All over the region people were asking, **“What then will this child be?”**

Luke has already told us that John was “to go before” the Savior, and that he was “to make ready for the Lord a people prepared” (1:17).

He knew that God had promised through Malachi that he would send a messenger ([Malachi 3:1](#)).

And he knew that John was to be that messenger.

And, in a rather understated way, Luke affirmed that God was fulfilling his purpose through the destiny of John when he said that **the hand of the Lord was with him** (1:66b).

The other Gospel writers record the impact of John’s life and ministry.

John understood that his destiny was to point people to Jesus. And he did so in a remarkable way.

John was an itinerant preacher ([Matthew 3:1](#)).

Large crowds of people from Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan River flocked to hear his preaching ([Matthew 3:5](#)).

He preached a powerful message of repentance ([Matthew 3:2](#)), and told people about the coming Savior ([Matthew 3:3](#)) who was the “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” ([John 1:29](#)).

Many people confessed their sins and demonstrated the genuineness of their repentance by being baptized ([Matthew 3:6](#)).

John’s fearless preaching and confrontation of sinners ([Matthew 3:7-10](#)), even of those who were in high positions of leadership ([Matthew 14:3-4](#)), would eventually cost him his life ([Matthew 14:6-10](#)).

John was the first and faithful messenger pointing people to the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

At his birth, there was a sense that John was destined to live a great life.

In fact, Jesus would eventually say of John, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist” ([Matthew 11:11a](#)).

And so, God fulfills his promise through the destiny of John.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the account regarding the birth of John the Baptist, we should trust God's promise.

God always fulfills his promise.

He promised that he would send a messenger who would be the forerunner to the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. That messenger was John.

God fulfills his promise at the birth of John, by the naming of John, and even through the destiny of John.

No one or nothing can thwart God's purpose.

And his purpose is to have a people who are living in fellowship with him.

That is why God created Adam and Eve.

Sadly, Adam broke God's law, and his sin has now passed on to all his offspring, with the exception of Jesus Christ.

God sent Jesus to be the Savior of sinners.

Next time, we will study Luke's account of the birth of Jesus.

But, before Jesus was born, John was born. And John was born to point people to the arrival of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke wrote the account of the birth of John the Baptist so that we would trust God and his word.

Luke wants us to believe that Jesus is the one who came to seek and to save the lost.

Believe in Jesus today, and you will be saved. Amen.