

Johnny Boy (Luke 1:56-66)

1. A Call to Rejoice and Remember (v.56-58)

- Elizabeth's relative, Mary, had remained with Elizabeth at her home in Judah for three months (v.56). Most likely, Mary was present at John's birth and circumcision, although Mary will take a "backseat" until chapter 2.
- "Now the time came" or "when it came time" resumes the pause of the narrative that is focused on Elizabeth's pregnancy with John (v.25).
- Although the Gospel of Luke was written in Greek, its style is Hebraic in many places. Thematically, Luke places Elizabeth's pregnancy alongside Rebecca's (Lk. 1:41; Gen. 25:22). John is likened to Jacob and Esau in Rebecca's womb. The difference, however, is that there is no "jostling" on John's part.
- It appears Elizabeth has remained in seclusion for her full pregnancy term. Mary is the only person other than Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah, who knows that she is carrying a child. Elizabeth's neighbors heard that the "Lord showed her great mercy" and "rejoiced with her."
- Elizabeth is not only old but barren as well (v.7). While she is in her autumn years, the Lord had mercy on her in allowing her, for the first time, to experience child labor pains. As a pious woman (v.6), she would have been familiar with her predecessors, who were similarly blessed with a child: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Samson's mother, and Hannah. God had shown her "great mercy." This is the same mercy Mary sings about in her Magnificat (v.46-55). God is showering mercy. He is a fountain of mercy. He overflows!
- The birth of John sent an electric current across the community. Her neighbors and relatives may have heard about the pregnancy after giving birth to her son. Their response was not one of "reproach" (v.56) but of rejoicing.
- The joy of the community (v.57) is the fulfillment of Gabriel's announcement (v.14).

2. A Call to Obedience (v.59-63)

A. in circumcision:

- God had specified that all Hebrew males were to be circumcised on the 8th day after birth (Gen. 17:12). This was eventually formalized through the Mosaic Law (Lev. 12:3), which obligated males to live under the commands of the Law and share in the blessings that are wrought by covenantal obedience.
 - Why was circumcision a sign of the covenant? It signified a rejection of paganism. Sacred cultic prostitution was practiced in the Near East to venerate the divine. Surgically reconfiguring the male body part through circumcision was the visible sign of the covenant of their flesh (Gen. 17:13). It signified that sexuality in Israel was not the means to secure and access divine powers and properties.
- Even though circumcision was performed by women occasionally (Ex 4:25; 1 Macc. 1:60), it was typically the priests or the heads of the home who performed this ritual. Since Zechariah is both a priest and the father, he may have executed it himself.
- The circumcision of John would have been as joyous of an occasion as his birth because this circumcision gave him full Abrahamic and Mosaic credentials.
- This added to his credibility as a forerunner to the Messiah. If he did not meet covenantal requirements, it would have been impossible to point the Jewish people to the Jewish Messiah, a light to the Gentiles.

B. in naming the child "John":

- According to Josephus (Jewish historian), children were named after their parents. However, we do not see this frequently in Scripture.
- The neighbors and relatives had heard of the birth (presumably) and had attended the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to call Elizabeth's son Zechariah (Jr.).
- Gabriel commanded Zechariah to name the child "John" (v.13). How did Elizabeth know what to call her son?
 - Zechariah had informed Elizabeth of what had happened to him in the temple
 - Elizabeth has been told through the Holy Spirit
 - Elizabeth was not informed providentially and named her son John without any prompting
- While the relatives and neighbors rejoiced, they disagreed with the child's name. Where did "John" come from?
- Despite the pressure from the crowd, Elizabeth named him John (v.60). They did not accept this name and confronted her husband, Zechariah.
- The reader is informed of an additional handicap: Zechariah is not only mute but deaf as well (v.20; 62-63). They "made signs" to him.
- Zechariah asked for a writing tablet (v.63). A *pinakidion* was a wooden tablet covered in a thin layer of wax. Letters were traced with a stylus (or stiletto) made of metal or wood. Messages were apparent through the removal of wax.
- Zechariah writes on the *pinakidion*, "His name is John." It is emphatic in Greek.
- Both Elizabeth and Zechariah named the child "John."

3. A Call to Worship (v.64-66)

- When God names or re-names a man or woman, He is often progressing into the next era, or epoch in His grand narrative of redemption: Adam (Gen 5:2), Ishmael (Gen. 16:11), Abram to Abraham (Gen. 17:5), Sarai to Sarah (Gen. 17:15), Isaac (Gen. 17:19), Israel (Gen. 32:28), Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isa. 8:3-4), Jezreel (Hos. 1:4), Lo-ruhama (Hos. 6), Lo-ammi (Hos. 1:8), John (Luke 1:13), Jesus (Matt. 1:21), and Peter (Matt. 16:18).
- While Zechariah was informed of the approximate time frame of his chastisement (v.20), it was not until he wrote on the tablet, "His name is John," that his deaf and muteness were removed.
- It took nine months for his faith to mature (James 1:2-4) as his first words were not bitterness towards God but blessings (v.64).
- Why did fear come on all the neighbors? What were "all these things"?
 - barren, elderly Elizabeth providentially gives birth to her son
 - the child's name if Zechariah did not share it with Elizabeth. If they **both** knew the child's name, how would that bring about "fear/awe"?
 - the restoration of Zechariah to complete operation of hearing and speaking
 - after 400 years of silence, there appears to be something unique happening
- "these things" were spread all around the hill country, as people were astounded and astonished. They asked, "what will this child be?" not "whom will this child be?" While there is amazement from the people, that is not an indication of faith (Mark 5:20; 6:6; 15:5, 44). They are "musing" and "thinking" about what this child is to be.
- There is a recognition that God's hand was with "him." The hand of the Lord is repeatedly referenced in Scripture to point to Israel's slavery in Egypt (Ex.3:19-20; 13:3, 9; Deut. 5:15; 7:8; Neh. 1:10; Jer. 32:21; Dan. 9:15).
- Luke is alluding to Israel's deliverance from Israel's bondage in Egypt. How is the hand of the Lord going to act now that He is visiting his people? (Luke 1:35).

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