

5. Zacharias and Elizabeth Named John

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children clearly understand that Mary gave praise to God for the fact that He had chosen to work in her life to give birth to Jesus. We saw that Mary recognized that her own son would also be her Savior. We saw that she expressed these thoughts in the home of Elizabeth and Zacharias after the angel had appeared to her and told her what would happen in her life. Today, we are going to see that the son that had been promised to Zacharias and Elizabeth was born.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months after Mary learned that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and conceive Jesus in her womb. That was also the last three months of the pregnancy of Elizabeth as she and her husband waited for the coming of their son that would go before Jesus to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus. Today, we will learn about the birth of that son to Elizabeth. Luke 1:57-58 says, “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.” We saw in an earlier topic that God had promised a son to Zacharias and Elizabeth even though they were old.

Here, we see that Elizabeth’s full time had come for that promised son to be born. We also see how the neighbors and relatives responded to that birth. We see that the neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to Elizabeth. As we mentioned in an earlier topic, among the Jews it was considered a reproach or a cause of shame if a couple did not have a child. We see that pain and sorrow in the words of Hannah as she prayed at the tabernacle. 1 Samuel 1:10-11 says, “And she *was* in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, ‘O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.’” With this birth, Elizabeth no longer felt that shame.

The neighbors and relatives heard that God had shown great mercy to Elizabeth. The word translated “had shown great” means *to enlarge or magnify*. Mary had used this same word in Luke 1:46-47, where we read, “And Mary said: ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.’” Here, we see the neighbors and relatives also saw that what had happened was the work of God and they gave glory to Him. In addition, they all came and rejoiced with Elizabeth at the child that the Lord had given to her and Zacharias.

The Jews normally named a boy on the eighth day at the same time that they circumcised him. Luke 1:59-63 says, “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.” It was a great day when a boy was circumcised and given a name. As a result, the neighbors and relatives all came for the event.

We see why the Jews circumcised on the eighth day in Genesis 17:12 where we read, “He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant.” Here, we see that God told Abraham that a child was to be circumcised on the eighth day. We saw in an earlier topic that Zacharias had been told that he would not be able to speak because he did not believe. Luke 1:20 says, ““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.”” As a result, Zacharias could not take the leadership in the circumcising of his son. Instead, other priests had been called to come and circumcise the child.

The neighbors and relatives immediately began to call the baby Zacharias after the name of his father since he was the first son. Elizabeth told them that they were calling him the wrong name. She told them that his name was to be John. In Luke 1:13, the angel told Zacharias, “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 saw in the topic on that verse that the word “John” means *Jehovah is a gracious giver*. However, none of the neighbors or relatives knew what the angel had told Zacharias. As a result, they told Elizabeth that there was no one among all of the relatives by the name of John. Here, we see that it was common for the Jews to name the first son after the father and the later children after some relative.

The neighbors and relatives were not ready to let Elizabeth make the decision to name the child John. As a result, they made signs to Zacharias to see what he wanted to name the child. Here, we see that Zacharias could not hear as well as not being able to talk. He made motions to them that he wanted a writing tablet. He wrote on the tablet, “His name is John”. The word translated “marveled” means *to be filled with wonder or amazement*. Luke 2:18 says, “And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.” Here, we see that the people of Bethlehem all marveled when the shepherds told them about the birth of Christ. That was the same response made by the neighbors and relatives when Zacharias wrote John instead of writing his own name.

Suddenly, the neighbors and relatives got another big surprise. Luke 1:64-66 says, “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 *them* kept *them* in their hearts, saying, ‘What kind of child will this be?’ And the hand of the Lord was with him.” The angel had told Zacharias that he would be mute until the child was born. Now that the child had been named, that time of silence had come to an end.

Immediately, Zacharias opened his mouth and began talking. In fact, he began giving praise to God for what the Lord had done by giving them a child. Psalm 127:3 says, “Behold, children *are* a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward.” Zacharias recognized that this was a special child that had been promised by the Lord because the Lord had a very special ministry for him. We also want to help every parent understand that children are given by the Lord and He has

a purpose for their lives. Zacharias was filled with joy as he gave praise to the Lord.

People that were there that day for the circumcision and naming of John quickly began telling others about the unusual things that had happened to Zacharias. They told about the praise that he had given to the Lord as he talked about John and at least some of the things that the angel had told him. Perhaps he even shared the words recorded in Luke 1:15-17 which say, “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.” As a result, this brought great fear on all of the people throughout the hill country of Judea as they discussed the things that had been passed on to them.

Whatever Zacharias said that day, it was a reminder to all of the people in the hill country that God had not forgotten the people of Israel. It had been almost four hundred years since the last book of the Old Testament had been written. In addition, the people were also living under the control of the Roman government. They felt God had been silent and now they heard that God had spoken to Zacharias in the temple. This caused the people to experience a sense of wonder and the people throughout the area began talking about what the Lord had done.

We see that all those who heard these things kept them in their hearts. The word translated “kept” means *to place, to make, or to lay down a foundation*. This same word is used in John 10:11 where Christ said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” Here, the word is translated “gives”. Christ came to lay down His life for the sheep. The people in the hill country laid these thoughts in their hearts so that they became a foundation for all that they thought and said. Here, we see how the Lord was working in the hearts of people to prepare them for the message that John would share about the coming of Christ.

The people in the hill country wondered what kind of a person John would be with such an unusual background that began even before his birth. As John grew up, we also read that the hand of the Lord was with him. Here, we see an important lesson that we want to teach our physical and spiritual children. The hand of God is used to describe his power and authority. The Lord had a purpose for the life of John and was preparing him to carry out that purpose. In the same way, God also has a purpose for the life of every Christian. That plan is what gives our lives meaning and purpose. The Lord wants us to help each of our children find out the purpose that they Lord has for their lives as we give them guidance day by day. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children discover the purpose that God has for their lives.