

▣ THE BIRTH OF JOHN

Luke 1:57-80

30 years ago at 57 years of age my father suffered a major heart attack. I was within days of finishing the semester at Dallas Seminary so Cathy and I were delayed a few weeks in getting out to Santa Maria. When I first saw Dad I was struck by how frail he looked and the gray pallor of his complexion. Within the hour of our arrival, my sister Janet arrived with her husband and her newborn son, Andrew. I will never forget the change that came over my father when Janet laid Andrew in my father's arms. That little baby boy infused life into my stricken father. He sat up. His color came back. He had energy to chat with us all. That little baby boy touched something deep in my father's soul.

Undoubtedly baby John, born to his parents in their old age, touched something deep in Zechariah & Elizabeth. I imagine their wrinkled faces wet with tears as they cradled their newborn son for the first time. Great must have been Zechariah's regret over his unbelief unable as he was to whisper and coo over his son. He must have wondered when God was going to lift his punishment.

After John was safely born, Zechariah and Elizabeth made arrangements for John's *bris* – his circumcision. They notified the rabbi; sent invitations to family and friends and arranged for plenty of food and beverage. John's *bris* was an important day.

Part 1.	The Coming of the King → <i>The Birth of John</i>
Part 2.	The Authentication of the King
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▣ THE BIRTH, CIRCUMCISION AND NAMING OF JOHN (LUKE 1:57-66)

LUKE 1:57-66 (ESV)

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

Well, it was a big day in the neighborhood. Eight days earlier elderly Elizabeth gave birth to a baby boy. Before that, a little over nine months ago, Zechariah came home from his Temple service stone deaf and mute (1:22). The story was he had been visited by an angel. The angel told him he and Elizabeth were going to have a baby in their old age (1:13). Shortly after Zechariah came home, Elizabeth went into seclusion for five months (1:24). When she emerged she was very pregnant. She survived labor and delivery and brought a healthy baby boy into the world. Unlike we Americans, the Jews waited to name their baby boys. Every Jewish baby boy was circumcised in obedience to both the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 17:12) and the Law of Moses (Lev. 12:3).

Circumcision took place on the eighth day, even if that fell on the Sabbath. This continues to be the practice in modern Judaism. The ceremony is called a *Bris*, or *Brit Milah*. Part of the ceremony is the naming. In first century Israel it was the custom to name the boy after a relative. The rabbi who officiated the circumcision (the *mohel*), assumed the baby would be named after his father Zechariah. But Elizabeth firmly declared he would be named John. Her friends and family protested this was contrary to Jewish custom because, "None of your relatives is called by this name."

Perhaps assuming Zechariah would follow tradition, the friends and family tried to go over Elizabeth's head and *made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called*. That they had to make signs to Zechariah indicates Zechariah had not only been struck mute but deaf as well.

Zechariah sided with Elizabeth. Their son will be named John in obedience to Gabriel's command (1:13). John, in Hebrew, is *Yochanan* which means *Jehovah is gracious*. Because he obeyed, Zechariah's punishment was lifted and he spoke for the first time in nine months.

For the friends and family of Zechariah and Elizabeth it was an extraordinary day capping an extraordinary year. An old woman had given birth. The baby's naming broke with tradition. And now Zechariah can hear and speak. As they listened to Zechariah's prophesy their hearts must have filled with even greater wonder and perhaps anxiety. God was on the move. What did it mean for John? What did it mean for each of them? What did it mean for their people?

His hearing and voice restored, Luke tells us Zechariah himself came under the influence of the Holy Spirit and delivered a prophecy. In the presence of all those attending John's *bris* Zechariah declared:

☐ ZECHARIAH'S PROPHECY (LUKE 1:67-79)

Concerning Messiah (1:68-75)

68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; 72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

In verses 68-75 Zechariah focused on Messiah. The angel Gabriel, Mary and now Zechariah link the coming of Messiah with God's Covenants. In verses 68-71 Messiah is the *horn of salvation in the house of his servant David*. Messiah will fulfill the Davidic Covenant. He will reestablish the Throne of David and set up His Kingdom on earth. Messiah will rule not only Israel but all the nations of the earth. During the Messianic Kingdom, the Jews will dwell secure in the Land God has promised them.

In verses 72-75 Messiah will fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant with its three provisions of the Land, the Seed and the Blessing. Again, the result will be that the Jewish people will dwell securely in the Promised Land and will be able to serve God unmolested by their enemies.

Zechariah transitions in verse 76 to focus on his son, John. What a tender, sacred moment as Zechariah looked upon his baby boy in his arms and spoke these words over him:

Concerning John (1:76-79)

76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

John will prepare the way for the Messiah. John will not only identify Messiah to the nation, but he will reveal that the Messiah will be the means by which their sins can be forgiven. John will eventually point Jesus out as *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29). *Forgiveness of sin* is a provision of yet another covenant, the New Covenant. (Jer. 31:31-37).

The *sunrise* of verse 78 is the Messiah. The coming of Messiah is the dawning of a new day with its promise of salvation and the forgiveness of sin. This new day, this salvation through Messiah, is not limited to Israel. Rather, the Messiah is bringing salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike. Notice the way Zechariah describes the two groups upon which the sunrise is giving light. The sunrise is giving light to *those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death*. This is a reference to all Gentile nations and people groups. They sit in darkness because they have not received the revelation of God. The Messiah

is coming to bring salvation, the forgiveness of sins and new life to the Gentiles. The Messiah is coming *to guide our feet into the way of peace*. Notice the pronoun “our”. This refers to Zechariah’s people, the Jews. Messiah is coming to lead the Jews into the *way of peace* through forgiveness of sins and new life.

Luke concludes this part of John’s story with a summary of John’s childhood and his years of preparation in the wilderness.

☐ JOHN’S PREPARATION FOR HIS MINISTRY (LUKE 1:80)

LUKE 1:80 (ESV)

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

John spent years in the desert wilderness training for his public ministry much like Moses. The benefit of being trained away from the Pharisees and rabbis was that John was not being trained according to rabbinic Judaism, but through direct, Spirit-guided study of the Hebrew Scriptures. When John reengages with his Jewish countrymen he will call them out of Pharasaic/Rabbinic Judaism into a right relationship with God based on the Hebrew Scriptures and not the laws of men.

For the third time the coming of Yeshua our Messiah King is linked to God’s Covenant. Jesus certainly came into the world to save you and me. But I hope you realize His story is much bigger. Jesus came into the world to fulfill God’s unconditional promises to Israel. We Gentiles are, by God’s grace, included in the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant. By faith in the blood sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf, our sins can be forgiven.

Are you trusting in Jesus?

Similar to John’s training we endeavor to study God’s Word, the Bible, as free from any filter as is possible. It is our goal to read out the Bible in its context and let it define our beliefs. This is why we emphasize such things as knowing the historical context of a passage, knowing the kind of literature a passage is, observing closely the words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and how they relate to one another. We do these things and more so that, to the best of our ability, we accurately interpret and apply God’s Word. It is the Word of God that transforms lives not the words of man. As Jesus will teach, when we know God’s truth, His truth sets us free.