

JOHN'S BIRTH AND NAMING: AN EVENT FOR ALL GENERATIONS

LUKE 01:57–66, 80

Introduction

The birth of a child is a significant event for every parent. But the birth of John was a significant event for human kind, an event that says much to every man.

- I. The child's birth (vv. 57-58).
 - a. Sealed God's power.
 - b. Sealed God's mercy
 - c. Caused all to rejoice.
- II. The child's name sealed a prophetic witness (vv. 59-63).
- III. The child's birth caused several important results (vv. 64-66).
- IV. John's childhood fulfils the prophecy (v. 80).

I. *Luke 01: 57–58 God's Power and Mercy*

The child's birth sealed God's power and mercy.

1. The child's birth sealed God's power. Note these facts.
 - => Elizabeth had conceived when she was old, beyond child-bearing years (Lk. 1:18, 36).
 - => Zechariah had been visited by the angel of God and told exactly what would happen (Lk. 1:11f).

The fact that the child was born just as God had said is evidence of God's glorious power. God was able to control natural events and to send forth the forerunner of the Messiah *exactly* as He had promised.

Mat 19:26 *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

Luke 1:37 *"For nothing is impossible with God."*

Job 42:2 *"I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted."*

Psa 115:3 *Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.*

2. The child's birth sealed God's mercy, showed that God was merciful in two ways.
 - a. The fact that John was born as a *baby of promise* demonstrated that God has mercy upon people, even upon an insignificant woman with a desperate need. She was childless. This was a terrible calamity to the people of that day. Children were considered a blessing from God, a great heritage of the Lord. In fact, a Jew whose
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wife could not bear children was thought to be cut off from God. He was expected to divorce his wife, remarry, and bear children. Therefore, being childless was a critical problem to Zechariah and Elizabeth, a problem that weighed ever so heavily upon their hearts and never left their minds. They felt disfavoured and displeasing to God.

Psa 103:8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Psa 103:17 But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children.

Psa 106:1 Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

- b. The fact that God used John in His plan of salvation demonstrated God's mercy. John was to be greatly involved with the Messiah. God allowed him the glorious privilege. Such a high privilege and call clearly demonstrated God's glorious mercy.

Thought 1. The very same privilege is given to us. God wants to use everyone of us in His plan of salvation, both to be saved and to be witnesses of His salvation.

1 Tim 2:3-5 This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

3. The child's birth caused all to rejoice. God's mercy upon a person's life was bound to make some rejoice. Elizabeth's neighbours and cousins rejoiced with her and all believers rejoice ever since. God has had mercy upon the world, and John's birth was one of the significant proofs of His mercy. God sent the forerunner to proclaim the coming of the promised Messiah. The fact that John was born as Scripture predicted and as Zechariah witnessed is proof of God's mercy. God did exactly as He had said. He sent the forerunner to prepare the way for the coming of the Saviour of the world.

II. Luke 01:59–63 The Prophetic Witness

The child's name sealed a prophetic witness. What happened is interesting. All Jewish males were circumcised on the eighth day after birth (see *Circumcision*, Phil. 3:3; see Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3). Circumcision was the Jewish ceremony where the child was offered up or dedicated to God. Circumcision was the rite or sign that the child was to be a follower of God, a true Jew. It was also the day on which the child was officially named.

Some of the neighbours and relatives wanted the child to be named after the father, Zechariah. However, Elizabeth objected, knowing that the angel had told Zechariah to name the child John. The relatives took the matter to Zechariah, asking him to write the name out for all to see. They, of course, were expecting Zechariah to be pleased with their suggestion that the child be called after him. But Zechariah shocked them. He confirmed

that the child was to be named John. He dared not doubt and disobey God again. He was under the discipline of God for having disobeyed Him before.

The point is that the name John sealed the prophetic witness. The angel had told Zechariah what to name the child. His name was to be John, and Zechariah had borne witness to the angel's visit and promise, even to the angel revealing that the child was to be named John. John was the *prophetic name* given by God's messenger. Zechariah obeyed God and bore testimony to the prophecy; thus, Zechariah sealed the prophetic witness by confirming the name John.

Thought 1. The very fact that the child was named John adds proof to the whole event being true, as having really happened.

Thought 2. The prophetic witness is true. Zechariah confirmed it by naming the child John.

John 20:31 *But these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Thought 3. Note that the obedience of Zechariah removed the discipline of God for his sin. Zechariah named the child John despite all the pressure from friends and the practice of the day to name the first son after the father. God had *told* Zechariah what to do in naming the child, and when he obeyed, the discipline of God was removed from his life.

PHILIPPIANS 03: 03 CIRCUMCISION

Before Christ, circumcision was the physical sign that a man was a follower of the true God. It was the sign that a man believed the promises that God had made to Abraham and Israel (see Gen. 17:10-14; Rom. 4:11). God never intended circumcision to have any value other than being a sign. It was not to bring righteousness to any man — not even to Abraham (Rom. 4:9-10). It was given only as a sign — a sign of the faith that a man already had in God's promises. Righteousness was imputed to the man because he believed God's promises; then the man was circumcised as a sign of his faith in God (see Rom. 4:11).

However, many abused God's purpose for circumcision.

1. Some made circumcision a substitute for true righteousness. A man was thought to be safe and secure in the arms of God if he was circumcised. Believing God and loving men had little to do with being a child of God. Many forgot the circumcision of a pure heart and became Jews of the circumcision in name only. Circumcision became merely an external and physical sign.
2. Some used circumcision as a way to divide and categorize people. A great wall of division was thrown up around the uncircumcised (cp. Acts 10:1; 1 Sam. 17:26,

36; 2 Sam. 1:20). Any man who was uncircumcised was thought to be *cut off* and *far off*, not only from those thought to be the people of God (the Jews and the circumcised) but from God Himself. (See Acts 10:1-33.) An uncircumcised man was looked upon with bitter contempt. In the mind of the Jew, God was thought to love only Israel, despising and rejecting all other people (the Gentile nations).

3. God has done away with circumcision as a sign of righteousness since Christ has come (Gal. 5:6; 6:15; Col. 2:11). Righteousness is now of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter of rules and regulations (see Rom. 2:25-29; 4:8-12, 23-25). The truly righteous man is the man who is God's *inwardly* – the man whose spirit has been *recreated* into the very nature of God. God's very own righteous nature is implanted into the very nature of man when he is *born again*. A man *born again* by the Spirit of God is God's "new creation" (Jn. 3:3f; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 1:4). □

III. *Luke 01:64–66 The Birth of John the Baptist*

The child's birth caused several important results.

1. The father was miraculously healed; consequently, he began to praise God. The restraint upon Zechariah's tongue was removed. Note: he had been shut up with his own thoughts, deaf and dumb for nine months. God healed him, opened his ears and loosed his tongue and he began to do exactly what he should have been doing: praise God. Note that his last spoken words had been words of questioning, distrust, and unbelief (Lk. 1:18).
2. The people were awe-stricken. The word *awe* (phobos) means reverence. It means a reverential awe, a reverential fear of God. The people stood in reverence before the events, awe-stricken over what was happening and wondering what else was going to happen. God was working. His hand was evident.
3. The events were spread abroad. God's hand upon the child was the subject of the countryside. (Note. It *should* have been the subject of all. God's movement should always be at the very centre of men's conversations.)
4. The sense of destiny surrounded the child. Note that the people kept the things in their hearts and "wondered" about them. They did not forget what they were hearing. There was something unusual about the message surrounding the child. Expectations were running high, and many were holding the things in their memory waiting for the child to grow, to see what would happen.

Thought 1. All four results should take place in our lives. We should be praising God; we should be awe-stricken at the events; we should spread the events abroad; we should see the destiny surrounding John. We have the privilege of knowing just who John was, the forerunner of the Messiah Himself.

1 Pet 1:17-20 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

Psa 111:9-10 He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever Birth holy and awesome is his name. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

Psa 89:7 In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him.

IV. Luke 01: 80 John the Baptist – Spiritual Growth

John's childhood is described only in this single verse. Nothing else is known. He grew as a normal boy physically, but three things are said about him that differ from the normal child.

1. He advanced far beyond other boys spiritually. He grew and became strong in spirit. He was a boy of strong heart and commitment, of strong will and decisiveness, of strong conscience and conviction, of strong drive and initiative. He was God's servant, a young man who was committed to follow, obey, and serve God.
2. He was reared in a different environment than most boys – in the desert. The desert was an obscure place, a place of quietness, far from the worldliness of the cities and masses of men. The desert was made for meditation and thought, for seeking God.
3. He stayed at his desert home until God called him to launch his ministry to Israel. This points to a life of obedience both to parents and to God.

Thought 1. The crying need of the hour is for believers to grow in the Lord Jesus Christ – to grow strong in the spirit.

Eph 4:14-15 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

2 Pet 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Acts 20:32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." ■