

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Luke 1:57-66

INTRODUCTION

We are taking an expositional walk of the Gospel according to Luke and we are going to celebrate the birth of our Savior by looking at our text this morning of the birth of John the Baptist.

Luke pulls us into the story he is telling.
Luke tells this history in a way that puts us right in the middle of it. We aren't just bystanders listening to a good story.
We are participants in an unfolding drama.

READ Luke 1:57-66

Proposition: 3 Hallmarks of John:

- I. His **Merciful Birth**
- II. His **Graceful Naming**
- III. His **Powerful Mission**

So That: To prepare the way for the Lord, to carve the path for the King, to open the heart for the birth of the Savior.

1st Hallmark of John, ...

I. His Merciful Birth **1:57-59a**

Point – John's birth against the backdrop of God's mercy

Proof – “^{57a}**Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth,**”

The natural (birth) has become active through the supernatural (conception).

“**had come**” – from the original Greek word πίμπλημι – which means to ‘fill’ or ‘fulfill’

Luke, the Gentile, shows the Jewish influence from his fellowship and studies:

- expressions of time or days being fulfilled
- **1:23** (Zacharias' priestly service)
- **2:6** (Mary's pregnancy)
- **2:21** (Jesus' circumcision)
- **2:22** (days of purification)

Rebekah → Gen 25:24 – “When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.”

Luke is unfolding this new ‘modern’ drama (in his time), he is also tying us back to what had taken place before.

“^{57b}**and she brought forth a son.**”

1:13 – A fulfillment of prophecy from Isaiah, from Malachi and now from Gabriel

- God's Word is true
- God's promises never fail

Heb 10:23 – “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;”

“^{58a}**And her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her;**” – “had magnified His mercy” - v. 46 – “my soul magnifies the Lord”

Luke is drawing attention to the Giver.

- A merciful birth
- A joyful celebration

“**mercy**” – compassion, *pity, sympathy, lovingkindness, faithfulness*
Also expressed in → **1:50, 54, 58, 72, 78** – by **Mary** twice, by **Luke** once, and by **Zacharias** twice

“^{58b}**and they were rejoicing with her.**” – from the original Greek word συγαίρω – ‘share joy with’

Phil 2:17-18 – “I rejoice and share my joy with you all. ¹⁸And you too, *I urge you*, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.”

In Israel a birth was cause for great joy and celebration. The friends would come, the neighbors would come, and the family would come. They would often hire local musicians to celebrate after the child was born.

Second fulfillment of that prophecy of bringing joy.

First was in **1:14**, after baby John leapt for joy in the womb. The neighbors and relatives are the second fulfillment of that prophecy.

Beyond this, the angels and shepherds were the next fulfillment.

- **2:10** – “And the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people;’”

Application– Where are you? Do you have this supernaturally given joy that only comes from a right relationship with God – which is obtained by faith alone in Christ alone. That is the only true source of joy. Is God well pleased with you – not because of works we have done but of the finished work Jesus has done at the cross?

Luke doesn’t say that her neighbors and relatives heard she had a child and rejoiced with her. What does he say?

→ her neighbors and relatives heard

“the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her”

Do you see the difference? The first focuses on the Gift (as wonderful as it is 😊). The second focuses on the Giver .

J.C.Ryle – *“How much more happiness there would be in this evil world, if conduct like that of Elizabeth’s [neighbors and relatives] was more common! Sympathy in one another’s joys and sorrows costs little, and yet is a grace of most mighty power. Like the oil on the wheels of some large engine, it may*

seem a trifling and unimportant thing, yet in reality it has an immense influence on the comfort and well-working of the whole machine of society.

A kind word of congratulation or consolation is seldom forgotten ... The servant of Christ will do well to remember this grace. It seems "a little one," and amidst the battles about mighty doctrines, we are sadly apt to overlook it. Yet it is one of those pins of the tabernacle which we must not leave in the wilderness. It is one of those ornaments of the Christian character which make it beautiful in the eyes of men."

Application – How will our neighbors know that we love Him? By our love for one another.

Rom 12:15 – “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”

This merciful birth of John showcases the **obedience** of Elizabeth and Zacharias.

“^{59a}**And it came about that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child,**”

Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3 – part of the culture of the time

Illustration – Circumcision is God’s brand; the mark of God’s ownership → purification from sin based upon the circumcision of the heart passages

Rom 2:28-29 – “He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

Same pattern as we see in chapter 2 for Jesus → **2:21**

→ Birth, circumcision on the eighth day, naming, and praise.

The **Obedience** on the outside showcases the **belief** on the inside.

2nd Hallmark of John, ...

II. His Graceful Naming

1:59b-64

Point – John’s naming against the backdrop of God’s grace

Proof – “^{59b}**and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.**”

Literally translated as – “and they were calling him after the name of his father, Zacharias” – common among the Jewish nation at that time

- this graceful naming showcases the faith of Elizabeth and Zacharias

“⁶⁰**And his mother answered and said, ‘No indeed; but he shall be called John.’**”

“**No indeed**” – not best translation ... makes Elizabeth sound like a woman at an English Tea refusing a crumpet ☺ It is important to know that Elizabeth is unequivocal and emphatic → “Absolutely not!” – grammatically stating it in the future tense as an accomplished fact. She demonstrates submissive trust in God.

“⁶¹**And they said to her, ‘There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.’**”

Problem! → Conflict with custom – for believers, obedience to clear instruction in the Word of God supersedes cultural customs of any time

Illustration– One historical example is Wilberforce and others and what they had to go through to change custom when it came to slavery.

“⁶²**And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called.**”

The judgment sign in vv. 19-20 is – “silent and unable to speak” – literally translated as “not have the power to speak”

All those nine months of silence, God’s judgment on him for not believing ... no doubt a time of soul searching for **Zacharias** ... a time of silence, reflection, and repentance.

At this moment of truth, there is not even the hint of a shadow of wavering in **Zacharias** → “^{63a}**And he asked for a tablet, and wrote as follows, ‘His name is John.’**”

His answer is emphatic, just like **Elizabeth’s**.

While **Elizabeth’s** response was unequivocal and emphatic, **Zacharias’** response is even more definite.

Zacharias did not write, “We have decided to call him John,” or “You must call him John.” His baby already has a name, given to him by God → “**His name is John.**”

- Literally translated as “John is his name!”
- God already named the boy through the angel Gabriel.
- **Zacharias** accepts and affirms the Word from God.

“^{63b}**And they were all astonished.**” Not so much because of the agreement of **Elizabeth** and **Zacharias**, although that may have contributed, but more so because of the absolute definiteness and certainty from this godly older couple with the miracle baby.

“^{64a}**And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed,**”

2 Dimensions to Zacharias healing I want you to notice here:
His healing is:

1. **Immediate** (Instantaneous)
2. **Impeccable** (Total)

1) His healing is **immediate**.

Notice the immediacy – “**at once**” – ESV, KJV, and NIV all translate, “immediately” As soon as he wrote down the words, “John is his name,” his tongue is loosed.

Zacharias’ disbelief was immediately rewarded with dumbness. His belief is immediately rewarded with delight.

This is a miracle. **Zacharias can’t speak** and **all of a sudden, instantaneously, he can speak**. This is God’s **power on display**.

Greek word translated as “**at once**” is used almost exclusively in the New Testament for miracles, all by **Luke** in his Gospel and in Acts with the exception of two by **Matthew** – Jesus and the fig tree in **Matt 21:19&20**

Luke 4:39 – **Simon’s mother-in-law** – “standing over her, He rebuked the fever, and it left her; and she immediately arose and waited on them.”

5:25 – **the paralytic** – “at once he rose up before them, and took up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God.”

8:44 – the **hemorrhaging woman** – “came up behind Him, and touched the fringe of His cloak; and immediately her hemorrhage stopped.”

8:55 – the **synagogue official Jairus’ dead daughter** – “her spirit returned, and she rose immediately; and He gave orders for *something* to be given her to eat.” → **Complete Regeneration**

Luke 13:13;18:43; Acts 3:7; 5:10; 12:23; 13:11; 16:26

Illustration – Remember the Prodigal Son and the Forgiving Father ...

When the son returns and repents, what is the first word out of the forgiving father’s mouth??? “Quickly!” He told his servants to prepare a banquet quickly.

Application – In the same way, that is how our God and Father treats a sinning person who comes to Him, who repents of their sin, who pleads for forgiveness and trusts in God. Quickly,

God's favor, rather than His enmity, rests upon you. This is how you can be one in whom God is well-pleased.

2) His healing is **Impeccable**

Point – Total, complete, not lacking anything, not partially fulfilled

Proof – “^{64b}**and he began to speak in praise of God.**

- Complete healing.
- Complete removal of judgment! ☺

Illustration – **Mark 7:35** – “his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly.”

To hear is one thing, to be able to know that what you're hearing is language when you've never heard language is another miracle. There's no speech therapy here. He has full command of a language he's never even heard.

Illustration – **Gen 21:7** – “And she said, ‘Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.’”

Notice! → Not just birth, but “nurse” as well.

Point – God can turn the marks of sin into memorials of grace.
Where sin abounds, grace can much more abound.
Beloved, God never wastes calamity in the lives of His children.

Application – Without God's grace and power, illnesses can leave people exhausted and embittered.

But not Zacharias. **Zacharias** has 9 months of pent up words

... so what comes out when he finally speaks?

And oh boy, does he speak ☺ → **Zacharias Benedictus 68-79** which we will look at next week in our Christmas Eve service.

While **Elizabeth's** and **Mary's** lights of godliness and faith shine brightest in Luke 1, **Zacharias'** song is unmatched in terms of theological and doctrinal weight

Read 76-79 → **Zacharias'** focus is the salvation his son will point towards.

Application – Friend, will gratitude for salvation be your focus this Christmas?

3rd Hallmark of John, ...

III. His Powerful Mission **1:65-66**

Point – John's mission against the backdrop of God's power

Proof – “^{65a}**And fear came on all those living around them;**”

The power of God inspires wonder. It inspires fear. It inspires awe. **MacArthur** describes it as “*a holy trauma, a kind of spiritual shock*”

Illustration – Like peas and carrots, **joy** and **fear** go together



Not merely reverence, but reverential fear

Zacharias – 1:12 – fear fell upon

Mary – 1:30 – greatly troubled, perplexed

Neighbors and **Relatives** – fear came upon

So, what specifically caused this **shock** and **awe**?

A miracle conception and a miracle birth, a divinely given name from God and a powerful and instantaneous healing of a mute man.

“^{65b}**and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea.**” – the southern portion of Israel, Jerusalem → Clearly what just happened heralds some mighty action of God. God is near and carrying out His plan on earth.

“^{66a}**And all who heard them kept them in mind,**”

“**mind**” – καρδία *cardia* – Literally → ‘heart’

- Literally translates as “all who heard them placed them in their heart”

Illustration – Like Mary! → **2:19** – “Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”

“^{66b}**saying, ‘What then will this child *turn out to be?*’”**

Crux interpretum → Portends, foreshadows, foretells, heralds

This powerful mission spawns **life’s most important question**
→ who is the person of Jesus Christ?

Illustration– Mark 8:27 – “Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, ‘Who do people say that I am?’”

The question He asks is, “**Who** am I?” After this is established, He tells His followers, “**What** I must do.”

“^{66c}**For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him**”

That is Luke’s inspired commentary, not part of quote from the people.

“**the hand of the Lord**” – throughout Old Testament

→ only used by Luke in the New Testament → Luke 1:66; Acts 11:21; 13:11

Similar to Mary → **1:51** – “He has done mighty deeds with His arm;”

→ The hand to guide and to bless

→ Powerful presence of God

CONCLUSION

Flash forward about 30 years. John is imprisoned at the time Jesus began His ministry.

Herod Antipas – The son of Herod the Great threw John into the dungeon of Machaerus on the northeast shore of the Dead Sea. He had a palace at one end and a prison at the other.

The dungeon was dug deep into the earth, prisoners were chained to the walls. No natural light and only clammy, foul air to breathe.

John the Baptist was imprisoned here for a little over a year until his execution.

Why did Herod imprison John? → “Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her.”

“**Herodias**” – was his niece – became his sister-in-law when married brother **Philip**, then became his wife

In order to marry her, **Herod Antipas** divorced his first wife and **Herodias** divorced **Philip**. She moved from one uncle to another.

John was outraged that a ruler in Israel would commit this kind of sin openly, so he rebuked Herod repeatedly in his preaching. John’s rebuke of Herod for his wickedness cost this man of God his freedom and eventually his life.

Mark 6:20 – “Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him.”

Herod hears, but refuses to submit – willful choice to reject → **ears that won’t listen!**

How about you?

Do you enjoy the Christmas carols? The trees and lights? The presents?

Do you maybe even enjoy a worship service like this? Maybe even the sermon?

Your ears may hear ...but...does your heart trust???

Do you trust Jesus Christ as Lord, as Savior?

That is a question for all of us to ask this Christmas season.