

December 11, 2022

"Zechariah Speaks"  
Lesson 2 of Unit

Luke 1:57-66, 76-79

**Intro**

In last week's lesson, Zechariah is visited by the angel Gabriel. He is told that his wife Elizabeth, who was barren, would have a son, and that his name was to be John. Zechariah, in disbelief of these events, asks "How will I know that this will happen?" The sign Gabriel gives is that Zechariah will be mute, unable to speak, until the time the baby is born. He will be unable to speak for 9 months! That's a long time to ponder!

Today's passage looks at the birth of John and the reactions of both Zechariah and the people in the community experiencing these supernatural events.

**Read Luke 1:57-66**

1. vs. 57: As promised by God through Gabriel, Elizabeth gives birth to a son
  - Between this announcement and the birth, three events are noted:
    - Elizabeth goes into hiding for 5 months; we are not told why
    - Gabriel's announcement to Mary about bearing the Christ child
    - Mary's visit to Elizabeth when Elizabeth was 6 months pregnant
  - The lack of other details focuses our attention on the promise and its fulfillment
  
2. vs. 58: Here neighbors and relatives rejoice with Elizabeth on the birth of this son
  - Elizabeth had been barren (1:7), but now she has been blessed with a child
  - Only God could give a child to an older couple who were unable to conceive before
  - This fulfills Gabriel's words for 1:14 that "many will rejoice at his birth"
  - John's life and words will also cause many to rejoice later as well
  - This celebration is also a direct contrast to what Elizabeth had previously experienced
  - "Reproach among people" (1:25) becomes community celebration
  
3. vs. 59: Circumcising a baby boy on the 8<sup>th</sup> day goes back to Abraham and the Law of Moses
  - Luke 1:6 tells us that John's parents were "righteous before God"
  - They show this by adhering to the Law's circumcision requirements
  
  - Scripture does not say anywhere what the process is for naming a child
  - By this event, custom seems to be that the child is named when circumcised
  - The people at the ceremony didn't hear Gabriel's words
  - They want to name the baby after his father
  
4. vs. 60: Elizabeth immediately contradicts this group opinion about the boy's name
  - Zechariah has obviously made known to her what Gabriel told him

5. vs. 61: The people say, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.”  
 A child’s name seems to come from family somehow, whether close or distant  
 It’s interesting that the people can’t conceive of the child having a name that doesn’t come from a family member...
6. vs. 62: The crowd makes signs to Zechariah about what he thinks the child’s name should be  
 We were told that he would not be able to speak until the child was born  
 It appears that he is also not able to hear, since they are making signs to him  
 If he could hear, they would have spoken their question to him
7. vs. 63: John asks for a writing tablet, and simply writes “His name is John”  
 This shows that he and Elizabeth are in agreement about the child’s name  
 Everyone is “astonished”—this is not what they had expected  
 They didn’t know about Gabriel’s message, but the parents did  
 Luke shows people being astonished frequently in his gospel  
 This is always connected to the results of God’s work  
 See 2:33, 9:43, 11:14, and chapters 20-26
8. vs. 64: When Zechariah agrees to what God has directed through Gabriel, his tongue is “set free”  
 In vs. 67, it says he was “filled with the Holy Spirit”  
 So what Zechariah speaks beginning in this verse aligns with God’s will
9. vs. 65: The people were “filled with awe” as they see and hear what is happening to Zechariah  
 This awe is closely connected to “fearing the Lord”  
 It is a recognition of God’s power and moving, causing awe  
 John has been unable to speak for 9 months; now he is praising God!  
 The news of John’s birth and Zechariah’s restored speech doesn’t stay in the temple  
 It went “throughout the hill country of Judea”  
 This country is mountainous and difficult to travel  
 This is big news, a highly unusual event; the news travels even to these places
10. vs. 66: The events caused the people to wonder and reflect on their meaning  
 Since these events are so unusual, what do they mean for the future?  
 They see that God’s hand is upon John; “what then is this child going to be?”

### **Read Luke 1:76-79**

11. vs. 76: God filled Zechariah with the Holy Spirit in vs. 67. He now prophesies John’s future  
 “You...will be called a prophet of the Most High”  
 Prophets communicate God’s promises and warnings to the people  
 John does both of these things in what he says during his ministry  
 John is also to “go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him.”  
 This is a direct connection to Is. 40:3  
 “The voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
 Prepare the way of the Lord”  
 This is exactly what John does  
 He lives in the wilderness, and prepares the people to receive Jesus

12. vs. 77: Salvation is the key topic of this verse

Most Jews of this time viewed salvation as political freedom from Rome  
The most militant of these Jews were called the Zealots  
One of the disciples was apparently from this group (see Luke 6:15)  
John's message is of a different type of salvation  
This type comes "through the forgiveness of their sins"  
John preaches "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"  
God's plan of salvation is bigger/better than a political salvation  
It includes every ethnicity and nationality

13. vs. 78: God's mercy is the point of the next two verses

God's salvation doesn't come because of people's worthiness  
Humanity is a sinful people who aren't worthy of salvation  
God's "tender" nature, His compassion, is where His mercy and kindness come from

The "rising sun" refers to Christ

It comes to us "from heaven"

The Greek word for this used in the Septuagint (Greek OT) connect it to Christ

The word refers to a Branch of the Lord (like Jer. 23:5, Zech. 3:8)

A verb form speaks of the rising of the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2)

The same verb speaks of the coming of a star out of Jacob (Num. 24:17)

Jesus is the one who meets all these descriptions

14. vs. 79: This "rising sun" from vs. 78 will "shine on those living in darkness and the shadow of death"

Both of these images refer to spiritual darkness leading to spiritual death

Is. 9:2 says "The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light"

This is again a reference to the coming Messiah, Jesus

People who are now in spiritual "light" will walk the "path of peace"

They will live in unity with each other and with God

Zechariah's prophecies are fulfilled in his son and in Christ's coming

Application: We can be like Zechariah. We have moments of doubt, moment of pause in our faith in what God is doing in our lives. Like his enforced silence, there may be times we don't have the words to say to God about what we are thinking or feeling. At those times, we may wonder if our failures have ruined us, or if the presence of God has left us.

But as Zechariah discovered, God is faithful and merciful despite our unbelief and doubting. The way He is always faithful to us encourages us to praise Him. His mercy towards us encourages us to embrace His forgiveness. The way He has been faithful and merciful to us allows us to tell those in our worlds of His faithfulness and mercy to those to will call on Him and follow Him. For them as well as we have found out, God's salvation turns darkness and death into light and life.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for showing us mercy in forgiving our sins. In our inadequate word, we praise You for being faithful to us. Help us to be prepared to be like John in leading others to forgiveness in Jesus. In His name we pray, Amen.