

March 13th, 2022

“God’s Divine Announcement to Zacharias”

Luke 1:15-25

Read Luke 1:15... John is an important herald (**Matthew 11:11a**), “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist!”

Think about that for a moment. Remember when we studied (**Hebrews 11**) some of the great heroes of the faith? Jesus is saying that John is the greatest man who has ever lived up to his time, i.e., John would be considered greater than Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Wow!

John’s greatness is evaluated by God, “in the sight of the Lord.” Think about that. John would be the forerunner crying out to Israel that the Messiah had indeed come, and God was again actively interacting with the Nation of Israel.

John was born to a very common family living in the hill country of Judea. He had no formal education, as far as we know, and it is said (**Luke 1:80**) that, “he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.” John’s clothing was made out of camel’s hair, held in place with a leather belt; and what did he eat? Locusts and wild honey. John wasn’t trying to start a new trend in fashion or food (**Luke 3:4**), “as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, [he was]“ The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.’”

John was all about directing attention to and revering Jesus Christ, the Messiah, God’s Son (**Matthew 3:11**), “I baptize you with water for repentance, but He [Christ] who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire,” (**John 1:30**), “This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’”

Gabriel announces that John will drink no *wine [lit., straight from the wine press]* or liquor [*lit., wine that was fermented, alcoholic*]. This is significant, in that it means John will be set apart, like one taking a Nazarite vow (**Numbers 6:1-4**), “The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the Lord, he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, nor shall he drink any grape juice nor eat fresh or dried grapes. All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from the seeds even to the skin.’”

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Both Samson (cf. **Judges 16:17**) and Samuel (cf. **1Samuel 1:11**), were Nazarites their whole lives.

Gabriel’s announcement is that John would be great in the sight of the Lord, i.e, in the sight of God (cf. **Luke 1:6**). The truth is, Jesus Christ, as God in human flesh, is declaring approval of John, and no one can be approved by God unless their sins have been forgiven. So, in a sense, God imputed righteousness to John, as Gabriel declares, “[John] will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb.”

When a person confesses Christ as Lord, repenting of sin and trusting Jesus alone for salvation, that person is filled with the Holy Spirit of God, being marked as God’s own possession (**Ephesians 1:13-14**), “In Him [Christ], you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him [Christ] with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

That happened to me on August 1, 1978, when I was 3 weeks shy of being 29 years old, God’s Spirit took up residence in me. That means for almost 29 years of my life I did not serve the Lord. Each of you who belong to Christ, experienced the indwelling Spirit of God at the moment you repented, believed, and began to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

John was filled with the Spirit of God from the time that he was conceived in his mother’s womb. John’s whole life would be lived under the guidance, leading, and power of the Holy Spirit. Wow!

Read Luke 1:16-17... Gabriel goes on to say that John’s ministry and preaching will be so powerful that it will cause unrepentant sinners to turn back to God.

Later in this chapter, at John’s circumcision, Zacharias prophesies concerning his son John, (**Luke 1:76-77**) saying, “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.”

John is destined to proclaim the gospel of God’s grace, the good news of forgiveness of sins through the One and Only Savior, *Jesus [lit., God’s Salvation]* who is the Christ [*lit., the Holy One of God*], *Immanuel [lit., God with us]*.

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John would preach repentance (**Mark 1:4-5**), “John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.”

John’s purpose was to expose the sinful hearts of the people, calling them repent and believe in the Lord for salvation. That is exactly what we are suppose to be doing today.

2Corinthians 5:17-21, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from *God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.* Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; *we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

John would come as the forerunner of the Messiah, “in the spirit and power of Elijah.” The Jews believed that God would send a messenger before the Day of the Lord’s judgement and the Messiah’s coming to set up His kingdom (**Malachi 3:1**), “Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts,” (**Malachi 4:5-6**), “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

John was not Elijah of the OT resurrected, nor was he the final Elijah who would come about 3.5 years before the return of Christ to the earth.

See **Matthew 16:28-17:13...** John appeared about 3.5 years before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, fulfilling part of the prophecies given by Isaiah and Malachi concerning the forerunner of the Messiah.

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In **Matthew 17**, Jesus seems to be saying that not only has an Elijah-like Prophet already come (in the form of John) preparing the way for the Lord; but in some prophetic way another Elijah will come again in the future, appearing in the middle of the 7 years of Tribulation and proclaiming the Word of God for the 3.5 years before the Coming of Christ for judgement (cf. **Revelation 11, 19**).

Read Luke 1:18-25... Zacharias now responds to the angel, expressing his doubt concerning what he has been told. Immediately the angel rebukes Zacharias and declares, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God!"

Gabriel came from God to bring Zacharias the “good news” that a special son was going to be given to him. Gabriel isn’t just any angel, he is God’s primary messenger angel; one of only two angels who are actually named in the Scriptures (the other being Michael, the Archangel).

Because of Zacharias’s disbelief, Gabriel causes him to be mute, and tells him he will not be able to speak until these things have been fulfilled (see **Luke 1:57-64**).

After Zacharias was made mute, he went outside where the people had been waiting for him to give a benediction, which would have been something like (**Numbers 6:24-26**), “The Lord bless you, and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.” But Zacharias couldn't speak, instead he was trying to use hand motions to tell the people about Gabriel being near the altar of incense.

Luke tells us that after Zacharias had finished his priestly duties, he returned home. We are not informed as to how he may have told Elizabeth the news that she was going to be pregnant and they would have a son who would be named John [*God is gracious*].

The angel’s good news became a reality, for we are told that soon Elizabeth became pregnant, and she remained in seclusion for five months. Why was that? Probably because she was barren and too old for a pregnancy, and most likely people would not have believed her; at least not until it was very obvious that she was indeed pregnant.

Notice again **Luke 1:25**, “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men.”

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As I mentioned last week, for a Jewish couple not to be able to have children was considered a curse, as if the sins of either the husband or the wife, or both, had brought God’s judgement upon them; but now through God’s intervention, any disgrace that might have been experienced was completely removed and only the joy of the good news and their gratefulness toward God remained.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were just common people of humble means who were faithfully serving the Lord; they were unable to have children, and at that moment God intervened by sending Gabriel with the Good News.

The Good News isn’t that an aged couple who had been barren, have become pregnant with a son who is to be named John [lit. *God is gracious*].

The Good News is that John is the one chosen by God to announce the long awaited arrival of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Lord and Savior; and everyone who believes in and receives Him will be saved.

Pastor Mike

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