

Luke

His Name is John

Luke 1:56-66

With Study Questions

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And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house. ⁵⁷ Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. ⁵⁸ When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. ⁶⁰ His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." ⁶¹ But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." ⁶² So they made signs to his father – what he would have him called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed*, and he spoke, praising God. ⁶⁵ Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶ And all those who heard *them* kept *them* in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him (Luke 1:56-66).

Review

Reviewing the first chapter of Luke, the author, a physician, indicates at the onset that he intends an "**orderly account**" of the things "**fulfilled**" among them. Though the story of redemption can at times appear like a combination of a hurricane, tornado, earthquake and erupting volcano, there is at the same time a wondrous consent of all of its parts. Whatever appears disorderly in the Scriptures is a result of our own disorderly minds.

Certain high end math equations appear to most of us as scribbles on a chalk board. But those gifted in mathematics perceive the orderly beauty. This is what Luke is seeking to help us with in his gospel and Acts.

He begins with a record of a couple, Zacharias and Elizabeth. Zacharias is a priest. They are beyond child-bearing years when they are

visited by an angel, Gabriel. They will supernaturally bring forth a child who will “**make ready a people prepared for the Lord.**” This child is John the Baptist. In the way regal trumpets announce a soon-coming king, John the Baptist will trumpet, or herald, the Christ. God is about to keep the promise He made from the dawn of history.

Six months into Elizabeth’s pregnancy, Gabriel is sent to the virgin Mary. She too will have a miraculous birth, but unlike her cousin’s. Mary will have a child, not by her soon-to-be husband, but by the Holy Spirit. Luke records how Mary then visits her cousin and how John, still in his mother’s womb (filled with the Spirit [Luke 1:15]) leaps for joy.

Mary then responds with what has been called *The Magnificat*. This prophetic response praises God for what will be accomplished by the child in her womb. Luke now moves back to the birth of John.

And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house. ⁵⁷ Now Elizabeth’s full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. ⁵⁸ When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her (Luke 1:56-58).

Baby Shower

We live in an age where many view their Christian faith as sort of a private, spiritual enterprise. We read books, watch/listen to sermons online, post our thoughts, and content ourselves that our operations are sufficient for the Christian life.

But we read here a record of something that we might gloss over as we seek the meatier portions of the passage. At the birth of John, both neighbors and relatives rejoiced with her. We are to be aware of and participate in the significant events of the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to,

**Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep
(Romans 12:15).**

Births, weddings, baby showers, funerals, etc., are significant. It is no mere mundane activity when people organize events to commemorate such things. It is biblical, and at some reasonable level, we are called to

participate. The situation with Elizabeth was, to be sure, extraordinary. God has shown her great mercy in giving her a child in her old age. Her friends were aware and participated. This should be our practice as well.

So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. ⁶⁰ His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." ⁶¹ But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." ⁶² So they made signs to his father – what he would have him called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John (Luke 1:59-63).

Sacramental Joy

Of course, certain events carry more weight than others. Or at least they should. The miraculous birth, as extraordinary as it was, plays second-fiddle to the promise of God which includes that which is eternal. Certain events we enjoy because it is simply relaxing or exploring. But events that have some objective, e.g., a play, a sporting event, a concert, etc., brings the vacation to a deeper level. But when I'm in an airplane, or a bus, for ministerial reasons (I think of Mexico or China or Thailand), as much I don't like flying or traveling, those are the richest events-the most eternal events.

Everyone is rejoicing with Elizabeth over her miraculous birth. But the circumcision brings it to a much more profound level. Parties are fine as far as they go. But a party after a wedding-a wedding reception-is much more festive. For thousands of years circumcision was a sign of God making a promise He would keep in Christ. Little doubt, this was the highlight of the affair. The generational promise of God put upon the children of God's children. As Peter preached,

For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call (Acts 2:39).

One must ask why Peter mentions the children. It is the sacramental means by which God extends His promise from generation to generation. It's almost as if Baptists recognize this omission in their theology so they

create semi-sacraments like infant dedication, baptism without water. Let us enjoy the words of Matthew Henry,

The greatest comfort we can take in our children is in *giving them up to God*, and recognizing their covenant-relation to him. The baptism of our children should be more our joy than their birth.¹

What's In A Name?

Everybody's got an opinion on the child's name. Let's name him Zacharias, after his father. Seems like a reasonable option. People select names for their children, and we often wonder. Our first child we named Gabriella because we always loved the name, and it went well with our last name. Our second we named after me. Our third was an Italian version of my mother's mother, Sophie. Our fourth was an Italian version of my wife's father, Gene.

At some level of valuing ancestry, you select names of the lineage. Sometimes people pick names of their favorite theologians, Calvin, Martin, Charles. Or a popular artist of your time, Dylan, perhaps Kanye is on the horizon as a popular name. Names make a difference. You can give your boy a feminine name (or vice-versa), which may cause difficulties later in life.

In the early twentieth century the name, Jeeves, in popular literature was a character who was a valet. Jerry Seinfeld quips that if you name your child Jeeves, you've pretty much mapped out his career. In the Bible, names mean things. Zacharias means Jehovah remembers. Elizabeth means my God is an oath. John means Jehovah has been gracious.²

Notice, there is no equivocating. Elizabeth was quite firm that "**he shall be called John.**" But Zacharias pounded the pylon deeper. It was not that he shall be called John, "**his name is John.**"

This was communicated through a writing tablet. It appears Zacharias was not merely mute but deaf, since they had to make "**signs**" to communicate with him. Sometimes ministers lose the ability as orators. At such times they may have to give up their pulpits. But unless you have lost your mind, you can still write. Some of our greatest biblical literature was

¹ Henry, M. (1994). [Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume](#) (p. 1825). Peabody: Hendrickson.

² Zodhiates, S. (2000). [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

written from prisons. If you have been called to the ministry, I don't understand retirement in the traditional sense. If you can't speak, write!

My father (I pray) came to faith toward the end of his life. He was not, generally speaking, a source of theological wisdom. But he had other wisdom. From Brooklyn, from the military, from the ring, from the barges in the Hudson River (or whatever river in the city), he brought to me what has become an anachronistic disposition of determination. He said, "If you can't run walk. If you can't walk crawl. If you can't crawl, run." Zacharias couldn't talk, but he could write. His name is John.

Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. ⁶⁵ Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶ And all those who heard *them* kept *them* in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him (Luke 1:64-66).

His Mouth Opened

As you may recall, Zacharias was the recipient of a chastisement from God due to his unbelief. But the chastisement would only last "**until the day these things take place**" (Luke 1:20). It would appear that the chastisement included being both mute and deaf. I think there is some value in our recounting that both Zacharias and Elizabeth were "**righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless**" (Luke 1:6). Nonetheless,

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives (Hebrews 12:6).

The chastisement of Zacharias was not an indictment against his entire character. It was not a sign of God's overall displeasure. It is a refining.

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).

Is God training you? How are you responding? It is difficult to guess all the ups and downs Zacharias might have gone through in those nine months of training. But the end result, the fruit of the training is seen in the first thing his loosed tongue does when his speech is returned, **“he spoke, praising God.”** I am confident that it could be said of Zachariah in this instance, **“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34).** Sometimes we really need to listen to ourselves.

An Altered Atmosphere

Now the atmosphere of the event seems to change. A party of joy at the prospect of a merciful God and a new baby now transitions into dwelling of fear. A healthy, reverent fear of God has seemed to have fallen on hard times in today’s church. In Paul’s charge against a universal, sinful humanity, it climaxes with the words

Their feet are swift to shed blood;¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.”¹⁸
“There is no fear of God before their eyes (Romans 3:15-18).

In his great hymn, John Newton wrote, “twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved.” We live in an age where we’re neither fearful nor relieved.

In a recent trip our family waited for a train while another train passed by. It was very close, going very fast and one could feel the power of it. It was a bit scary. Sometimes we feel an earthquake, a huge wave, a powerful storm and it brings fear. The idea that we could interact with the Maker of all things and carry a casual disposition is folly.

Now and again God will produce fear in us that we might seek refuge in Him. When my children were little and afraid, they would run to me. It builds trust and intimacy.

Something Massive Afoot

Those in attendance at this baby shower would come to realize that this was no ordinary baby shower. What happened here would be

discussed **“throughout all the hill country of Judea.”** Something huge was about to happen. God was about to inject humanity with a great panacea. John would be that swab, wiping the skin in preparation.

The way the fame of Jesus **“spread throughout all Syria” (Matthew 4:24)** those events surrounding the birth of John were discussed and pondered. **“What kind of child will this be?”** From the womb, John was unique. God was breeding an anticipation. Sometimes we will see two talented adults get married and have children. The community, whether sports or the arts or academics, will often have an eye on those children. Judea had an eye on John.

Little doubt, many years later when he began his preaching ministry, there were some who remembered. There was some who were not surprised. **“The hand of the Lord was with him.”** In our next meeting, we will put our hearts upon Zacharias’ prophetic response to these things. I have little doubt that Zacharias rejoiced in being a parent. He rejoiced in his new addition. But for Zacharias, as with John his son, the spotlight will move from John to **“the Dayspring from on high...to give light to those who sit in darkness” (Luke 1:78, 79).**

Questions for Study

1. What is Luke seeking to achieve in this gospel? Briefly review what has occurred so far (pages 2, 3)?
2. Give a reason, from the context of this passage, for why it is important to be part of the body of Christ (pages 3, 4).
3. Investigate the joy of the event described by Luke. What are the various levels of joy (pages 4, 5)?
4. How much difference does a name make (page 5)?
5. What did God's chastisement of Zacharias produce? Can you think of an example where this type of thing happened to you? Explain (pages 6, 7).
6. In what respect is fear valuable (page 7)?
7. Why do you suppose all of this is recorded of John the Baptist (pages 7, 8)?