

**I. Introduction.**

**II. The setting of John's birth – personal and national barrenness. v. 5-7**

- A. Herod the Great, a ruthless tyrant appointed by the Romans, is king of Judea. v. 5a  
2 Sa. 7:13 Ps. 89:29 Dt. 28:15ff
- B. Zacharias and Elizabeth, though pious, are childless. v. 5b-7 1 Chron. 24:1-6,10
1. They are godly (righteous and blameless). v. 6 2:25,36-38
  2. They have a great sorrow – Elizabeth is barren (and old). v. 7,25 Dt. 7:12-13 28:4  
Gen. 16:1 25:21 30:1 Judges 13:2 1 Sam. 1:10
  3. Your trials are not necessarily because God is displeased.
- C. How can it be said that they are “righteous in the sight of God”? v. 6
1. Luke is not saying that they were sinless. Rom. 3:10ff Isa. 53:6
  2. Nor is he saying that they are justified by their obedience to the law. Rom. 3:20
  3. The Bible uses the word “righteous” in different ways.
    - a. God declares us righteous by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone – justification. Ro. 3:21ff 1:16-17 Ga. 3:11,6 2:21 Gen. 15:6 Phil. 3:9 Eph. 2:8-9
    - b. Believers live righteous/blameless lives of obedience to God– sanctification.  
1:6 2:25 23:50 Mt. 1:25 Eph. 2:10 Jo. 14:15 1 Jo. 2:3-4 Ge. 7:1 17:1
    - c. There is also a pharisaical self-righteousness. 5:32 15:7 18:9ff Ro. 10:3
  4. Should we pursue the righteousness of which Luke speaks? Heb. 10:24 Titus 2:14
- D. Though these are very dark days, the sun is about to rise. 1:78

**III. The angel foretells John's birth – a call to faith. v. 8-17**

- A. Zacharias is chosen by lot to offer incense in the Temple. v. 8-10 Ex. 30:7-8  
What appears to be a chance event is God's work. Pr. 16:33 Acts 1:17,26 Ruth 2:3
- B. An angel (Gabriel) appears to Zacharias. v. 11-12,19,26 2:9 Mt. 1:20 Dan. 8:16 9:21  
Judges 13:3ff Rev. 5:2 Heb. 1:4 Acts 5:19 12:7
1. After centuries of silence, God again speaks to His oppressed people.
  2. Should you expect angelic appearances? How can you hear from God? Ro. 10:17
- C. The angel declares that Zacharias and Elizabeth will have a son. v. 13-14
1. Do not be afraid because I bring good news of joy. 1:19,30 2:9-10 5:8,10 8:50
  2. Which of Zacharias' petitions is being answered? A child? Israel's redemption?  
The child will also be an answer to the prayer for redemption.
  3. The angel reveals the gender and the name of this miracle child. 1:31 Mt. 1:21,25  
Isa. 7:14 Gen. 16:11 17:19 1 Ki. 13:2
  4. John will bring joy, not just to his parents, but to many. 1:10,58 2:10,25,38 3:3ff
  5. The Lord is visiting not just a childless couple, but a barren nation (and world).
- D. Their son, John, will be great. v. 15-17 John 1:6
1. He will be great in the sight of the Lord. v. 15a,32 3:16 7:28-30,24-25 20:3-7 9:7-9
  2. He will be consecrated for his task – no wine. v. 15b Nu. 6:3 Jdg. 13:4,7 Lev. 10:9  
Ezek. 44:21 Pr. 31:4 23:29ff Eph. 5:18 Acts 2:15-17
    - a. May our leaders drink alcoholic beverages? 7:33-34 1 Ti. 4:3 5:23 John 2:1ff
    - b. Don't do anything against your conscience or which harms others. Ro. 14:23

3. John will be filled with the Spirit from the womb. v. 15c 1:41,61,67 2:25-27 4:18
    - a. Under the New Covenant all will be filled with the Spirit. 3:16 7:28 Joel 2:28 Acts 1:8 2:4 1 Cor. 12:7,13 John 3:34 7:37-39
    - b. What does this verse tell us about the unborn?
  4. What kind of greatness do you seek (and expect)? 1:15 22:26 Mark 10:43
- E. John will be the forerunner who will prepare the way for the Messiah. v. 16-17 3:7ff
1. Through John's ministry many will repent of their sin and turn back to God. v. 16
  2. In what sense are the hearts of fathers turned back to the children? v. 17b 12:51ff
  3. He is the forerunner spoken of by the prophets. 3:3 7:27 Mal. 3:1 4:5-6 Isa. 40:3ff
  4. John comes in the spirit and power of Elijah. Mal. 4:5-6 John 1:21
  5. We need preachers like John. Rom. 10:17 2 Co. 3:6 1 Th. 1:9

#### IV. Zacharias doubts – but God's plan is not thwarted. v. 18-25

- A. The faith of righteous Zacharias fails. v. 18-2
1. The good news of the gospel demands a response of faith. v. 19 Jo. 6:29 Heb. 11:6
  2. His focus upon human weakness causes him to doubt God's power. v. 18 Ge. 18:14
  3. How is his response different from that of Mary (and others)? 1:34 11:29 Jdg. 6:36ff Gen. 17:17 18:12 Heb. 4:13
  4. Zacharias receives both a sign and a chastisement – he is dumb (and deaf) until the promise is fulfilled. v. 20,62ff Pr 10:19
  5. Skeptics today limit themselves to natural causes and carnal reason.
  6. Application: even true believers can be guilty of unbelief. Mt. 6:30 1 Cor. 10:13 Ro. 6:11 Isa. 55:1-2 Ps. 34:8 Heb. 12:4ff
- B. Zacharias finally emerges from the temple, speechless. v. 21-22  
The next words out of his mouth will be praise to God. 1:64ff
- C. The Lord enables Elizabeth to conceive. v. 23-25 Gen. 29:31 30:23 21:6 Ruth 4:13
1. God brings about stunning reversals. 1:51ff Ps. 113:5-9 1 Sam. 2:1ff
  2. Why did she go into hiding?

#### V. Concluding applications

- A. Our broken-hearted prayers have not been forgotten by God. 1:13,25 Ps. 56:7
- B. Have faith in God and His promises. Take Him at His Word. 1:18 Pr. 3:5-6
- C. Are you prepared for the Day of the Lord's coming? Heb. 9:27 Ro. 10:13 John 3:16

#### Discussion questions

1. In what sense were Zacharias and Elizabeth righteous in the sight of God?
2. Would you like for such a thing to be said of you?
3. Why are some people today reluctant to speak of righteousness in this sense?
4. What are some connections between this passage and the Old Testament?
5. How is the situation of Elizabeth like that of Israel in her day? Why was Israel barren?
6. Why would the Lord allow such a righteous couple to suffer barrenness?
7. Should we expect angelic visitations? Why or why not?
8. Which of Zacharias' prayers was answered?  
What do we learn about prayer from this passage?
9. What are some of the implications of (and questions raised by) the fact that John was filled with the Spirit in his mother's womb?
10. What will John do to prepare the way for the Messiah?  
Do we need preaching like that of John in our day?
11. How do we, like Zacharias, fail to believe God?