

August 5, 2012

*"Born to Be Great, but Not the Greatest"*

Luke 1:57-80

<sup>15</sup> Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not,

<sup>16</sup> John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Luke 3:15-16 NKJ)

I. *The greatness of John the Baptist is indisputable, and was evident even from his birth –*

1. *John's birth was a "great mercy" to Elizabeth*

Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son.<sup>58</sup> When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. (Luke 1:57-58 NKJ)

A. *She had been barren*

B. *She was well past child bearing years*

C. *Giving birth at her age was considered a great mercy from God and like a miracle*

D. *Not having children was a shameful thing to women, the birth of John took away her reproach -*

NKJ Luke 1:7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

<sup>24</sup> Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, <sup>25</sup> "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people." (Luke 1:24-25 NKJ)

NKJ Luke 1:36 "Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. "For with God nothing will be impossible." (Luke 1:37 NKJ)

2. *John's circumcision and naming coincided with the recovery of Zacharias and caused people to marvel, fear and question "what kind of child will this be?"*

<sup>59</sup> 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.

<sup>60</sup> His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John."

<sup>61</sup> But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name."

<sup>62</sup> So they made signs to his father-- what he would have him called.

<sup>63</sup> And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled.

<sup>64</sup> Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God.

<sup>65</sup> Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea.

<sup>66</sup> And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" (Luke 1:59-66A)

3. *John's greatness from birth onward, even from before his birth, was due to the fact God was with him –  
And the hand of the Lord was with him. (Luke 1:66B)*

II. *Yet, as great as John the Baptist was, even his father knew, even from the start, John's greatness was a secondary, inferior and dependent greatness, notice the Christ centered nature of Zacharias' praise and prophecy –*

1. *Zacharias' first words, having a newly restored voice were words in praise of God –*

Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. (Luke 1:64 NKJ)

2. *His Spirit inspired prophecy was first about God and the redemption / salvation which would be provided by Christ -*

Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: <sup>68</sup> "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, <sup>69</sup> And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, <sup>70</sup> As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, <sup>71</sup> That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, <sup>72</sup> To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: <sup>74</sup> To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, <sup>75</sup> In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. (Luke 1:67-75 NKJ)

A. *Note the Spirit will direct us to put God and Christ first*

- B. Note Christ is spoken of in terms of redemption and salvation - 68-69
- C. Note Christ is spoke of as a horn, symbol of government and power - :69
- D. As a Horn of Salvation because He would use that power to save us - :69
- E. Christ and these themes were the focus of all God's prophets and promises - :70-74
- F. The purpose of our salvation being our service and relationship with God - :75
- G. Just like Mary and Elizabeth, the Spirit raises Zacharias also to this high level of Praise, prophecy and purpose focused on Christ –

III. Yet, this Heavenly focus was not adverse to earthly duty, Zacharias' son John had a calling from birth and at eight days Zacharias had the privilege of commissioning / charging young John with that call –

1. Note the direction of this call / commission –

**"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, (Luke 1:76 NKJ)**

*He speaks directly to his young son John, eight days old, why?*

- (1) He would start with this child early, preparing him for this High Calling!
- (2) John had responded to Mary's greeting, even while in the womb, he would not underestimate Spirit empowered understanding!
- (3) He and his wife were old, who knew how much time they had left to influence their young son, they would REDEEM the time as the days were evil!
- (4) His son's calling was an exceedingly high calling, and being Spirit filled Zacharias felt / knew the importance and weight of such a calling!

2. Note the content of this call / commission –

**"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,<sup>77</sup> To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins,<sup>78</sup> Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;<sup>79</sup> To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:76-79 NKJ)**

- Prophet of the Highest meant Prophet of God; "THE" prophet of the Highest indicates that John would uniquely be such a prophet
- He was to be the forerunner of Christ, preparing His way:
  - (1) He would provide knowledge
  - (2) Give good news about the remission of sin
  - (3) About God's tender mercy
  - (4) About Christ as "the Dayspring from on High"
  - (5) Providing Light
  - (6) Guiding feet to the way of peace

IV. See John's preparation for this calling –

**So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel. (Luke 1:80 NKJ)**

1. His maturation both physically and spiritually was a process
2. He was taken to and or sought out the solitude of the desert
  - (A.) A high calling requires a great deal of time alone with God

–  
(B.) Paul had a similar desert experience at the beginning of his conversion and call –

<sup>15</sup> **But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace,**

<sup>16</sup> **to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,**

<sup>17</sup> **nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.**

<sup>18</sup> **Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.**

<sup>19</sup> **But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Gal 1:15-19 NKJ)**

(C.) Even Jesus had a somewhat similar preparation – Matthew 4:1-11

3. We all need time alone with God

*Arnold A. Brevick*