

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

TEXT: LUKE 1:1-13

INTRODUCTION:

1. Tonight we will begin a new series in the Gospel of Luke, and we will start off with the birth of John the Baptist (1:13).
2. Luke is referred to by the apostle Paul as "the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14). In addition to being a medical doctor, Luke was an excellent historian.
3. Luke was a frequent companion of the apostle Paul, as we see in the book of Acts, which he authored.
4. Sir William Ramsay (1851-1939) was a great archaeologist. He went to Asia to try and prove that Luke was not an accurate historian. After making a thorough study, Ramsay came to the conclusion that Luke had not made any inaccuracies, and that the book of Acts was accurate to the minutest detail. As a result Sir William Ramsay became a Christian and wrote several books on Paul's missionary journeys.
5. Luke wrote this book to his friend, the "most excellent Theophilus" (1:3; cf. Acts 1:1).
6. The *Scofield Study Bible* says Luke "was of Jewish ancestry" but the Bible does not say. Most Bible teachers believe he was a Gentile. He may or may not have been a Jewish proselyte.
7. Luke wrote his Gospel in order to give his readers certainty and assurance about the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - "those things which are most surely believed among us" (1:1)
 - "which from the beginning were eyewitnesses" (1:2)
 - "having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first" (1:3)
 - "That thou mightest know the certainty of those things" (1:4)
8. The key verse is Luke 19:10, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."
9. Chronologically, Luke begins the New Testament, and he begins with the details surrounding the birth of John the Baptist.
10. John was born "in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea" (1:5). John 1:6 says, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John."
11. The Old Testament ends "with a curse" (Malachi 4:6). But the New Testament begins with the angel Gabriel announcing the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah (Luke 1:13-17, 76-80).

I. JOHN THE BAPTIST HAD GODLY PARENTS (1:5-13).

1. Both his parents were descended from Aaron the high priest, the brother of Moses. Therefore, Zacharias was a priest, and Elisabeth's father was a priest (1:5).
2. Today we would say, "John came from good stock."
3. The Gospel of Luke begins with Zacharias the priest executing the priest's office before God, and it ends with our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, entering the heavenly Holy of Holies (1:8; 24:50-53).
4. "And they were both righteous before God" (1:6), i.e., they were godly believers with a good testimony. They were "blameless" (1:6).
5. This was a dark time in Israel's history, but God always has a faithful remnant. In addition to Zacharias and Elisabeth, there were other godly believers, such as Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25, 36-38).
6. But Zacharias and Elisabeth were childless, and they had reached an advanced age (1:7). In Israel it was considered a great reproach (shameful) for a married woman not to have children (cf. 1:25).
7. Genesis 30:22, 23 says, "And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach."
8. According to the Bible, it is God who opens and closes the womb (cf. Genesis 29:31, 32; 30:22, 23; I Samuel 1:5, 6).
9. There is an important lesson here. Zacharias' name means, "The LORD remembers." Going back to Hannah, I Samuel 1:10 says she "prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore."
10. Then I Samuel 1:19 says, "And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah:

and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her."

11. Elisabeth's name means, "God's oath." So together we see: "The LORD remembers His oath."
12. John the Baptist had praying parents, and God answered their prayers. God not only answered their prayers, He gave them a son and his name was John (Luke 1:13).
13. John means, "The LORD is gracious."
14. The LORD remembered Zacharias and Elisabeth, and the LORD was gracious.
15. A number of years ago, I had the good pleasure of hearing Dr. John Whitcomb preach in a Baptist church in Queens. He quoted Genesis 8:1, "And God remembered Noah."
16. Dr. Whitcomb explained that this does not mean that God ever forgot Noah. He said God never forgets. He said the word means, "granting requests, and delivering."
17. God delivered Noah and his family from the flood which destroyed the whole world.
18. John's parents were older, "well stricken in years" (1:7), but they kept praying for a child and God answered their prayers (1:13, 25). God's delays are not denials!
19. Waiting for our prayers to be answered brings discipline, spiritual strength, a deeper knowledge of God, and richer answers to our prayers (W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Outline Studies in Luke*).

II. JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (LUKE 1:14, 15).

1. John the Baptist was an unusual preacher. He was "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15).
2. Both John's parents were filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke 1:49 says John's mother "Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost."
3. Luke 1:67 says, "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost."

4. According to the Bible, all Christians should be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 is a command. "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit."
5. There is much confusion over this today, and many people associate the fullness of the Spirit with wild emotionalism.
6. But consider the testimony of missionary to China, Hudson Taylor: "Being filled (with the Holy Spirit) does not always lead to exalted feeling or uniform manifestation, but God always keeps His word. We have to look to His promises or rest in them, expecting their literal fulfillment. Some put asking in the place of accepting; some wish it were so, instead of believing that it is so."
7. Dr. Walter Wilson and his father-in-law were at a meeting one night, and Dr. James Gray (President of the Moody Bible Institute, editor of the Scofield Bible) was preaching.
8. He was expounding Romans 12:1. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."
9. Dr. Gray said, "Have you noticed that this verse does not tell us to whom we should give our bodies? It is not the Lord Jesus who asks for it. He has His own body. It is not the Father who asks for it. He remains upon His throne. Another has come to earth without a body. God could have made a body for Him as He did for Jesus, but He did not do so. God gives you the privilege and the indescribable honor of presenting your bodies to the Holy Spirit, to be His dwelling place on earth. If you have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, then yours is a holy body, washed whiter than snow, and will be accepted by the Holy Spirit when you give it. Will you do so now?"
10. Dr. Wilson and his father-in-law said little to each other as they went home that night. But separately they each went into their rooms and asked the Holy Spirit to use them as never before. The power of God came upon them and they both became great soulwinners.
11. The same Holy Spirit who filled John the Baptist, and the apostle Paul, and Hudson Taylor, and James Gray, and Walter Wilson wants to fill each and every one of us.

III. JOHN THE BAPTIST MINISTERED IN THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIJAH (1:16, 17).

1. John's ministry was a partial fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (1:16, 17).

2. Our Lord said in Matthew 11:13-15, "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."
3. There will be a fuller fulfillment during the tribulation period, when one of the two witnesses (Revelation 11) will undoubtedly be Elijah.
4. The Old Testament ends with these words: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:5, 6).
5. Then after Malachi's prophecy there was an interval of 400 years between the Old Testament and the New Testament. H.A. Ironside wrote a book about this period, entitled *The Four Hundred Silent Years*. The interval was not really "silent," but there is no Scripture record between Malachi and the New Testament.
6. Chronologically, Luke begins the New Testament, and he begins with the birth of John the Baptist. It was a time of darkness when John was born. It "was in the days of Herod" (1:5), i.e., Herod the Great, an Edomite who was made the "King of Judea" by the Romans (1:5).
7. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says, "To further solidify his power, he divorced his first wife, Doris, sent her and his son away from court, and married Mariamne, a Hasmonean (the ruling Jewish dynasty of Judea) princess...Unfortunately, there was a dark and cruel streak in Herod's character that showed itself increasingly as he grew older. His mental instability, moreover, was fed by the intrigue and deception that went on within his own family. Despite his affection for Mariamne, he was prone to violent attacks of jealousy...In the end Herod murdered Mariamne, her two sons, her brother, her grandfather, and her mother, a woman of the vilest stamp who had often aided his sister Salome's schemes. Besides Doris and Mariamne, Herod had eight other wives and had children by six of them. He had 14 children. In his last years Herod...lost the favour of Augustus. He was in great pain and in mental and physical disorder...The slaying, shortly before his death, of the infants of Bethlehem (recorded in Matthew 2:16) was wholly consistent with the disarray into which he had fallen. After an unsuccessful attempt at suicide, Herod died. His final testament provided that, subject to Augustus's sanction, his realm would be divided among his sons: Archelaus should be king of Judaea and Samaria, with Philip and Antipas sharing the remainder as tetrarchs."

8. So it was a dark period of history when Christ was born, and when John the Baptist was born. But John came "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Luke 1:17).
9. These are dark days. There is violence everywhere -- all over the world and right here in our own country. And yet it is a wonderful time to serve the Lord.

CONCLUSION:

The power of the Holy Spirit that John the Baptist had is for all of us today. F.B. Meyer said, "There is a power, an anointing, a gracious endowment of fitness for service -- which are the privilege of every believer. The Holy Spirit is prepared, not only to be within us for the renewal and sanctification of character, but to anoint us as He did the Lord at his baptism. He waits to empower us to witness for Jesus, to endure the persecution and trial which are inevitable to the exercise of a God-given ministry, and to bring other men to God. It would be well to tarry to receive it...Never rest until you are sure that the Spirit dwells in you fully, and exercises through you the plenitude of his gracious power."